

Women's political parties' issue concerns and communication strategies

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Abstract

Despite their consistent formation and participation in elections across various political contexts in the 20th and 21st centuries, women's parties have received scant comparative attention in party politics research. In particular, in recent years there has been a wave of *feminist parties* forming in European states, whose electoral behaviour and campaign strategies invite scholarly attention. These parties have the potential to operate as critical actors in increasing women's descriptive and substantive representation by politicising gender-based issues. However, little is known about the specific issues that these parties mobilise or how they communicate them to the electorate and to other political parties. Therefore, this thesis endeavours to bridge a gap between gender politics and party politics research, through an investigation of the issue concerns and issue communication of European women's parties – specifically *feminist parties* – in party manifestos, news media, and social media.

I tackle this puzzle in three connected empirical Chapters. In the first, I present an in-depth comparative analysis of European women's parties' issue concerns, through inductive text analysis of an original dataset of election manifestos spanning a thirty-year period. In the second and third empirical Chapters, I use quantitative content analysis to investigate how the platforms of three *feminist parties* in Finland, Sweden and the UK are communicated via news media and social media across two second-order election campaigns. By situating women's parties within the field of comparative party politics, this thesis conceptualises contemporary *feminist parties* as both doctrinal organisations that aim to substantively represent women's interests and simultaneously as strategically motivated niche parties, pursuing office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. Utilising a combination of mixed-method text analysis techniques applied to original data, I also offer innovative methods for measuring attention to gender-based issues in political texts such as manifestos, newspaper articles, and social media data.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Women are politically underrepresented in political institutions around the world. Within Europe, women account for 41% of representatives in the 9th European Parliament session (2019-2024) (European Parliament, 2019) and make up on average 31.1% of representatives in national parliaments as of 2023 (IPU, 2023). In correspondence to being descriptively underrepresented, women are also substantively underrepresented (see Celis and Childs (2020) for a comprehensive account of women's substantive representation).

Scholarly attention has been paid to the actions and impacts of women's movements (Anyidoho et al., 2021; Beckwith, 2007; Evans, 2016a; Weldon, 2013) and women's policy agencies (Kantola and Outshorn, 2007; Squires, 2007; Weldon, 2002) in furthering women's representation. But one group which has received comparatively less investigation is women's political parties. These parties mobilise around the shared identity of womanhood and present issue platforms that aim to improve women's descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 12). They emerge in contexts where women are frustrated with the lack of descriptive and substantive representation of their interests within political institutions (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020) and want to make a change by acting within the political system itself. In particular, in the 21st century a wave of *feminist parties* has emerged in various European countries, promoting an intersectional feminist ideology that seeks to secure the rights of women and minoritised groups and to challenge structures that perpetuate discrimination (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Shin, 2020).

Women's parties thus have the potential to act as critical actors in increasing women's representation, both through election of their candidates and through exerting pressure on mainstream parties to improve representation of women and of gender-based issues (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers, et al., 2020: 16). Yet, research has little engaged with what specific issues these parties mobilise and how they may pursue these office-seeking and policy-seeking goals.

The majority of research on women's parties, has come from the gender and politics field and has focused on the emergence, organisation and electoral success (or lack thereof) of these parties (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2014; Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers, 2020; Cowell-Meyers, et al., 2020; Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Evans

and Kenny, 2020; Ishiyama, 2003; Levin, 1999; Slater, 1995; Zaborsky, 1987).¹ Meanwhile, research in the field of party politics has little engaged with women's parties, often defining them as single-issue parties (for example, Wagner, 2023). As a result, there is a gap in scholarly research to understand what issues women's parties politicise and how they may encourage competition over these issues in the European political system. As we are witnessing a (re)politicisation of gender-based issues across Europe in recent years, such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021; De Giorgi et al., 2023; Farris, 2017; Galpin and Trenz, 2019), it is important to investigate the role that women's parties may be playing in increasing the salience of these issues.

Therefore, this thesis endeavours to bridge a gap between the gender politics and party politics subfields through investigation of the issue concerns and issue communication of women's parties, specifically contemporary European *feminist parties*. I conceptualise these parties both as doctrinal organisations that aim to substantively represent women's interests and simultaneously as strategic political parties, that carefully craft their issue communication in the pursuit of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. My empirical research presents a comprehensive investigation of the issue concerns of European women's parties and an analysis of how effectively the issue concerns of *feminist parties* are communicated across election manifestos, news media, and social media.

1.1 Women's parties and *feminist parties*

The primary focus of this thesis is *feminist parties*. *Feminist parties* are a type of women's party oriented around a feminist ideology, that advocate for greater representation of women and a deconstruction of the structures and institutions that perpetuate gendered discrimination (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020). I focus my analysis primarily on *feminist parties* rather than women's parties more generally for several reasons. First, comparative and case study research on women's parties indicates that they are a heterogeneous group that can span the left-right ideological spectrum (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Evans and Kenny, 2020; Shin, 2020). However, it is suggested that there exist two general types of women's party- *feminist parties* and *essentialist women's parties*- which take different approaches towards the representation of women and gender-based issues (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). Thus, in comparative analysis of parties' issue concerns and communication,

¹ A notable exception is Kimberley Cowell-Meyer's case study research on the contagion effects of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (2011) and of the Swedish Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative).

I argue that it is sensible to focus on a sub-type of women's party that share commonalities in their issue concerns and ideology.

Second, I focus on *feminist parties* rather than *essentialist women's parties* because comparative and case study literature suggest that the vast majority of women's parties operating in Europe over the last 10-20 years are *feminist parties* (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers, 2020; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Evans and Kenny, 2020). Indeed, since 2010 self-identified *feminist parties* have competed in at least 10 countries across Europe, whereas non-feminist women's parties are much less common in the 21st century. Therefore, if women's parties are playing a role in contemporary European politics, it is specifically *feminist parties* that are doing so.

Third, my broader focus in this thesis is on the issue competition and communication strategies of *feminist parties* as a type of niche party. In Chapter 2 I outline in detail my argument that only the *feminist* category of women's party can be defined as a niche party based on the types of issues that they mobilise around. In Chapter 4 I substantiate this argument with evidence from parties' manifestos. By defining *feminist parties* as niche parties, I situate them within the party politics literature on issue competition and issue communication and investigate their issue communication as strategic political actors.

For these reasons, I focus my investigation specifically on the *feminist* type of women's parties. However, in order to investigate *feminist parties*' strategic issue communication, we first need to know what the issue concerns of women's parties are and provide evidence that *feminist parties* do constitute a distinct type of women's party that emphasise specific issues. Thus, my analysis in Chapter 4 investigates the issue concerns of the women's party family as a whole and tests whether *feminist parties* do emphasise different issues to *essentialist women's parties*. Having laid this groundwork, the analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the issue communication of three *feminist parties* in traditional news media and on social media.

1.2 Argument and approach

The first point in this thesis is to understand what women's parties want. Case study research has demonstrated the breadth and variety of women's parties that have formed across Europe (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2014, 2019; Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Evans and Kenny, 2020; Slater, 1995) and around the world (Levin, 1999; Shin, 2020; Zaborsky, 1987). Yet the small amount of existing comparative research has established commonalities in the emergent conditions of women's parties and have posited the existence of a women's party family based on shared naming patterns, sociological origins, and ideology

(Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). While this research makes a strong case for the existence of the party family, it has not comprehensively engaged in investigation of how women's parties mobilise around the shared identity of sex/gender, or what specific issues they focus on to increase women's descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation.

This opens questions as to what extent women's parties do constitute a distinct party family. Moreover, research on women's party emergence has proposed two types of women's party: *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). *Essentialist women's parties* are those that emerge in contexts of political and economic turbulence and which advocate platforms centred on securing women's rights without outright challenging patriarchal institutions and structures (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Ishiyama, 2003; Shin, 2020). *Feminist parties* are more likely to form in advanced industrialised democracies where there has been a shift towards postmaterialist values and offer overtly feminist platforms (Cowell-Meyers, 2016: 16; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020). While these party types have been mapped out in contexts of party emergence, there has been limited empirical examination to substantiate a differentiation in issue concern. Thus, I argue that an empirical investigation of women's parties' issue concerns is necessary to strengthen the conceptualisation of the party family and to substantiate existing typological frameworks.

Therefore, in the first empirical Chapter of this thesis (Chapter 4), I map the issue mentions in a dataset of European women's party manifestos and empirically test whether *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* emphasise different issues. I collected an original dataset of European women's party manifestos over a thirty-year period, 1990-2020 and use an in-depth mixed-method text analysis research design to measure issue attention. This draws from previous research on the ideology of radical right parties (Mudde, 2013) which suggests inductive analysis of party manifestos as an appropriate approach to investigating the ideology of understudied small/niche parties.

My approach combines computational text analysis techniques including structural topic modelling, word frequency and keyness analysis of a corpus of 45 election manifestos, with a manual thematic analysis of a smaller sample of manifestos. It therefore provides both a broad comparative measure of issue emphasis across the party family, as well as an in-depth analysis of parties' issue positions and framing. I also empirically test the differentiation in issue concerns between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. The results of this analysis confirm the distinguishing of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* as a distinct types of women's party. Additionally, I provide evidence that contemporary European *feminist parties*

act as niche parties, mobilising around a narrow platform of mostly neglected gender-based issues.

This is an important step in situating women's parties in the field of comparative party politics research. Defining *feminist parties* as niche parties offers a path to study them, not only as organisations seeking to substantively represent women, but as strategic actors carefully crafting their policy platforms in pursuit of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. It makes an important contribution toward future research being able to examine *feminist parties*' role in politicising gender-based issues and encouraging competition from other parties. As a step towards this research, a further contribution of the analysis in this Chapter is that I develop a comprehensive list of gender-based issue areas that are emphasised within women's party manifestos.

In the following two empirical Chapters, I use this list of issue areas to examine the strategic issue communication of *feminist parties* - as small/niche parties - in news media (Chapter 5) and social media (Chapter 6). I focus on three cases in these analyses: *feminist parties* in Finland (Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party)), Sweden (Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)), and the United Kingdom (the Women's Equality Party) during campaigns for the 2019 European Parliament election and a municipal election in each country's capital. I argue that these *feminist parties* will pursue an issue ownership strategy in their communication, acting as policy-seeking small/niche parties (Adams, et al., 2006; Bischof, 2017; Meguid, 2005; 2008; Meyer and Miller, 2015). However, because *feminist parties* are small/niche parties, I investigate the potential barriers they face in their ability to effectively communicate their issues to the electorate and to other parties.

In the second empirical Chapter (Chapter 5), I focus on *feminist party* and candidate's issue coverage in traditional news media. I expect that *feminist parties*' media coverage will not reflect the issue concerns emphasised in their manifestos but will instead emphasise issues that are stereotypically associated with women, as a result of gendered social roles. Research on small/niche parties has shown that due to their limited ability to impact the media agenda, their media coverage relies on stereotyped heuristics of their associative issue concerns (Walgrave et al., 2012) rather than being responsive to their actual communication (Hughes, 2016). Research on small/niche parties and the media agenda has predominantly focused on green parties (Hughes, 2016) and the radical right (Meyer et al., 2020). I argue that the same agenda dissonance will be observed in media coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates.

Specifically, I draw on past evidence that women candidates from mainstream parties receive more issue coverage on stereotypically feminine issues than on stereotypically masculine issues (Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Ross et al., 2013; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). Research on media coverage of women's movements finds that these organisations are commonly linked to traditional women's issues such as childcare and reproductive rights, regardless of their platforms focusing on a wider range of issues (Barakso and Schaffner, 2006; Bronstein, 2005; Schreiber, 2010). I present the first comparative test of these expectations in the case of small/niche parties. I expect the same gendered issue stereotypes to be applied in news coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates, because these parties have an associative issue ownership over women's issues and primarily nominate women candidates.

To test my expectations, I collect an original dataset of approximately 1200 news items mentioning the three *feminist parties* (Feministiskt Initiativ, Feministinen Puolue and the Women's Equality Party) and their candidates across the two election campaigns (European Parliament and municipal). I develop a novel code scheme of 26 issue areas, drawn from my analysis of women's parties' election manifestos in Chapter 4, past studies of gendered issue coverage, and from established comparative manifesto coding schemes. Using this comprehensive code scheme, I measure the issue mentions in coverage of the *feminist parties* and their candidates and offer descriptive and statistical analysis of the whether it reflects gendered issue stereotypes. Extending on previous research on women candidates which has relied on binary models, I use multinomial models to test the likelihood that journalists and *feminist party* actors will mention specific issue areas in news items. This provides a more nuanced understanding of whether issue coverage by journalists accurately reflects the gender-based issues that *feminist parties* themselves prioritise, or whether journalists over-emphasise stereotypical women's issues.

In the third empirical Chapter (Chapter 6), I investigate *feminist party* and candidate issue communication on Twitter. Past literature has argued that, in the context of limited and often misrepresentative news coverage, small/niche parties invest in social media as arena to communicate their issue concerns accurately and effectively to voters and to other parties (Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013). Moreover, evidence suggests that small/niche parties and their candidates pursue issue ownership strategies in their communication on social media (Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn, et al., 2022; Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021). I expect the same of *feminist parties'* Twitter communication.

However, in an increasingly candidate-centered electoral environment (Takens et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2023; Van Aelst et al., 2012), candidates simultaneously face pressure to develop

individualised electoral campaigns (Peeters et al., 2021; Vos, 2016; Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). Social media offers a particularly favourable environment for candidate individualisation, as it offers autonomy over the messaging and encourages more personalised communication (Ceron, 2017; Karlsen, 2011; Karlson and Enjolras, 2016). Thus, the incentives of individualised campaigning on social media may result in candidate's communication diverging from the party platform. This would be disadvantageous for *feminist parties* as it would compromise their ability to communicate a narrow and cohesive set of issues.

Past literature has examined the individualisation of mainstream party candidate's communication on social media (Boyle et al., 2022; Ceron, 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022; Karlsen, 2011; Karlsen and Enjolras, 2016) and has explored structural factors and personal characteristics of candidates that moderate the extent to which they will diverge from the party platform (Boyle et al., 2022; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022). However, these arguments have not been tested in relation to small/niche parties, whose candidates have different electoral strategies and resources to mainstream party candidates. I expect that the potential benefits of individualised campaigning will lead *feminist party* candidates to diverge from the party platform in their social media campaigns. However, I also expect to find differential effects across the party hierarchy that differ from past research on mainstream parties and candidates (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022).

I test these expectations by collecting a novel dataset of approximately 30,000 original tweets from party and candidate accounts of the three *feminist parties* across the same European Parliament and municipal campaigns as used in the analysis of newspaper coverage. I use the same comprehensive code scheme to measure issue mentions in tweets of party and candidate accounts. I present in-depth descriptive analysis of the issues emphasised by both parties and candidates, examining the extent to which social media communication is reflective of the party platform, including comparison across election campaigns. I then utilise multilevel binomial models to test my expectations on candidate divergence. I therefore present the first comparative analysis of *feminist parties'* issue communication on social media and an examination of candidate individualisation focused on small/niche parties.

In sum, the three strands of this thesis are united in the attempt to better conceptualise the issue priorities of women's parties and *feminist parties* and to understand their issue communication strategies as representatives of gender-based issues and as strategically motivated political parties. I also present *feminist parties* as a case to study small/niche party issue communication across different communication channels including party election manifestos, traditional news media, and social media.

1.3 Key concepts and terms

Throughout this thesis I refer to *gender-based issues*. A *gender-based issue* is one that is viewed through the lens of its differential impacts on different gender categories (sometimes referred to as *gendered issues*) (EIGE, 2023). It is important to note that a *gender-based issue* is not automatically a *women's issue*, as men and gender-diverse people are also differentially impacted by certain issues. However, the term *gender-based issue* is commonly used in research across disciplines to refer to issues that have a greater impact on women, for example 'gender-based violence'.

I choose not to use the terminology of *sex-based issues*, which is premised on defining women as a biological category. I make this choice first, as it is problematic to differentiate whether a political issue is a concern of women due to their biological sex or their socialised gender roles. For example, some scholars have attributed caring as a sex-based role (Smith (2007: 797) in Muehlenhar et al., 2011), yet others argue that women's typical caretaking role is the result of socialised norms of women taking on the majority of domestic labour (Rider (2005: 21) in Muehlenhar et al., 2011: 799). *Gender-based issues* are therefore a broader category, encompassing both issues that affect women because of their sex, such as reproductive rights, but also issues that have an adverse effect on women due to discriminatory societal norms, structures, and institutions.

Second, in Chapter 2 I discuss how stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, developed from social norms and roles of women and men, result in women and men politicians being associated with and being considered to have competence in handling certain issues (Huddy and Capelos, 2002; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Lawless, 2004; Meeks, 2012; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). In Chapter 5 I then investigate *feminist parties*' news coverage and examine the extent to which such gender-stereotypical issues are emphasised. Therefore, a focus on gender rather than sex is more consistent with the literature that I am drawing from.

Finally, the use of *gender-based issues* aligns more closely with the language used by contemporary European *feminist parties* themselves, who take gender equality and intersectionality as their focus (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). Also, *gender-based issues* allows for inclusion of issues in relation to transgender, gender diverse and gender non-conforming people, which are issues taken up by many contemporary *feminist parties* (Ferber, 2022; Nabavi, 2015).

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In Chapter 2 I outline the theory behind each of the empirical Chapters in the thesis, setting the context for my research questions and hypotheses, and drawing together the overarching thread that runs between them. In this Chapter, I make four key points. First, from a review of the current conceptualisations of women's parties and *feminist parties*, I establish the need for empirical analysis of women's parties issue concerns. Second, I argue that women's parties, and *feminist parties* in particular, should be brought into the field of comparative research on issue communication and competition by conceptualising them as small parties and niche parties. Third, I move on to how *feminist parties*' issue concerns may be communicated across different mediums, starting with traditional news media. I draw on theories of media logic and empirical evidence of gendered mediation of women political actors to argue that *feminist parties* are likely to receive media coverage that relates them to stereotypically feminine issue areas. Fourth, I turn to social media communication and argue that as policy-seeking small parties, *feminist parties* will pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media campaigns, but that this will be mitigated by the incentives for candidates to build individualised campaigns.

In Chapter 3 I outline the research design and data used to test my expectations in the three empirical Chapters. In each section I present the rationale for my choice of research design and methods, detail the data collection and preparation processes, and present the general methods used in my analysis. In this Chapter I also present a detailed rationale of my case selection of the three *feminist parties* and two election campaigns analysed in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I present the results of my empirical analyses. In Chapter 4 I analyse issue mentions in European women's parties' manifestos 1990-2020. I investigate the shared issue concerns of the women's party family and assess differences in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. The remaining two Chapters focus on the issue communication of a sample of three *feminist parties* across two election campaigns. In Chapter 5 I investigate whether the issue coverage that *feminist parties* receive in traditional news media maps against gendered issue stereotypes and examine which specific issues are emphasised in news items. In Chapter 6 I investigate whether *feminist parties* pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media campaigns and examine whether and under what circumstances candidates diverge from the party platform.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I revise the main contributions of this thesis and offer a discussion of some of the limitations in data availability and methods and their impacts on the analysis. I end this thesis with a discussion of the pathways for future research on women's parties, *feminist parties*, and policy-seeking small and niche parties.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This literature review seeks to achieve three things. In the first section I situate existing understanding of women's parties, and particularly *feminist parties*, in the broader field of research on comparative party politics and issue competition. Existing research on women's parties has largely focused on party emergence and party organisation, leaving a limited understanding of the issues that women's parties mobilise around and campaign on in their party platforms. Moreover, studies which have aimed to conceptualise women's parties' issue concerns make little engagement with the broader body of research on party competition and communication. Therefore, I first review the existing conceptualisation of the women's party family and investigate the shared ideology of women's parties. I focus, in particular, on frameworks which suggests that within the women's party family, there exist both *essentialist* and *feminist* women's parties (Shin, 2020).

As a step toward empirical comparative analysis of women's parties' issue concerns, I then situate women's parties within the literature on party competition and issue communication. Specifically, I conceptualise women's parties as small parties, and suggest that *feminist parties* – a sub-category of the broader women's party family - meet the definitional criteria of niche parties that have been laid out in past research (Meguid, 2005, 2008; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). From their position as niche parties, I expect *feminist parties* to pursue strategic issue communication campaigns.

From this point onward, in the remainder of the Chapter, I focus exclusively on *feminist parties'* issue communication. This is because my empirical analyses in Chapters 5 and 6 are focused on how *feminist parties* communicate strategically as small/niche parties in pursuit of electoral and policy-seeking goals. As outlined above, my discussion in the first section of this Chapter and my analysis in Chapter 4 aim to demonstrate that specifically the sub-type of *feminist* women's parties can be conceptualised as niche parties based on their issue platforms. As niche parties, I expect *feminist parties* to adopt strategic issue communication campaigns. Yet I also expect that the communication of their issue platforms will be hindered by their status as small/niche parties mobilising around gender-based issues.

Thus, in the second section, I consider the news coverage that *feminist parties* and their candidates may be expected to receive, both as small/niche parties, and parties campaigning on a platform of gender-based issues. I draw on theories of media logic and agenda-setting to discuss the limited and misrepresentative news coverage received by small/niche parties. Most

importantly I establish that, due to their limited agenda-setting capability, news coverage of small/niche parties can be misrepresentative of their actual issue concerns (Hughes, 2016).

I link this to literature on the gendered mediation of women politicians which indicates that issue coverage of women candidates relies on stereotyped heuristics of gendered social roles (Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). Crucially, these stereotypes persist irrespective of women candidates own communication (Kahn, 1994). Evidence of this gendered misrepresentation is also found in news coverage of parties with women in visible positions (Greene and Lühiste, 2018) and in news coverage of feminist movements (Bronstein, 2005; Barakso and Schaffner, 2006). Therefore, I combine arguments of media logic and gendered mediation to argue that there will be a dissonance between the issue coverage of *feminist parties* and their own issue communication, underpinned by gendered stereotypes.

In the third section, I set out my expectations for how *feminist parties* and their candidates communicate on issues in their social media campaigns. The limited and misrepresentative media coverage afforded to small/niche parties encourages them to utilise social media to communicate their issue platforms (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013). Small/niche parties communicate more on social media and focus their communication on their owned issues (Pineda, 2021). I therefore expect *feminist parties*' communication to follow a similar pattern.

However, the increasing focus on candidates in electoral politics encourages candidates to build individualised campaigns that diverge from the party platform. Extant research from mainstream parties suggests that more viable candidates are those most likely to diverge (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022). However, pursuing different strategies to mainstream parties, and having fewer resources to develop professionalised campaigns, I argue that the same expectations are not applicable to small/niche parties. I draw together literature on small/niche party communication strategy and candidate individualisation to set out my expectations of the issue communication of *feminist parties* and their candidates on Twitter and how this may differ across the party hierarchy.

The three sections of this literature review are connected by the overarching aim to better understand the strategies that women's parties, and specifically *feminist parties*, pursue in their issue communication and to evaluate their effectiveness. Situating *feminist parties* in the field of study of small/niche parties, I theorise that *feminist parties* are expected to pursue narrow and cohesive issue communication strategies. Through review of studies of the media coverage of small/niche parties and women politicians, I then consider the barriers *feminist parties* may face in communicating these platforms in traditional news media. Finally, I investigate social

media as a space for *feminist parties* to maintain control over their issue communication, but examine the potential threat posed by the individualisation of candidate campaigns. In the conclusion of this Chapter I discuss how the three sections of the literature review map against the three empirical chapters of the thesis, wherein I analyse issue mentions in party manifestos (Chapter 4), news media (Chapter 5), and social media (Chapter 6).

2.1 Conceptualising women's parties

2.1.1 Defining women's parties

The first step in this section and in this thesis is to clearly establish what is meant by a *women's party*. The first working definition of a women's party for comparative research is offered by Cowell-Meyers (2016: 4) as 'autonomous organisations of or for women that run candidates for elected office' whose aim is to 'advance the volume and range of women's voices in politics'. This definition establishes two important characteristics of women's parties. First, that they are *political parties* that run candidates for elected office, a fact that separates women's parties from women's social movements or women's advocacy groups. Second, that they are mobilised around gender identity. Cowell-Meyers' (2016: 4) original definition defines women's parties as organisations 'of or for women'. This is extended by Cowell-Meyer's et al. (2020: 6) who argue that women's parties are '*intentionally and consistently*' run by women [emphasis in the original text]. This therefore separates women's parties from other parties that may have a high proportion of women members, candidates, or leaders but who do not take 'gender as their principal organisational and analytical focus' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 6; Shin, 2020).

However, this definitional criterion is potentially problematic as several contemporary *feminist* women's parties have fielded male candidates. In fact, in 2023, *feminist parties* in Finland (Feministinen Puolue) and Sweden (Feministiskt Initiativ) both elected men to party leadership positions.² The definitions offered in past research (Cowell-Meyers 2016, Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020 and Shin, 2020) do not necessarily exclude men from membership, candidacy, or leadership of women's parties. However, more recently established women's parties, particularly those who adopt an intersectional feminist approach focused on marginalisation beyond the single axis of gender, may be challenging this as a necessary characteristic of a women's party.

² Luis Lineo was elected as Feministiskt Initiativ's co-leader alongside Agnes Lundgren, while Lauri Alhojärvi was elected as Feministinen Puolue's chairman.

Instead, perhaps the key defining characteristic of a women's party is that their aim is to improve women's political representation. Cowell-Meyer's (2016: 4) initial definition states that women's parties' aim is to increase the 'volume and range' of women's voices in politics. This is made more concrete by Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 6) who extend and clarify the original definition, stating that the primary function of a women's party is to increase women's representation 'descriptively, substantively, or symbolically' (2020: 12).

This clarification is significant as it highlights that the primary aim of women's parties is not necessarily achieving electoral representation. Indeed, case study literature has indicated that consciousness raising was the primary goal of parties in Canada (Zaborszky (1987) and Israel (Levin, 1999) in the 1980s and 1990s. Other women's parties have allowed members to have joint membership with other political parties as their goal to increase women's descriptive and substantive representation across politics more broadly (see for example, Feministische Party DIE FRAUEN, 2021: 8).

While electoral representation secures greater descriptive representation for women, which may lead to greater substantive representation of women's issues (Phillips, 1995), women's parties may also pursue policy-seeking strategies. Policy-seeking strategies refer to when parties seek to maximise their impact on public policy (Strøm, 1990: 567). This can of course be achieved through securing electoral office. However, research has shown that some small/niche parties, particularly those with origins in activism, may also run campaigns with the aim of influencing the policy offers of other parties (Cowell-Meyers, 2020; Lynch and Whittaker, 2012). In their pursuit of increased descriptive and substantive representation of women, women's parties may pursue a combination of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. This is a point that I develop in more detail in the next two sections of this Chapter (2.2 and 2.3).

2.1.2 The women's party family

Comparative study has developed from the definitions of women's parties to argue for the existence of a women's party family (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). Using Mair and Mudde's (1998) party family framework, Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020) contend that commonalities in naming patterns, sociological origins, and ideology are sufficient to define women's parties as a distinct party family. In the following paragraphs I outline each of these arguments in detail and focus, in particular, on the supposed shared ideology of the women's party family.

First, the most basic commonality unifying women's parties is their self-identification as such. Many women's party's labels include the words 'women', for example Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia) or Germany's Die Frauen (The Women). Women's parties may also use

terms like ‘mother’ or ‘daughter’, for example Magyar Anyák Nemzeti Pártja (The Hungarian Mothers’ National Party). Some women’s parties will also make their specific approach to women’s representation clear in their party label, such as identifying as a *feminist party*. The most notable example of this is the Feminist Initiative which has had branches in Denmark (Feministisk Initiativ), Norway (Feministisk Initiativ), Poland (Inicjatywa Feministyczna)³, Spain (Iniciativa Feminista) and Sweden (Feministiskt Intiaitiv). Thus, at first glance, women’s parties can be grouped as self-identified family of parties mobilised around the ‘*shared group identity*’ of gender, while certain labels, such as ‘feminist’, may also hint towards differences in their specific political outlook.

Second, Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020) contend that women’s parties constitute a party family given their shared sociological origins and the conditions leading to their emergence. Past research on women’s party emergence has in fact highlighted two types of women’s parties (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Ishiyama, 2003). First, *essentialist women’s parties* are those that emerge in contexts of political and economic turbulence, such as in states undergoing democratic transition. Women’s parties form in these states to ensure that women’s voices are included in the development of new political institutions and processes (Ishiyama, 2003). Examples of *essentialist women’s parties* include those that emerged in Eastern European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union, such as Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia), Armenia’s Shamiram Party, and Belarus’ Nadzeya (Hope). Emerging from contexts of political upheaval, the platforms of these parties are supposedly centered on protecting women’s democratic and social rights and securing their material needs (Cowell-Meyers, 2016).

Feminist parties, on the other hand, are typically formed in established democracies and post-industrial economies where there is a perceived imbalance between women’s economic empowerment and their political representation (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). These parties propose overtly feminist platforms, advocating for increased women’s representation and directly challenging patriarchal structures and institutions that enable women’s subordination on the bases of gender (see Beckwith, 2000: 437 for a similar definition of feminist movements). Examples of *feminist parties* include the Feminist Initiative which has branches in several Western European countries, the UK’s Women’s Equality Party and Finland’s Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party) among others.

Although these two different types of women’s parties have been identified, comparative research has argued that there are shared characteristics across the emergent conditions of all

³ The Polish branch of the Feminist Initiative began as the *Partia Kobiet* (Women’s Party) in 2007 before renaming as the *Inicjatywa Feministyczna* (Feminist Initiative) in 2016. The party formally dissolved in 2020.

women's parties. Supply-side factors for women's party emergence include a population of women with relatively high level of socioeconomic and educational empowerment but with relatively low political representation (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Ishiyama, 2003).⁴ This precedes the emergence of a women's party in both Eastern Europe in the 1990s (Ishiyama, 2003) and *feminist parties* in Western Europe in the 21st century (Cowell-Meyers, 2016) and remains significant in statistical tests where region is controlled for (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). Fundamentally, across contexts women's parties emerge where there is a 'perception of exclusion from mainstream political processes' (Cowell-Meyers, 2016: 16) and a frustration with the lack of women's representation, descriptively or substantively, from mainstream parties.

Cowell-Meyers also noted the significance of a robust and autonomous women's movement in leading to women's party emergence, particularly of *feminist* women's parties (2016: 17). In related work on the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, she develops the idea of a 'movement-party' to explain those parties that appear to act as an extended branch of an existing women's movement (Cowell-Meyers, 2014). Indeed, case study literature indicates that parties in Iceland (Kvennalistinn (Women's List)) and Canada (The Feminist Party of Canada) were formed from feminist activists with no little formal political experience (Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Zaborszky, 1987).

However, not all women's parties emerge from an established women's movement. Some parties are formed by elites, for example the Swedish Feministiskt Initiativ was formed by former leader of the Left Party Gudrun Schyman, who had been a member of the Swedish Riksdag for 10 years (1993-2003). Others begin with no link to formal politics, such as the UK Women's Equality Party (WEP) which was formed by journalist Catherine Mayer and broadcaster Sandi Toksvig who met at the Women of the World Conference and formed WEP from a personal frustration with the lack of progress on gender equality from mainstream parties. WEP has in fact received criticism for not engaging closely with existing women's movements in the UK (see Evans and Kenny, 2019: 861). Therefore, connection with an existing women's movement is seemingly not a necessary condition to the formation of a women's party, but the perception of exclusion from political institutions is shared in women's parties' genetic origin.

⁴ These studies also identify several structural factors that are significant in the emergence of a women's party, but which are conducive to the emergence of new and small parties more generally. These include democratic transition, a multiparty system with low barriers to entry for small parties, low district magnitude, and a proportional representation voting system (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Ishiyama, 2003).

These differences in the actors that form women's parties may also link to the differences that have been suggested in *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*' platforms. *Essentialist women's parties* are argued to focus on securing women's material needs whereas *feminist parties* focus on issues of patriarchy and gender (in)equality (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). While these different focuses will partly stem from the specific socioeconomic and political contexts in which individual women's parties are formed, there may also be an element of strategy in parties' platforms. For example, as several contemporary *feminist parties* have been formed by political or social elites, they may be more likely to develop sophisticated issue communication strategies in comparison to *essentialist women's parties* which are formed by activists with less professional political experience.

Finally, Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020) contend that women's parties constitute a distinct party family because of a shared ideology that underpins the party family. This ideology is defined as 'a desire for gender equality, meaning that women and men should have equal citizenship rights and a pro-women perspective on social justice' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 13). This extends on the original definition of a women's party by stipulating that women's parties *must* be in support of gender equality. The initial definition defines a women's party as any party that has an explicit construction around gender and adoption of gender as their principal analytical category (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). Crucially this does not define women's parties as those that seek to increase gender equality or challenge existing gendered structures in society. Women's parties are essentially any party that takes sex and/or gender issues as their *raison d'être*.

A similar distinction is made in literature conceptualising women's movements, with the purpose being to acknowledge the heterogeneity of women's organisation. Thus, Beckwith (2000: 437) argues that the core commonality of women's movements is that they are:

"Characterised by the primacy of women's gendered experiences, women's issues, and women's leadership and decision making. The relationship of women to these movements is direct and immediate; movement definition, issue articulation, and issue resolution are specific to women, developed and organised by them with reference to their gender identity" (Beckwith 1996: 1038).

The benefit of having a similarly broad conceptualisation of the ideology of women's parties is that it recognises the heterogeneity of women's organisation and political activity without imposing judgement on the content of their platforms.

However, the disadvantage of loosely defined concepts is that they are difficult to operationalise and empirically investigate. For example, by defining women's parties as any party that seeks to represent women, it opens the door for a potential women's party that is anti-women's rights or gender equality. Shin (2020) outlines a typology of women's parties that includes a category for such parties, labelled 'reactive women's parties'.⁵ Such parties are deemed by Shin to be 'rare in reality' (2020: 83), however I argue that they are in fact a potential and even probable possibility. For example, many conservative parties have a women's group or section representing women members and candidates who may not support gender equality policies.

In recent years there has also been an increasing politicisation of gender-based issues by far-right parties, a process known as *femonationalism*, wherein far right parties mobilise gender issues to stigmatise immigrants and ethnic communities (see Farris, 2017). Fratelli D'Italia (Brothers of Italy) for example has a woman leader in Giorgia Meloni and a platform with policies relating to gender equality and gendered violence (Colella, 2021; De Giorgi et al., 2023). Therefore, the formation of an explicitly *anti-feminist party* is not an impossibility and under the original definitional framework would be categorised as a women's party.

Thus, I argue that the definition of women's party ideology as including a 'a desire for gender equality' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 13) improves the conceptualisation of the party family as it disallows the existence of women's parties that do not support equal rights between men and women. Nevertheless, the definition of the women's party family ideology remains broad, in recognition that the concept of gender equality can be contextual to individual parties. For some parties the focus may be on securing women's political rights in contexts of political instability and for others it may be a more radical overhaul of gendered structures within political institutions and discourses. Each of these approaches seeks to improve women's substantive representation in some manner.

Indeed, empirical evidence shows that women's parties do span the left-right continuum. While some women's parties are explicitly left wing, such as the Partido Feminista de España (Feminist Party of Spain) which advocates a Marxist feminist ideology (PFE, 2015), others are more economically and socially conservative, for example Magyar Anyák Nemzeti Pártja (The Hungarian Mothers' National Party) (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020).

⁵ Shin's (2020: 83) definition of a reactive women's party in fact includes both 'anti-feminist women's parties and parties with no women's concerns. While recognising the diversity of women's organisation is important, it is practically difficult to reconcile the idea that a women's party may exist whose platform contains no policies concerning women, especially when the defining feature of a women's party is to increase women's representation.

Some women's parties have even taken an explicitly non-partisan approach, arguing that working across the political spectrum can better help them achieve their policy-seeking aims (LSE, 2016). For example, the UK Women's Equality Party originally took no position on Brexit arguing that it was better able to advocate for women's rights from a non-partisan position (Evans and Kenny, 2019).⁶ Women's parties' position on the ideological spectrum may therefore be both normative and strategic.

In the conceptualisation of the women's party family Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 13) therefore argue that women's parties may occupy a 'third dimension' outside of the traditional left-right cleavage. They contend that ideology is best understood as 'a body of normative or normative-related ideas about the nature of man[kind] and society as well as the organization and purposes of society' (Sainsbury, 1980: 8 in Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 12). Consequently, the women's party family ideology is broadly understood as a shared commitment to values such as gender equality and social justice, rather than a position on the left-right continuum.

However, while this definition recognises both the heterogeneity of women's organisation and gender equality as an alternative political dimension, it offers little indication of what the shared *issue concerns* of women's parties may be, making measurement of party ideology empirically complex. Therefore, I contend that it may be best to understand 'women's parties' as an umbrella term, encompassing any political organisation that fields candidates for elected office on a platform that seeks to increase or improve the representation of women. However, in order to study women's parties' issue concerns in comparative perspective, it may be more useful to examine the types of women's parties that have been identified in the literature on women's party emergence, which may share greater commonalities in ideology and issue focus.

2.1.3 Essentialist and feminist women's parties

As mentioned above, the extant comparative empirical research on women's parties has distinguished between two types of women's parties, *feminist parties* and *essentialist women's parties*. These types have developed from empirical research on the emergence and formation of women's parties which has indicated that specific social, political, economic, and cultural contexts of party emergence may be connected to different approaches to women's representation and gender equality and to specific issue concerns (Cowell-Meyers, 2016).

⁶ Following criticism of this position, the party moved to campaign for a second referendum and to remain in the European Union. Later in this Chapter (and in the analysis in Chapter 4) I explore the extent to which taking a non-partisan approach is a strategic choice made by *feminist parties* pursuing office-seeking and policy-seeking goals.

Developing this discussion beyond parties' emergent contexts, Shin (2020) constructs a typological framework of women's parties, based on differences in descriptive and substantive representation (see Table 2.1). First women's parties are distinguished from other parties by the degree of women's descriptive representation within the party. Women's parties are 'women dominated', meaning that women dominate both leadership and membership. Other parties may be 'women mobilised', meaning that they have a large proportion of women members. But they are separated from women's parties as gender they are not '*intentionally and consistently* run by women' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 6 [emphasis in the original text]).

Shin (2020) then distinguishes three different types of women's party based on their level of substantive representation. This categorisation draws from past research on women's movements. Specifically, from Molyneux (1985; 1988), who outlined the difference between 'women's practical interests', those relating to women's immediate needs in their gendered roles as homemakers and carers, and 'women's strategic interests', which are those that aim to 'transform the social relations underpinning women's subordination' (Shin, 2019: 5). Applying this differentiation in issue focus to categorise women's organisations, Alvarez (1990) differentiates between *proactive movements* that aim to transform societal relations that marginalise women and *reactive movements* which 'accept prevailing feminine roles and assert rights on the basis of those roles' (1990: 23).

Shin's (2020) framework draws from this literature and applies it to women's parties. First, parties with limited priority of women's concerns are labelled as 'reactive' parties. As discussed previously, this controversial category includes parties with no women's concerns or with anti-feminist platforms. Based on the ideological definition offered by Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 13), 'reactive' parties would not fit the criteria of women's parties as they do not support gender equality and a pro-women perspective on social justice. In this thesis I therefore do not include 'reactive' parties as women's parties.

The remaining two categories of 'proactive' and 'feminist' parties map against the emergent conditions of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* that are outlined in past research (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). 'Proactive' or *essentialist women's parties*, are those focused on practical women's concerns and women's material needs but do not challenge women's status in society (Shin, 2020: 82-3). On the other hand, *feminist parties* advocate explicit feminist issue concerns aimed at challenging patriarchal structures and narratives (Shin, 2020: 83). In this thesis I use the terminology of *essentialist women's parties* as it offers a more substantive indication of parties' ideological outlook than the label 'proactive'.

Table 2.1 Shin's (2020) typology of women's parties

		Women's substantive representation		
		Low priority of women's concerns	Practical concerns	Feminist concerns
Women's descriptive representation	Women dominated	Reactive women's party	Proactive women's party	Feminist party
	Women mobilised	Gender hierarchical party	Women-friendly party	Gender equality advocate party

Notes: Typology of women's parties based on descriptive and substantive representation developed by Shin (2020: 83)

Shin's (2020) framework provides a useful step towards linking the research on women's party emergence with study of parties' ideological outlook. Taken together, this literature offers good evidence of the existence of two types of women's party. However, as of yet, there has been no comparative empirical analysis of the issue concerns of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* to substantiate this typology. There is also a question of whether differences identified between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* are instead merely reflective of broader changes in attitudes towards gender equality over time.

For example, Shorrocks (2018) finds that over a thirty-year period 1990-2010, UK and Western European voters have become significantly less likely to agree with the traditional division of social roles. It is therefore worth empirically examining whether these party types do reflect differences in ideological focus or whether they simply relate to the specific emergent contexts of parties examined in post-communist Eastern Europe (Ishiyama, 2003) and 21st century Western Europe (Cowell-Meyers, 2016).

To summarise, my review of the extant comparative literature women's parties has demonstrated that there is convincing evidence for the existence of a women's party family based on shared naming patterns, emergent conditions, and ideology. However, there is a need for further investigation of the ideology and issue concerns of women's parties. The current definition of the ideology of women's parties is deliberately broad in an attempt to recognise the heterogeneity of organisation around gender and approaches to representing women. However, this broad conceptualisation is also potentially problematic because it allows a range of parties to fall under one umbrella who may in fact be very different and even contradictory in their aim and issue platform. Ultimately, there is little understanding from existing comparative research of how women's parties mobilise around the shared identity of sex/gender

or what specific issues they focus on to increase women's descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation.

Moreover, extant research has proposed convincing arguments for a differentiation between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). Yet (to my knowledge) there has been no empirical testing of this typological framework in existing research. This opens questions as to what extent different parties can be unified in a party family if they focus on different issues and occupy different positions on the left-right cleavage (or even operate outside of it). Empirical analysis is therefore needed to improve the conceptualisation of the party family and to investigate the issue focus of *essentialist* and *feminist* type women's parties. In Chapter 4, I provide empirical analysis of the issue concerns in a sample of European women's parties' manifestos spanning a 30-year period to address these questions.

A particular gap in the existing comparative research on women's parties is that it has only engaged to a limited extent with comparative party politics literature and specifically the field of research on issue competition and issue communication (see Cowell-Meyers, 2014; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers, 2017, for single-case studies that draw on party politics theories and concepts). The original definition of a women's party stresses that they are *political parties*, as opposed to movements or social advocacy groups. It is therefore important to study women's parties' issue concerns not just as organisations seeking to represent women but also as political parties that adopt strategic issue campaigns in the pursuit of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. Situating women's parties within the party politics literature is important to measure parties' issue concerns and evaluate their strategic aims, individually and collectively.

Therefore, as a first step toward bringing women's parties more concretely into this field of study, in the next section I explore the classification of women's parties and the two sub-types of women's parties as small parties, niche parties, and challenger parties. This will offer a fresh perspective on their issue competition and communication strategies. A subsidiary aim is to make clear how contemporary European *feminist parties* should be theoretically placed within these groups. This lays the groundwork for my investigation of the issue communication of three European *feminist parties* in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.1.4 Situating women's parties in party politics research

In this section I assess the extent to which women's parties meet the definitional criteria of small parties, niche parties and challenger parties. These are three conceptually different but interrelated types of political party. It is important to understand the definitions of these party

types and how they may apply to women's parties as each comes with a set of expectations of party strategy and behaviour that has been explored in relation to other party families but has yet to be systematically applied to women's parties.

In each section I first set out the definitional criteria and measurement of the party type. I then discuss how it applies to women's parties as a whole before assessing its application to the sub-types of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

Small parties

First, almost all women's parties can be defined as small parties. Small parties (sometimes referred to as minor parties) are generally conceived as parties that are relatively unimportant players in the electoral field. However, scholars take different approaches to conceptualising importance. In previous research small parties have been defined in comparison to the total number of parties in parliament (Bolleyer, 2007) or to the so-called 'major' players (Gerring, 2005), or the extent to which they are probable coalition partners (Smith, 1991). Drawing these strands together, Dinas et al. (2015: 188) define small parties as 'those that, in large part owing to their limited electoral appeal, cannot take parliamentary representation for granted, and have to expend a significant amount of their efforts and resources trying to achieve parliamentary representation'.

Spoon (2011: 5) offers the only definition which considers issue focus as well as size. She defines small parties as those that have a narrow ideological scope and/or have a low vote/seat share. This therefore includes both ideologically narrow yet popular parties and ideologically wide but unpopular parties. The combination of size and issue focus overlaps significantly with research on niche parties (discussed below) and empirically it is preferable to separate these two features of party size and party issue focus as they may play different roles in a party's behaviour and success.

In empirical research, small parties are generally determined by their vote share, with a common threshold of under 5% of the national vote (which maps against the electoral threshold in many European proportional representation systems). This means that the classification as a small party is dynamic, where once a party becomes popular and receives a higher vote share it is no longer considered a small party. While small party status is specific to individual parties, past research has commonly discussed entire party families as being small parties, such as green parties (Spoon, 2011).

Based on existing definitions and measures such as national vote share, the majority of women's parties, both *essentialist* and *feminist*, can be defined as small parties. Only two European

women's parties have been represented in national parliaments, Kvinnalistin (Women's List) in Iceland (1983) and Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia) in the Russian Duma (1993). Additionally, the Swedish Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative) gained an MEP in the 2014 European Parliament elections. Thus, each of these parties at one stage moved out of the small party category, yet they each lost their representation in the following election, returning to the small party camp.

Niche parties

The second category of relevance to women's parties is niche parties. Niche parties are defined not by their size but by the 'niceness' of their issue focus. Whereas mainstream parties are presumed to aim to capture as many votes as possible by adopting a centrist ideology and appealing to the preferences of the median voter (Bischof and Wagner, 2020; Downs, 1957), niche parties campaign on a narrow range of issues and are broadly unresponsive to the median voter's preferences (Adams et al., 2006; Bischof and Wagner, 2020).

Bonnie Meguid is credited with offering the first operationalisable definition of niche parties as parties that reject the class-based orientation of politics and which offer limited issue appeals on 'novel' issues (Meguid, 2005; 2008). The first important element of this definition is that niche parties sit outside the class-based economic cleavage. In a similar approach, Wagner (2012) defines niche parties as those that promote a narrow range of *non-economic* issues. Based on this criteria, many women's parties would be classified as niche parties, as they can exist at any point on the ideological spectrum and often mobilise on a separate dimension to the economic cleavage (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020).

However, there is significant debate in the literature as to whether niche parties necessarily must campaign on non-economic issues. Some scholars have argued against this criterion as it excludes certain parties that do campaign on class-based or economic issues but may be considered to have a niche appeal, such as communist parties (Meyer and Miller, 2015). Moreover, niche parties that do not mobilise around economic issues can still frame issues through an economic lens, for example, right-wing populist parties and immigration (see Hagelund, 2003). Indeed, while women's parties may not predominantly mobilise around the economic cleavage, several women's parties have campaigned on economic issues such as the gender pay gap (see WEP, 2016).

Removing the economic criterion, Adams et al. (2006) offer an ideological definition of niche parties as those that adopt an extremist or non-centrist position on the ideological spectrum. Niche parties are therefore distinguished from mainstream parties as they do not compete for

the centre ground to attract the median voter. However, Adams et al. (2006) restrict niche parties specifically to the green, communist, and radical right party families. This approach has thus been criticised as it results in a static or ‘time-invariant’ (Bischof, 2017) measurement of nicheness. It means that certain parties will always be classed as niche based on their party family, regardless of changes in their programmatic offer over time. Moreover, restricting the niche party definition to specific party families limits the application of this definition to women’s parties or other under-studied party families.

Given the problems of spatial or ideological criteria, alternative definitions have focused on the second aspect of Meguid’s (2005; 2008) definition, classifying parties as niche based on the novelty and narrowness of their programmatic appeals. Meyer and Miller (2015: 261) offer a minimalist definition of a niche as party as one that ‘emphasises policy areas neglected by its competitors’. Similarly, Zons’ (2016) definition stipulates that niche parties emphasise neglected issues but adds that niche parties’ programmes are concentrated to a small number of issues (see also Bischof, 2017). The benefit of these definitions is that nicheness becomes a dynamic and time-variant measure, wherein parties can move in and out of the niche party category dependent on changes in their programmatic offer (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015: 261-262). Given the advantages of these definitions, in this thesis I adopt the definition of a niche party as one that emphasises a narrow range of issues neglected by competitors (Bischof, 2017; Bischof and Wagner, 2020; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016).

The fundamental aspect of this definition is that niche parties mobilise around *different* issues to mainstream parties. This offers a resolution to the problem of the ‘non-economic’ issue focus criterion in earlier definitions. Rather than a binary measure of issue focus, nicheness is measured by relative issue emphasis. Following this line of argument, Bischof (2017) argues that communist parties may actually not be considered niche parties because, rather than mobilising around ‘different’ issues, they offer a ‘different’ perspective on traditional issues such as economics.

From this basis, the classification of women’s parties as niche would be dependent on the specific issues that they mobilise. I therefore argue that women’s parties may be too broad and heterogeneous a group to be appropriately defined as niche parties. Moreover, as has been discussed, there is considerable weakness in defining entire party families as niche. Looking to specific types of women’s party, *essentialist women’s parties* that emerge in reaction to contexts of political turbulence and economic instability may also not qualify as niche parties. Past research has argued that these parties sought to represent women’s political and economic rights, securing greater resources for women in economic and social policy (Ishiyama, 2003;

Cowell-Meyers, 2016). Therefore, following Bischof's (2017) line of argument, their platforms may not address neglected issues but rather represent an alternative perspective on traditional issues.

Feminist parties, on the other hand, particularly contemporary *feminist parties* in Europe, may theoretically be classified as niche parties. Indication from existing research on *feminist parties* is that these parties advocate an intersectional feminist ideology and a platform of gender-based issues (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Filimonov and Svensson, 2016). Moreover, the case study literature suggests that *feminist parties* are strategic in the issues that they emphasise (Evans and Kenny, 2019) and thus may be more likely to deliberately promote neglected issue areas in pursuit of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. *Feminist parties* therefore theoretically meet both the spatial and issue concern criteria of niche parties. My analysis of party manifestos in Chapter 4 will provide empirical investigation of this expectation.

For the most part, women's parties have been excluded from past theoretical and empirical literature on niche parties and this may be for several reasons. First, some past research has labelled women's parties as 'single issue' parties (see for example Wagner, 2023), which are often considered separate to the niche category. Single-issue parties are defined both through demand-side and supply-side criteria as parties that campaign on one all-encompassing issue and whose vote base has no particular social structure but supports the party on the basis of this issue (see Mudde 1999).

This definition simply does not apply to women's parties, as research has demonstrated that women's parties have campaigned on a range of issues from traditional women's concerns such as childcare (Cowell-Meyers, 2011) to more traditional cleavage issues such as foreign policy (Cowell-Meyers, 2017: 485). Moreover, the women's party vote base can be argued to have a social structure, with membership being comprised predominantly of women. Women's parties themselves have lamented the narrow framing they receive in medias as 'special interest' parties (Hinsliff, 2018). Thus, women's parties may have been excluded from the study of niche parties due to a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of their programmatic offering. Though, their exclusion may also reflect a deeper problem in party politics research of reducing 'women's issues' to a single-issue category.

Second, women's parties may have been excluded from past research due to methodological reasons. Measurements of nicheness based on relative issue emphasis require investigation of parties' issue concerns, often through analysis of party manifestos. For example, Bischof (2017)

uses data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Lehmann et al., 2023) to test parties' focus on 'niche market segments' in their election platforms. Datasets of party manifestos such as the CMP often do not include women's parties' manifestos as they do not meet the inclusion criteria. The CMP dataset (with some exceptions) collects manifestos from parties that have gained a seat in the focal national election. As discussed above, only rarely has a women's party achieved national representation and therefore they are largely excluded from these widely used datasets.⁷

Thus, without data on women's parties' and their issue positions, they have been excluded from past empirical research. My exploration of women's parties' issue concerns in Chapter 4 provides (to my knowledge) the first empirical investigation of whether women's parties' platforms can be defined as niche. In this analysis I will focus specifically on *feminist parties* as the discussion above supposes that only *feminist* women's parties can be classified as niche.

Challenger parties

Finally, women's parties may theoretically be categorised as challenger parties. Challenger parties are simply defined as parties that have not previously held political office (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012: 251) and thus are defined, similarly to small parties, by their status relative to governing parties. However, the term was coined by De Vries and Hobolt (2012) to conceptualise the strategies of far-right populist parties which they argue act as issue entrepreneurs, mobilising around new or novel issues.⁸ By mobilising a new issue, challenger parties can attract voters by offering something different to the mainstream consensus. The challenger party concept is therefore potentially useful in conjoining the size/status and issue program of parties.

Thus, while the category of challenger parties is conceptually different to both small/niche parties, in practice the three groups overlap. Empirically, niche parties are found unlikely to be officeholders (Bischoff, 2017) and as parties oriented around neglected issues, they may pursue issue entrepreneurial strategies. Therefore, niche parties can often be classed as challenger parties. The concept of the challenger party also shares similarity to small parties as they too are unlikely to be in government (though a small party can be a member of a coalition whereas a challenger party cannot).

⁷ As I address in Chapter 3, the CMP database contains only four identifiable women's party manifestos from Armenia's Shamiram (1995), Belarus' Nadzeya (Hope) (1995) and Russia's Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia) (1993, 1995).

⁸ Challenger parties are therefore often characterised as being found at the extremes of the political spectrum, though this is not a necessary characteristic (see for example Hobolt and Tilley, 2016).

Yet the challenger party classification has faced some criticism for its difficulty in application to empirical research. First, a party may be a challenger at the national level but may hold office either locally or regionally. This would be the case for example for the Swedish Feminist Initiative which has held a European Parliament seat and been represented on municipal councils across Sweden but has never secured national representation. It is unclear how this semi-challenger status would influence a party's entrepreneurial strategy. A further complication is whether there is a time limit to being a challenger or non-challenger party. For example, does a party that held office twenty years ago but has not been represented since qualify as a challenger? Due to these issues, it is more difficult to assess whether women's parties or specific types therein can be categorised as challenger parties in comparison to small/niche parties which have clearer definitional criteria.

In the following chapters of the thesis, I will refer to all women's parties as small parties and to *feminist parties* as small/niche parties. All types of women's parties can be classed as small parties because they have a low national vote share and are considered comparatively 'unimportant' players in the electoral field. Meanwhile, only *feminist parties* are theoretically classified as niche parties based on their emphasis of gender-based issues that are neglected by mainstream parties.

Throughout the next sections of this Chapter I also draw on literature concerning both small parties and niche parties. While I have outlined that these are conceptually different categories, they are both relevant to my discussion. The primary focus of my empirical investigation in Chapters 5 and 6 is *feminist parties'* strategic issue communication as small/niche parties mobilising around gender-based issues. Thus, in the following section I outline how theories of party competition and issue communication should inform investigation of *feminist parties'* issue emphases and communication strategies. Niche parties are the only category of party that are defined by their issue appeals and the discussion of party issue competition and communication strategy is most logically understood through this lens. However, a party's size, or at least its relative status within the party system, also plays a role in its communication strategies and to how it is treated by other actors, for example mainstream media. Moreover, in existing literature the two categories have often been used interchangeably or in conjunction in studies of green parties and the radical right.

2.1.5 Feminist parties' issue communication

As discussed in the first section of this Chapter, it has been suggested in past research that as well as seeking electoral representation, women's parties may also pursue policy-seeking goals. For example, Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 16) suggest that although women's parties are largely

electorally unsuccessful, they can have an impact by ‘raising the agenda of women’s issues in order to embarrass existing parties into taking up the issue of women’s representation and specific policy issues’. While the presence of any women’s party may exert this effect, contemporary *feminist parties* formed by political elites may be particularly likely to be strategic in their issue platforms and communication practices. A good example of this policy-seeking strategy comes from the UK Women’s Equality Party, which launched the ‘Nickable Policies’ campaign in 2017, delivering their manifesto to each mainstream party with the words ‘Steal Me’ printed on the cover. It is therefore important to situate *feminist parties* in the literature on party competition to better understand and investigate their issue communication strategies.

There are two main theories of party competition that aim to unpick what issues parties emphasise and how they communicate them. First are positional theories that develop from Downs’ (1957) spatial theory of party competition. The essential argument of these theories is that parties adopt different positions on a policy dimension and voters will vote for parties that are most ideologically proximate to their own position. Whereas mainstream parties strategically shift their position to move closer to the median voter’s preferences (Bischof and Wagner, 2020), niche parties prioritise policy-seeking strategies over vote-seeking strategies and thus are expected to focus their communication on their core issues, regardless of voters’ preferences (Adams et al., 2006).

The alternative model of party competition focuses on issue ownership and issue salience. In these theories, parties are thought to ‘own’ certain issues in the minds of voters (Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996). Ownership can either be based on perceptions of competency, with voters perceiving certain parties to be more capable in handling a particular issue, for example conservative parties and economic policy. Alternatively, ownership can be associative, with voters perceiving an immediate connection between a party and an issue (Walgrave et al., 2012), an example being green parties and environmental issues.

In issue ownership models, parties do not compete to find the best position on an issue dimension but aim to increase the salience of the issues over which they have ownership and decrease the salience of those issues that they do not own. What matters then is what issues populate the broader issue agenda, as highly salient issues will be used by voters when making electoral decisions (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). Traditionally, niche parties are understood to be classic issue owners. They mobilise around a narrow set of neglected issues (Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016) with which they often have a strong ideological connection (Adams et al.,

2006; Meguid, 2005; 2008) and are unresponsive to shifts in competitors' programs or public opinion (Adams et al., 2006; Bischof and Wagner, 2020; Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2022).⁹

All women's parties can be conceived as having strong associative issue ownership over issues such as gender equality. They may also have competence-based ownership perceptions over women's issues such as abortion, as literature indicates that voters perceive women to be better substantive representatives of women's issues due to shared lived experiences (Mansbridge, 1999). Strategically minded *feminist parties* may therefore be incentivised to direct their communication at increasing the salience of feminist issues and women's issues to reap the benefits of associative and competence ownership perceptions.

However, while the original theories of issue salience and ownership argued that parties would communicate only their owned issues and avoid engaging with their non-owned issues (Petrocik, 1996), more recent empirical research has found that mainstream parties will engage in competition on their non-owned issues when those issues are particularly salient with voters (Green-Pederson and Mortensen, 2010). Therefore, in both the spatial and issue competition models, policy-seeking niche parties are incentivised to increase the salience of their owned issues in their communication to invite competition from mainstream parties.

Combining elements of issue competition and spatial models, Meguid's (2005; 2008) 'PSO Theory' – Positioning, Salience, Ownership' theory outlines the potential reaction of a mainstream party to a niche party gaining momentum on an owned issue. First mainstream parties can be dismissive, simply ignoring the issue to signal to voters that the issue is unimportant. In this reaction, mainstream parties neither increase the saliency of the niche issue nor changes their position on the issue.

The two alternative responses both involve mainstream parties engaging with the niche issue in different ways. First, mainstream parties can take an oppositional stance on the issue, spatially moving themselves away from the niche party position and creating competition over the issue. This may be done where the niche party has taken a particularly extreme position on the issue and thus, while the saliency of the issue may be high, there is also a high risk for a mainstream party in adopting a similar stance on the issue.

⁹ Some research has identified scenarios in which niche parties respond to either proximate competitors (Tromborg, 2015) or their core voter's opinions (Ezrow et al., 2011; Ferland 2020). However, most empirical work finds that niche parties are reluctant to move their position. For example, Meyer and Wagner (2013) find that niche parties only shift position in response to electoral setbacks. Other research has demonstrated that niche parties lose support when they diversify their programs or move on their owned issues (Bergman and Flatt, 2020).

Alternatively, mainstream parties can ‘accommodate’ the niche party’s issue, co-opting the policy of the niche party in an attempt to disrupt the niche party’s ownership of the policy and accumulate some of their voters. This is also known as the policy contagion effect. Contagion of niche parties’ issues and positions on issues has been observed foremost in the case of the radical right. In a cross-national European study, Green-Pederson and Otjes (2019) finds that parties increased attention to immigration in their manifestos as radical right parties grew more successful. There is also evidence that mainstream parties move further right on issues such as immigration (Abou-Chadi, 2016) and multiculturalism (Han, 2015) in the presence of an anti-immigration party, with Van Spanje (2010) finding that entire party systems are affected when a competitive radical right party emerges, not just spatially proximate parties. Similar effects have also been found in the case of Green parties (Spoon et al., 2014), though Abou-Chadi (2016) finds that mainstream parties *decrease* their attention to environmental issues in the presence of a green party as their issue ownership perceptions are too strong to overcome through accommodation.

Only one extant study has investigated the contagion effect of *feminist parties*. Through a manual content analysis of party manifestos over a twenty-year period, Cowell-Meyers (2017) finds that mainstream parties in Sweden increased the attention paid to issues of gender equality in their national manifestos, following the successful election of Feministiskt Initiativ candidate Soraya Post to the European Parliament in 2014, with ideologically proximate left parties being most responsive. This single case study offers early evidence that *feminist parties* can have a similar contagious effect on mainstream parties as has been witnessed in green and radical right parties, at least in terms of the emphasis of gender-based issues.¹⁰

The existing research on the contagion effect of niche parties on mainstream parties has recognised that niche parties benefit when their owned issues break through to the issue agenda (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005, 2008; Van Spanje, 2010). Therefore, niche parties are incentivised to pursue cohesive issue communication strategies around a narrow set of issues to increase their salience. However, relatively little research has actually looked at the communication strategies or behaviour of niche parties in pursuing this goal. Instead, research has largely focused on mainstream reaction to the mobilisation of an issue by a niche party (see for example Abou-Chadi, 2016; Han, 2015; Spoon et al., 2014; Van Spanje, 2010).

The limited research on niche party behaviour has predominantly investigated under what circumstances niche parties will expand their issue agendas and the consequences of such

¹⁰ Beckwith (2000) writes that women’s movements have also been influential in the policies of left-wing parties and have even ‘worked through’ such parties to achieve their goals.

expansion (Bergman and Flatt, 2020; Meyer and Wagner, 2013; Spoon and Williams, 2021). Of the few studies to closely observe niche party strategy, Lynch et al. (2012) use a survey of UKIP candidates and supporters to demonstrate that the party leadership recognised the necessity of maintaining a focus on the issue of European integration to increase its salience and secure the party's niche. Although the authors acknowledged that broadening the party's platform may be necessary to gain electoral representation in a majoritarian system. However, this study is focused on niche party behaviour after the initial breakthrough and impact on mainstream party behaviour, whereas most *feminist parties* are conceivably yet to have jumped that hurdle.

Therefore, one aim of this thesis is to address the gap in research on the issue communication of niche parties in the pursuit of policy-seeking goals. In Chapter 4 I will investigate the shared issues concerns of the women's party family and the specific concerns of *feminist parties* as a niche type of women's party. In Chapters 5 and 6 I then focus on three *feminist parties* in Finland, Sweden, and the UK and investigate how these parties' issue platforms are communicated through traditional news media and social media. In doing so, I present *feminist parties* as a case of small/niche parties mobilising around neglected issues that are explicit in their pursuit of policy-seeking goals.

2.2 Media coverage of small/niche parties and women political actors

2.2.1 The importance of media coverage in electoral politics

One of the ways that parties can communicate their core issues to the electorate and to political competitors is via news media. Traditional news media, such as print and television news, plays an incredibly important role in electoral politics as one of the primary channels through which voters receive information about political parties, candidates, and issues. Party manifestos are read only by a small audience (see Harmel, 2018) and while social media is making great strides in political communication and electoral campaigns, traditional media remains the primary information source for most voters.

A large of body of research focuses on the 'mediatisation' of social and political life, referring to process whereby society becomes increasingly reliant on and influenced by media organisations and their values (Hjavard, 2008: 113; see also Esser and Stromback, 2014; Landerer, 2013; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Marcinkowski, 2014). The mediatisation of electoral politics is important as it indicates that journalists and media organisations can have significant influence over the information that voters receive about parties and candidates and therefore may play an influential role in election outcomes.

First, the media can function as gatekeepers of electoral information by determining *which* political actors receive coverage and *how much* coverage they receive. Media visibility is important to political actors as higher visibility on average leads to increased support or vote intention towards parties and candidates (Aaldering et al., 2018). When investigating *which* actors receive coverage, studies often draw on the theories of media logic which argue that the content of news media is shaped by processes and established routines within media organisations (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008; Strömbäck, 2011). An alternative theory is that media follows a political logic, focusing on issues and policies. However, empirical research finds media logic to be used over political logic. In a 22-country study of the role of media coverage in election campaigns, Strömbäck and Kaid (2008) conclude that media logic was of greater prominence in each country case.

In particular, media logic theories contend that media organisations and journalists are not passive conduits of information but make choices about who and what is deemed newsworthy, based on news values. As news media has evolved into a competitive market of 24 hour rolling global news, those values increasingly prioritise capturing and maintaining audience attention (Golding and Elliott, 1979; Strömbäck, 2008; Zaller, 1999). Therefore, news media is more likely to focus on the most powerful actors in the system, such as ruling parties and party leaders (Banducci et al., 2018). It is likely to frame electoral politics as a horse race competition, and to emphasise conflict between major parties (Ergün and Karsten, 2021; Takens et al., 2013).

Second, news media can function as gatekeepers of political information in electoral politics by determining which political *issues* receive attention. Regular reminders via news media help voters maintain perceptions of issue ownership and issue salience (Walgrave and Soontjens, 2019; Walgrave et al., 2009). Therefore, media can play an important role in parties' fortunes by determining which issues voters hear about and consider important in their electoral decision-making. The influence of news media in this process relies on theories of cognitive media effects, understood as the impact that media messages have on audiences, both on an individual's processing of information and wider public opinion (Scheufele, 2000).¹¹

¹¹ The extent to which news messages influence audiences has been heavily debated. A basic three-stage model of media effects literature has been identified (Neumann and Guggenheim, 2011), oriented around the level of impact that media messages have on audiences. In the first stage, researchers posited a 'hypodermic needle' theory, stipulating that media has a direct and forceful persuasive impact upon audiences (see Laswell, 1927). In direct contravention, the second stage advocated for minimal media effects, bringing more focus on to the psychological, social, and ideological characteristics of individuals that impede the persuasive impact of media messages (see Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1949; Klapper, 1948). The third, and current, stage marked a return to a belief in significant media effects but with the use of more sophisticated methodologies and increased attention to the concepts of agenda-setting, priming, and framing.

Of particular relevance are the concepts of agenda-setting and priming. Agenda-setting is defined most simply as the ability of media to increase the salience of a particular issue, event, or idea in the minds of audiences, through the amount of coverage that is afforded to the issue (Scheufele, 2000: 304). Agenda-setting is a concept within broader accessibility theory, the basic idea of which is that audiences process information and store it in their memory. The information that is the most easily ‘accessible’ from memory storage is then used when making decisions and forming opinions (Collins and Loftus, 1975; Tulving and Watkins, 1975; Scheufele, 2000).

News media thus has the opportunity and means to affect which issues and opinions are most easily accessible in audience memory through the amount of coverage afforded to them and the position they occupy in news items (Scheufele and Tewkesbury, 2007: 11). Empirical evidence supports this as Walgrave et al. (2009) find that regular reminders via news media help voters maintain perceptions of issue ownership.

The second stage of this process, whereby voters are influenced to consider the most easily accessible information in their political decision-making, is known as priming. News media sets the audience agenda through increased coverage of certain issues and audiences are thus primed to consider these issues as important when evaluating political actors and making political decisions (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Scheufele and Tewkesbury, 2007: 15).

The issues that populate the media agenda therefore play an important role in electoral politics. However, it is generally considered that political parties set the political issue agenda and that media respond to these issues, rather than the reverse effect (see Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Nevertheless, media are still selective about *which* issues from the political agenda receive attention and follow news values around importance, entertainment, and conflict in determining which issues are newsworthy (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Meyer et al., 2020; Stromback, 2008).

2.2.2 Media coverage of small/niche parties

As discussed, theories of media visibility suggest that electoral coverage generally follows a media logic where an actor’s newsworthiness determines the amount of media attention that they receive. ‘Newsworthiness’ is often determined by power, with an actor’s prominence in the electoral system acting as an important selection criterion for journalists when writing a story or selecting a source (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996: 111).

The most powerful actors in electoral systems are governing parties and large well-established competitors. However, rather than simply party size, it has been argued that *relevance* is what determines whether a party receives media attention. According to the logic of newsworthiness,

small/niche parties, especially those outside government, should be considered less newsworthy than larger parties and therefore will receive less coverage. Small/niche parties are more likely to receive attention when they pose a threat to larger parties or are likely coalition partners (Hopmann et al., 2012).

Empirical evidence across contexts demonstrates that small/niche parties receive less coverage than mainstream parties in print and televised news (Deacon et al., 2019; Denemark et al., 2007; Van Aelst et al., 2008).¹² Particularly in majoritarian systems, such as the UK, small/niche parties receive less coverage as a result of their limited electoral viability (Brandenburg, 2003; 2006). Nevertheless, there is also evidence that these parties receive less coverage in proportional systems in Europe such as Denmark (Van Spanje and Azrout, 2022).¹³

Media coverage of small/niche parties is crucial to their electoral success and cross-national empirical research has demonstrated that public support for small parties increases after an increase in their media coverage (Damstra et al., 2021; Vliegenhart et al., 2012). Like many small/niche parties, contemporary European *feminist parties* have blamed a lack of media attention for their limited electoral success (Svenberg, 2018). In order to increase their media representation, parties must enter a ‘negotiation of newsworthiness’ (Cook, 2005: 102). This includes increased professionalisation of their electoral campaigns and aligning their communication with media logics. This commonly plays into the hands of larger parties that are more embedded in the political infrastructure as they are more likely to have the resources and capabilities to influence the news media agenda, for example by buying ad space or through contacts with media elites. This creates a ‘self-sustaining circle’ of coverage in favour of larger parties (Hoppmann et al., 2012: 186; Tresch, 2009).

However, small/niche parties do try and play the system. Spoon (2011) details how green parties in France and the UK attempted to increase the professionalisation of their media communication throughout the 2000s through significant expenditure on communications staff and external communication. Yet, despite this professionalisation, media organisations continue to prioritise larger parties. Helfer and Van Aelst (2016) find that in Switzerland and the Netherlands journalists are more likely to write a story about a press release from a more

¹² Similar evidence has been found in media coverage of party candidates, with candidates of small parties receiving less coverage than candidates from larger parties (Gattermann and Vasilopoulou, 2015; see also Vos, 2014 for an overview)

¹³ Van Spanje and Azrout’s (2022) study is actually focused on ‘new’ parties rather than small or niche parties. However, the examples offered include green parties and anti-immigration parties which aligns closely with literature focused on small/niche parties. Moreover, their findings indicate that it is new parties without parliamentary representation (i.e., those that did not form as splinters of mainstream parties) which receive less media coverage.

powerful party as they expect these messages to contain important policy announcements. Small/niche parties thus face disadvantage in receiving media coverage due to both their lack of power and a limited ability to challenge this through their lower resources.

Turning to issues, there is little empirical research specifically focused on small/niche parties' ability to influence the media agenda but in a broader study on agenda-setting in Austria, Meyer et al. (2020) find that parties' press releases are more likely to receive media coverage if they address issues that are already of interest to voters, media, or other parties. Alternatively, parties' owned issues were not associated with increased media coverage. As a result, Meyer et al. (2020: 282) note that less prominent parties, such as small/niche parties acting as issue entrepreneurs, are disadvantaged in their ability to gain coverage on their owned issues which may be 'innovative' or 'destabilising' to the issue agenda. Moreover, because parties receive more coverage on salient issues, mainstream parties may strategically increase their communication on issues that are already salient, creating a feedback loop to attract further attention (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Policy-seeking small/niche parties that pursue issue ownership strategies can reap no such reward.

In contrast, other studies *have* identified a connection between party issue ownership and media coverage. In a cross-national study of the linkages between parties' issue emphasis in manifestos and their news coverage, Merz (2017) finds that even when confounding factors such as issue salience are controlled for, parties predominantly receive coverage on the issues in their manifestos. However, this study utilises CMP data which includes only manifestos of larger parties (those that gained a seat in parliament in the focal election), meaning the outcome for small/niche parties is largely unexplored. Looking specifically at small parties, Schwarzbözl et al. (2020) find that small parties are rarely covered on issues that they do not own. In conjunction with Meyer et al.'s (2020) findings, this would suggest that *feminist parties* will receive a small amount of coverage but coverage that is linked to their owned issues. However, a piece missing from this puzzle is what the owned issues of *feminist parties* are and the extent to which they are an accurate representation of *feminist parties*' policy platforms.

As discussed previously, there are two types of issue ownership, competence-based and associative (Walgrave et al., 2012). Competence-based perceptions of issue ownership are developed through parties gaining reputation in handling a specific issue. Small/niche parties, either not in government or minor coalition members, may not be able to build strong competence-based ownership perceptions. The second element of ownership is associative, where voters make a spontaneous connection between a party and an issue (Walgrave et al., 2012). But where do these associations come from?

In the first explication of the concept of associative issue ownership, Walgrave et al. (2012) state that it draws from accessibility theory (discussed above in relation to agenda-setting) wherein voters access easily retrievable information when evaluating political actors and making political decisions. Voters are generally considered to be only ‘minimally attentive’ (Hayes, 2005: 910) to politics and thus when required to form political opinions or make electoral choices they rely on shortcuts, known as information cues, to condense complex topics and ideas into easily accessible and simple terms (Garrett, 2003). Stereotypes often form the basis of these information cues as, by their very nature, they offer simplified information about issues and groups, regardless of important variation within a group (Aronson, 2004: 44). Thus, the issues spontaneously associated with parties may be based on stereotypes of their ideology and competencies rather than parties’ own issue communication.

As larger players in the system, mainstream parties may be able impact the issues with which they are associated (Dahlberg and Martinsson, 2015; Tresch et al., 2015; Walgrave and Lefevere, 2017; Walgrave and Soontjens, 2019) and thereby influence their media coverage (Meyer et al., 2020). However, small parties have less ability to influence the political and media agendas (Hoppmann, 2012; Meyer, 2020) and therefore may be more at risk of being associated with stereotyped issue areas.

Indeed Schwarzbözl et al.’s (2020) example of small parties that receive media coverage which reflects their owned issues is green parties who receive media coverage on environmental issues. Yet European green parties are no longer single-issue environmental- parties but campaign on platforms including a broader range of policies (Hughes, 2016; Johnston and Sprong, 2023; Spoon, 2011; Spoon and Williams, 2020). Thus, representing green parties only in relation to their stereotypical association with environmental issues may actually be disadvantageous to these parties when they are trying to draw attention to other issue concerns.

Hughes (2016) develops this argument in detail, in a comparative study of the media coverage and press releases of Green parties in the UK. He finds that environmental issues account for 35% of mentions in media coverage compared to 20% of mentions in party communication. From this, he develops the concept of ‘agenda dissonance’ to describe this gap between what small/niche parties say and what media say about them.

I expect that this same agenda dissonance may be found in the media coverage of *feminist parties*. Like green parties, *feminist parties* (and women’s parties more broadly) have long been miscategorised as single-issue parties (see the discussion on p.25) indicating a misrepresentation of their issue focus. As small/niche parties with limited resources to affect

the media agenda, *feminist parties* may therefore experience a dissonance between their own communication and the media coverage that they receive.

Specifically, I expect that this dissonance will be motivated by stereotyped heuristics of *feminist parties*' issue concerns, as parties formed by and for women. In the following section I outline arguments from literature on the gendered issue coverage of women political actors and theorise how they may apply to *feminist parties*' news coverage.

2.2.3 Media coverage of women political actors

A large body of research is dedicated to investigating how women political actors are represented in news media. In particular, studies have compared the differences in the frequency and content of news coverage received by women political actors compared to men political actors.

I turn first to the *amount* of coverage received by women political actors in comparison to men. In the US context, where much of this research has taken place, results are mixed. Earlier work finds evidence of gender differences in the quantity of news coverage received by men and women candidates (Bystrom et al., 2001; Kahn, 1994; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991) whereas more recent studies find increased gender parity in press coverage (Fowler and Lawless, 2009; Hayes and Lawless, 2015; Jalalzai, 2006).

Single-country studies in the European context present more consistent evidence of a gender difference in the quantity of coverage (Ross et al., 2013; Vos, 2013; Thesen and Yildirim, 2023). Moreover, cross-national studies find evidence of a small but statistically significant gender gap in the quantity of coverage received by men and women even controlling for factors such as the electoral system and candidate viability (Lühiste and Banducci, 2016; Thesen and Yildirim, 2023; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020).

Suggested mechanisms for the lower coverage received by women political actors include the broader exclusion of women from electoral politics. For example, in the UK, Ross et al. (2013) found that approximately one third of national newspaper articles in the 2010 General Election included reference to one or more women. However, the authors also recognise that women comprised just one fifth of candidates in this election, thus the lack of coverage reflected the broader lack of relative power of women candidates. In proportional systems, Lühiste and Banducci (2016) find that the proportion of news coverage a woman candidate receives broadly reflects their placement on a party list, with more viable candidates receiving more coverage. Again, this supports the logic that newsworthiness determines the amount of media coverage afforded to a candidate.

Alternatively, the lower coverage afforded to women may be explained by the imbalance between men and women in journalism and the media industry (GMMP, 2020; Ross, 2014). The dominance of men in journalism may simply lead to direct bias against women candidates. Or male journalists may form closer informal networks with male politicians and thus may be more likely to contact these male politicians for interviews or quotes, resulting in a higher level of coverage (Aalberg and Stromback, 2010; Hooghe et al., 2015).

A third potential mechanism for women candidate's lower quantity of news coverage is as a result of gender stereotypes, which I will now discuss in relation to the *content* of women politicians' media coverage. As discussed in reference to parties, voters use socially produced stereotypes to form a baseline for comparison of a political candidate's abilities, issue positions, and character traits (Bauer, 2018; Hayes, 2005: 911). Like political parties, women and men political actors hold both associative and competence-based ownership of political issues, in this case drawn from stereotypes about men and women's character traits and roles within society.

Based on socialised roles as mothers and caregivers (Norris, 1996) and stereotyped traits of warmth and compassion (Banducci et al., 2002; Eagly and Karau, 2002), women are associated with so-called 'compassion issues' such as childcare, healthcare, and education (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Lawless, 2004; Meeks, 2016; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009). Not only are women associated with these issues, but experimental studies have found that voters assume them to have increased competence in handling them compared to men (Devroe and Wauters, 2018; Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Huddy and Capelos, 2002). Alternatively, building on stereotypes of masculinity and an historical association with the public sphere, men are associated with and assumed to be competent in issue areas such as foreign policy, defence, and economics (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Lawless, 2004; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009).

Linking back to the quantity of coverage received by men and women candidates, male issue and trait stereotypes are those most associated with political leadership (Banwart, 2010; Lee and Lim, 2016; Smith et al., 2007). This may explain why men receive more news coverage than women, as they are viewed as more viable political candidates and are therefore more newsworthy. However, empirical research, the majority of which is focused on US elections, has found mixed results in testing whether these gendered issue stereotypes are represented in the media coverage of women candidates. In studies using quantitative analyses, Kahn and Goldenberg (1991) and Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) find statistical evidence that women are represented more on stereotypically feminine issue areas. However, more recent study from Hayes and Lawless (2015) find no evidence of gendered issue stereotyping.

In relation to the country cases I focus on Chapter 5, Ross et al. (2013) find that in the 2010 UK General Election women candidates featured in fewer than 10% of articles focused on stereotypically masculine issue areas of economics and immigration but featured in over 60% of articles about gender or equality. To my knowledge, no extant research specifically focuses on gender stereotypes in the issue coverage of women and men political actors in either Finland or Sweden, or in fact the broader Nordic context.¹⁴ Research on gendered media coverage in Europe has largely focused on the visibility of candidates (Lühiste and Banducci, 2015). Of the very few studies that investigate issue coverage, Dan and Iorgoveanau (2013) focusing on Romanian candidates for the EP elections find both men and women candidates to be covered more on stereotypically masculine issue areas. On the other hand, testing gendered issue coverage at the party-level in Europe, Greene and Lühiste (2018) find that parties with more women candidates and women candidates in more visible positions receive increased coverage on compassion issues.

Thus, results in the European context are mixed. In a meta-analysis of 90 studies on the gendered media coverage of political candidates, Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) find an overall weak effect of issue stereotypes in the coverage of women and men politicians. Yet, they emphasise that the lack of statistical power in the results of previous studies may be underselling the strength of the effect.

A potential explanation for the differential findings in previous research, beyond the limitation of single-country case studies, is that candidates are simultaneously members of several social groups, each of which has issue-based stereotypes which may intersect, overlap and even contradict their gender stereotypes (Casesse and Holman, 2018). As discussed previously, voters also hold stereotypes about parties' issue priorities (Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave et al., 2012). Research has examined the interaction of these partisan and gender stereotypes in voter evaluations of candidates but again has found mixed results. On the one hand, some studies find party to play a more important role than gender in voter evaluations of candidate's traits and issue concerns (Hayes, 2011; Schneider and Bos, 2016). However, others find that even when party is held constant, voters assume women to have a more liberal positions on issues such as abortion (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009) and perceive women to be more competent in handling 'women's issues' (Huddy and Capelos, 2002).

¹⁴ Though not focused on issue coverage of politicians, in related findings, Sjøvaag and Pederson (2019) find in Norway that women are more likely to be used as sources in news stories focusing on social issues whereas they are unlikely to be used as sources in stories focusing on politics, economics or crime in comparison to men.

A common finding is that partisan and gender issue stereotypes have the strongest effect where they coincide, with women from socially liberal parties most associated with stereotypical feminine issue areas (Schneider and Bos, 2016; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009), compared to either socially liberal men or conservative women. Building on these findings, Schneider and Bos (2016) develop the ‘parallel processing model’. They argue that partisan and gender cues work simultaneously to build layered evaluations of political actors. Ultimately, the authors find both party and gender to be significant in voter evaluations on the majority of issues.

A large majority of the previous work on the interaction of gender and partisan stereotypes has occurred in the US context, comparing Democrats and Republicans, or the UK comparing Labour and the Conservatives. To my knowledge, no existing study has incorporated partisan stereotypes about smaller parties, presumably due to lack of information on what those stereotypes would be. However, the issue ownership perceptions of *feminist parties* are fairly clear. As self-identified representatives of women, these parties are deemed to have associative ownership (i.e., a spontaneous connection) and perhaps even competence-based ownership of gender-related issues. Thus, their party and gender stereotypes should coincide in media coverage, reinforcing an association with stereotypically feminine issues. Moreover, following Greene and Lühiste’s (2018) findings, the high proportion of women in the candidacy and leadership of *feminist parties* should also lead them to receive a higher proportion of coverage on stereotypically feminine issue areas.

In measuring whether candidates and parties receive a disproportionate amount of gender-stereotyped coverage, it is important to consider the extent to which actors themselves are communicating on gender stereotypical issues. For instance, if *feminist parties* receive a high volume of coverage on compassion issues, it may be because they themselves emphasise these issues in their party communication and news media are simply reflecting this (see Merz, 2017). Yet surprisingly, this is a consideration that is missing from the research designs of many past studies of gendered issue coverage.¹⁵ To take just one example, Kittilson and Fridkin (2008) perform a cross-national content analysis of gendered issue stereotypes in candidate news coverage using a comprehensive code scheme and find definitive differences in issue coverage of men and women candidates. However, without knowledge of what issues candidates themselves emphasised in their communication, the authors recognise that it is not possible to

¹⁵Likewise, studies investigating the convergence between candidate campaign messages and media coverage often do not include sex or gender as a variable (for example, Ridout and Mellen, 2007) or focus on men-only campaigns (see Hayes, 2010).

delineate whether differences are a result of media bias or simply reflect gender differences in candidate's campaign communication (p.382).

Kahn's (1994) pioneering study in this field was one of the first and only to include a measure of candidate issue communication, though her focus was on the responsiveness of news media to men and women candidate's TV adverts. She found that the correspondence between the issues mentioned in newspaper coverage and the issues highlighted in candidate advertisements was greater for men candidates. In particular, women gubernatorial candidates were underrepresented on stereotypically masculine issues and overrepresented on stereotypically feminine issue areas in media coverage, relative to issues mentioned in their television ads.

Similarly, at the party level, Greene and Lühiste (2018) include a measure of parties' attention to compassion-based issues in their manifestos. They find that higher presence of women candidates and visible women within a party increases the likelihood of receiving coverage on compassion issues, relative to the salience of these issues in a party's manifesto. Therefore, while *feminist parties* are expected to communicate on gender-based issues, there is evidence to suggest that even relative to this communication, their media coverage will feature an overrepresentation of stereotypically feminine issues.

The studies by Kahn (1994) and Greene and Lühiste (2018) both find an overrepresentation of stereotypically feminine issues/compassion issues as an aggregated category. However, a further important question is which *specific* gender-based issues are likely to be overrepresented in *feminist parties*' news coverage. Investigating this can provide further insight into the mechanisms underpinning the gendered bias I expect them to receive. Past research on media coverage of feminist social movements offers some indication as to what to expect in the issue coverage *feminist parties*. In an analysis of media coverage of US feminist movements over a 40-year period, Barakso and Schaffner (2006) find that 'gender equality' accounted for a third of all issue mentions in relation to feminist organisations. Moreover, they find that feminist movements were overrepresented on issues such as abortion, whereas their own platforms emphasised a broader range of issues including gendered violence, and economic justice (2006: 32). Similarly, Schreiber (2010) finds that 90.6% of media reports of feminist organisations link them to 'women's issues'. While this may in-part reflect the platforms of these groups, Schreiber (2010: 446) notes that 'if organisations are seeking to link women and women's activism to "broader" issues like tax policy cuts and the Iraq war, the media are not picking up on this'.

Investigating where this misrepresentation might originate, Bronstein (2005) analyses the frames used in media coverage of third-wave feminism (which is the most closely associated ideology of contemporary European *feminist parties*). She argues that third-wave feminism is commonly framed in relation to second-wave feminism, with activists linked to staple issues of the second wave, including equal pay and reproductive rights, rather than their actual issue concerns.

These findings offer good support to Hughe's (2017) concept of 'agenda dissonance' in small parties' media coverage. Just like green parties, the media coverage of women's movements appears to relate them to the issues with which they have associative (and possible competence-based) ownership such as gender equality, regardless of the broader content of their platforms.

Therefore, there is good evidence from studies of the gendered issue coverage of women political candidates (Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Ross et al., 2013; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020), parties with women in visible positions (Greene and Lühiste, 2018), and women's movements (Barakso and Schaffner, 2006; Bronstein, 2005; Schreiber, 2010) that *feminist parties* will be subject to stereotyped issue coverage. Less clear is which specific gender-based issues will be emphasised in their news coverage. While the literature on candidate issue coverage suggests an overrepresentation of compassion-based issues such as childcare and healthcare (Kahn, 1994; Kahn and Goldenberg, 2001; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Ross et al., 2013), studies of media coverage of women's movements suggests that *feminist parties* will receive greater coverage on issues that are associated with second-wave feminism such as reproductive rights and equal pay (Bronstein, 2005; Schreiber, 2010). In Chapter 5, I will investigate in detail whether *feminist parties* receive a disproportionate amount of coverage on gender-stereotypical issues and investigate which specific issues are overrepresented in comparison to their party manifestos and their own communication in news media.

In the face of potentially limited and misrepresentative news coverage, *feminist parties* may turn to alternative communication mediums to promote their party platform accurately and coherently. One medium used to a large extent by small/niche parties is social media (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019; Gibson and McCallister, 2011; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Southern, 2015). Therefore, in the last section of this Chapter, I outline literature on how small/niche parties utilise social media to communicate their issue concerns and consider the impact that candidate individualisation may have on *feminist parties*' issue communication online.

2.3 Small/niche parties' issue communication on social media

2.3.1 Small/niche parties' communication on social media

As highlighted in the previous section, a party's visibility plays an important role in their electoral success (Aaldering et al., 2018). However, as electoral campaigns have become increasingly mediatised (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), news coverage is largely directed by news values (Strömbäck, 2008) wherein relevance and power determine which actors receive most attention (Rudd and Connew, 2007).

As a result, news coverage is predominantly focused on those in power and those expected to win elections (Hopmann et al., 2012; Van Dalen 2012), to the disadvantage of smaller parties and parties whose issues are not on the issue agenda. Moreover, governing parties and mainstream competitors have ample resources and capabilities to influence the media agenda, for example by buying ad space or through contacts with media elites, creating a 'self-sustaining circle' of coverage (Hopmann et al., 2012: 186). The general conclusion is that small/niche parties face a disadvantage in attracting traditional media coverage.

Throughout the 21st century developments in digital technologies (Chadwick, 2013) have led to the widespread growth in the use of social media by political actors and the adoption of social media communication into election campaigns (Gibson, 2013). The consequence is the creation of a hybrid media environment (Chadwick, 2013) where voters gain most of their political and electoral information from a combination of traditional *and* social media. While many commentators argue that traditional media still remains the most important source of political information for voters (André et al., 2012), social media is gaining significant headway.

Therefore, facing limited and misrepresentative coverage in mainstream media, social media offers opportunity for small/niche parties to gain visibility (Ahmed et al., 2017) and to accurately and effectively communicate their issue platforms to voters. As expounded in the so-called equalisation thesis, social media offers increased advantages to smaller parties and candidates, as it is ostensibly free and requires little in the way of training or resources to use (Evans et al., 2019; Galais and Cardenal, 2017). The potential advantages of social media campaigning for small/niche parties are numerous.

First, in the absence of media gatekeepers, small/niche parties retain complete control over their communication, allowing them to communicate directly with their voters on their priority issues (Engesser et al., 2017; Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013). There is also evidence from party websites that small/niche parties can 'speak through' their electorate to a wider vote base (Utz,

2009; Vissers and Hooghe, 2009). A similar effect can be achieved on social media through interaction with and sharing of parties' posts.

Second, the issue agenda on social media is found to be more diversified than that of traditional news media (Gilardi et al., 2022), offering greater opportunity for small/niche parties to get their issues on the agenda. Research has also demonstrated that there is a two-way relationship between the social media agenda and traditional media agenda (Gilardi et al., 2022), meaning that small/niche parties can use social media to communicate with opinion leaders and journalists to try and exert influence on the traditional media agenda. Finally, exposure to digital media has also been linked to an increase in voters changing their vote choice from mainstream to small parties in cross-national study (Galais and Cardenal, 2017).

Empirical research has accordingly found evidence of higher uptake and usage of social media by small parties and minor candidates across a range of country contexts including the USA (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019), India (Ahmed et al., 2017), Australia (Gibson and McCallister, 2011), the UK (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Southern, 2015), and Denmark (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013).

However, in relation to my empirical focus in Chapter 6, the results from studies in Finland, Sweden and the UK are mixed. On the one hand studies find that overall mainstream parties use social media platforms more than minor parties in Finland (Carlson and Strandberg, 2008)¹⁶, Sweden (Larsson and Moe, 2011) and the UK (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Southern, 2015). However, in each case there is also evidence of higher usage of social media by *specific* small/niche parties. For example, in the UK Southern (2015) finds that UKIP used social media platforms less than mainstream parties but that the Green Party used sites such as Twitter and YouTube more.¹⁷ Such findings have led to the development of the 'ethos' thesis (Southern, 2015: 4), which suggests that certain types of small parties, such as green parties, develop more sophisticated online campaigns than may be expected given their size and resources. One of the only studies to include *feminist parties* comes from Larsson and Moe (2011) who identify that in Sweden, while major parties dominate in social media communication, certain minor parties including Feministiskt Initiativ are very active on Twitter in both producing their own content and engaging with other users.

¹⁶ This study took place in the mid-2000s and thus predates many important developments in social media campaigning such as the exponential growth of Twitter as a platform. In a later study, Strandberg (2013) finds candidates of smaller parties in Finland to be more active in their social media use than major parties.

¹⁷ The high attention paid to UKIP in traditional media relative to other small parties (Goodwin and Ford, 2013) may have played a role in their lower usage of social media.

Fewer studies have investigated the *content* of small/niche parties' social media communication and the available extant research has focused only on single-country contexts. For example, evidence from the US has found that minority party candidates to be more likely to mention issues in their Twitter communication than mainstream party candidates (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019). As well as talking more about issues, small parties mostly talk about their *owned* issues in their social media communication (Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2022; Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021). Moreover, in line with small/niche party communication more broadly, small parties are found to be less responsive than mainstream parties to changes in public opinion in their social media communication (Ennser-Jedenastik et al., 2022).

Based on the discussion of small/niche party issue communication strategy earlier in this Chapter, I expect *feminist parties* to emphasise their priority manifesto issues in their social media communication. To recap, small/niche parties often mobilise around new issues and issues that are ignored by mainstream parties (Hobolt and de Vries, 2015; Meguid, 2008) and have strong associative ownership of these issues (Walgrave et al., 2012). Therefore, they are more inclined to emphasise their owned issues in their campaign communication (Praet et al., 2021; Wagner, 2012). This approach aims to increase the salience of their owned issues, as opposed to adopting the broad appeal strategy of catch-all parties which seek to maximise their appeal by campaigning on a variety of issues to attract different groups of voters (Somer-Topcu, 2015). By maintaining a focus on owned issues in their communication, small/niche parties both appeal to their core voters (Bergman and Flatt, 2020; Dumitrescu, 2011) and maximise their potential for policy contagion through clear communication of their issue position (Hug, 2001, Neville-Shepard, 2014). Thus, I expect *feminist parties* to pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media campaigns.

2.3.2 Candidate issue communication on social media

However, just as *parties* pursue complex issue communication strategies across hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2013), simultaneously individual *candidates* pursue their own campaign strategies. Elections have become increasingly candidate centered (Takens et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2023; Van Aelst et al., 2012) and therefore candidates are incentivised to develop personalised or individualised campaigns, separate from the party campaign, to advertise themselves to voters (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008: 980).

This is particularly the case in open-list proportional systems such as Finland and Sweden (as well as the EP elections and municipal elections in the UK which have a proportional element), where candidates are competing against other parties and within their own party (see Strandberg 2013 for further explanation within the Finnish context). Social media, in comparison to news

media, offers pathways for candidates to build individualised and personalised profiles (Karlson and Enjolras, 2016). Moreover, the unrestricted and unmediated nature of social media is also found to increase the likelihood that candidates will post content that truly reflects their personal views and interests (Ceron, 2017).

There is mixed evidence as to whether candidates' adoption of a personalised campaign is advantageous to the party (Peeters et al., 2021) or whether parties fare better when candidate communication aligns with the party platform (Van Dalen et al., 2015). However, past literature has outlined several potential advantages to the candidate themselves in adopting a more personalised campaign. First, building an individual campaign increases a candidate's media visibility (Peeters et al., 2021). Evidence indicates that candidates are becoming the central focus of elections for voters (Takens et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2023; Van Aelst et al., 2012). As discussed in the previous section, news media is the primary source of information for voters about candidates as well as parties (André et al., 2012). By building personalised campaigns on social media, individual candidates may be able to increase their visibility in traditional news media, which is associated with greater electoral success, and it may also influence selection of candidates by the party (Sheafer and Tzionit, 2006). Second, individualised campaigning allows candidates to specialise and build a reputation of expertise in specific policy areas (Vos, 2016). Via specialisation, candidates can appeal to voters and the media and advertise their expertise to party executives, which can lead to ministerial or committee appointments once in government (Beckman, 2006).

Most of the extant research on candidate individualisation on social media has focused on mainstream parties. Yet, I suggest that the same appeal of candidate individualisation will apply to candidates of small/niche parties such as *feminist parties*. First, the opportunities for increased visibility and issue specialisation based on expertise are applicable to small/niche party candidates. For example, the first (and only to date) *feminist party* MEP, Feminist Initiative's Soraya Post, used her position as a Roma member of the European Parliament to advocate for greater protection of Roma people and to fight against anti-Gypsyism (Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, 2017). Likewise, the WEP former deputy leader Dr Hannah Barham-Brown, a disabled woman and disability campaigner, founded and leads the party's disability caucus. Both actors were able emphasise these issues under the banner of the parties' intersectional feminist ideology, and thereby build individual reputations in these areas.

In fact, opportunities for candidate individualisation may be *particularly* available for small/niche parties oriented around a broad ideology such as feminism, which offers scope for candidates and members to take interest in a range of issues and even adopt different positions on issues within the bounds of the party's ideology. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the definition of the women's party ideology suggested by Cowell-Meyers et al (2020: 12) is a general desire to 'increase women's representation descriptively, substantively or symbolically'. This allows both parties, and candidates within parties, to take different and even opposing positions on the same gender-based issues.

There is evidence of this occurring within contemporary *feminist parties*. For example, the UK Women's Equality Party has faced intra-party conflict for a number of years over the issue transgender self-identification (Brooks, 2020), with members and candidates adopting different stances based on bio-essentialist versus queer feminist positions. After a motion was introduced at the 2022 party conference supporting gender self-identification, former leader Sophie Walker publicly shared a five-page letter addressed to current leader Mandu Reid urging her to reconsider the party's position (Figure 2.1).¹⁸

These examples demonstrate that even within a small/niche party that wants to pursue a cohesive issue campaign, individual members and candidates can and do take different policy positions. As such, candidate campaign individualisation may compromise *feminist parties'* ability to communicate a coherent issue platform.

2.3.3 Candidate individualisation and candidate viability

However, despite the individual incentives for candidates to diverge from the party platform, there are structural factors that may moderate the opportunity and rewards of candidate campaign individualisation. Past research on intra-party conflict has indicated that candidates are most expected to diverge from the central party in majoritarian systems with single-member districts in comparison to PR systems (Proksch & Slapin, 2015). Within PR systems, candidates may be more inclined to adopt personalised campaigns in open list systems where they are competing against candidates within their own party and are fighting for preference votes, as opposed to closed list systems (Bräuninger et al., 2012). However, empirical findings on election effects are mixed (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013) and research finds that candidates also build individualised campaigns in closed list settings (Chadwick 2013, Karlsen and Enjolras 2016).

¹⁸ Full text available at: <https://twitter.com/SophieRunning/status/1596036529209724929>.

Figure 2.1 Tweet from WEP former leader Sophie Walker (@SophieRunning)



The Leader of the Women's Equality Party, [@ManduReid](#) of [@WEP_UK](#), tomorrow brings a pro-self-ID motion to party conference. I wrote to her to ask her to reconsider. This is my letter. [#NoToSelfID](#) 

a while, the leadership and management groups in the party do not make it a comfortable home for women who do not accept the ideology of gender. I left for many reasons but this was one of them. (I am aware of course of the irony of this. I feel responsible for every woman who left WEP when I was Leader on the same grounds, as I struggled to hold the party together around this schism.)

But here we are, and history is repeating itself. Four years ago, a group of WEP members brought a motion to conference to ask So your motion seeks to do two things here: It passes a policy of self-ID without a full membership vote or exploration of the impact on multiple policies, and it rewrites the history of WEP. I don't think this is wise.

It has never been more urgent to have a forensic assessment of the impact on the feminist movement – a movement for women, by women – and on women's sex-based rights – our protected characteristics – and also on our rights to talk about our lives and

Journal of Criminology on the concerns of female prisoners that a number of trans women were reverting to a male gender after leaving women's prisons?) Nor did it discuss the increasing participation of men identifying as women in women's sporting events. (Have you read Women In Sport's [report](#) concluding that the inclusion of trans women in female categories in most sports cannot be balanced with fairness, and in some sports, safety?) Nor did the Assembly discuss medical intervention on children or the political pressures on [present no answer at all to how you propose to deal with the situation in prisons, in sports and in all the spaces and places where women are directly threatened and losing their protected rights to participation and private space because of self-ID policies. You don't even raise the issue of where policies of self-ID may be – are already being – abused by violent and manipulative men. I think it's very telling that you talk only about domestic abuse services in your motion and only in terms of appropriate funding. \(Did you see - just this](#)

7:02 am · 25 Nov 2022

460 Retweets 66 Quotes 1,632 Likes 66 Bookmarks

In addition to these structural factors, another important factor that has been examined in recent research, is how the placement of a candidate within the party hierarchy influences their issue strategy and campaign communication (Ceron, 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al., 2022; Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer et al., 2022; see also Boyle et al., 2022). Research has established that incumbent candidates are more likely to build personalised campaigns than challengers (De Winter and Baudewyns, 2015), having greater safety in candidate selection and stronger links with constituencies. More recent research extends this binary measure of incumbency to a dynamic measure of candidate viability (Boyle et al., 2022; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022; Stier et al., 2020). As well as the benefits of a more dynamic measure, using viability means that these theories can be applied to small/niche parties who may have no incumbent candidates.

The argument proposed in the context of mainstream parties is that more viable candidates, guided by office-seeking motivations, are expected to be more responsive to public opinion and thus engage more with the issues that the public considers important, even where this diverges from the parties' owned issues (Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer et al., 2022). Alternatively,

candidates at the lower levels of the party hierarchy are expected to be more focused on promoting the issues the party owns as they are more policy-oriented and are motivated by desires to advance within the party. Thus, their communication efforts are mainly targeting the intra-party audience (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022). Following a similar logic, Eder et al (2017) theorise that more viable candidates will also consider manifestos less relevant documents than non-viable candidates but find no statistical support for this hypothesis.

However, for small parties such as *feminist parties*, the motivations of more viable candidates may be different. Even the most viable candidate from a small party is not necessarily viable in the broader electoral context. The first goal of small/niche party candidates may thus be to increase the visibility of the party itself. Particularly, viable candidates, who in the case of small parties are likely to be the party leader, may be instead incentivised to communicate the party's core message, acting as the *de facto* mouthpiece of the party. Party leaders are increasingly becoming centered in campaign news coverage (Banducci et al., 2018). Therefore, to increase the visibility of the party and combat against misrepresentation, these candidates must repeatedly state the party's aims and priorities when writing news articles, participating in televised debates, or communicating with voters on social media. This establishes the party's issue ownership perceptions by reminding voters of the party's issue concerns (Tresch and Fedderson, 2019; Walgrave et al., 2009).

A similar argument was proposed by Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al. (2022) about the issue ownership communication strategies of party leaders in comparison to candidates in press releases from mainstream parties in Austria. However, while party leaders were found to be more responsive to changes in public opinion, the study found no significant issue ownership effects. Empirical research on small parties has however indicated that party leaders of small parties are more likely than leaders of larger parties to mention their priority issues during televised debates (Allen et al., 2017). In terms of social media, Turnbull-Dugarte (2019) found that small parties are more likely to post pictures of their top candidate on social media than mainstream parties. Therefore, there is indication that small/niche parties recognise the importance of the visibility of their most viable candidates and that these candidates reflect the parties' messaging in their communication.

Turning to less viable candidates, research from mainstream parties suggests that these candidates will toe the party line as they are more likely to be policy-oriented and may be pursuing advancement within the party (Eder et al., 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022). It may also be true that less viable candidates of small/niche parties are more policy-oriented, particularly where these parties have developed from an activist organisation.

However, there are several additional considerations to be made when applying this argument to small/niche parties.

First is the practicalities and costs of campaign communication, particularly the professionalisation of modern political campaigns. Strategic issue campaigns require money, resources, and organisation, all of which are less readily available to small parties (Southern, 2015). While accessing social media is a low-cost exercise, running professionalised election campaigns on social media is time intensive and potentially cost intensive (Kreiss et al., 2018). For example, Nulty et al. (2016) in a study of candidate's use of Twitter in the 2014 European Parliament elections found that incumbents were more likely to use Twitter than challengers, theorising that incumbent's access to assistants and campaign teams made social media campaigning easier. More generally, while I established support for the equalisation theory of social media above, some scholars have found that although small parties show higher uptake of social media, mainstream parties create more and higher quality content (see Southern, 2015: 4).

In comparison to mainstream parties, small parties have limited funding and resources to invest in campaign communication. Therefore, it is most likely that they will direct professional campaign resources towards party leaders and the most viable candidates. Less viable candidates and those lower on the party lists may be less able to take on the costs of running professionalised social media campaigns, tightly cultivated around the party's priority issues. They may also simply not see the value in investing in a social media campaign given their extremely limited chance of electoral success.¹⁹

A second consideration is the role of party organisation in a candidates' ability to individualise their campaign communication. More viable candidates and party leaders are closer to the central party organisation. They therefore are likely to play a more significant role in developing the party's issue platform, potentially leading to greater convergence in their communication and that of the party. Alternatively, those lower down on candidate lists, while still incentivised by policy-seeking priorities, face less pressure to communicate the party line and more freedom to discuss issues in which they are invested. Research has demonstrated that parties with more central control are more likely to have candidates that campaign on party issues (Boggild and Pederson, 2018). Thus, lesser resourced small/niche parties, with potentially weaker party

¹⁹ In line with this argument, Boyle et al. (2022) find that during the UK's final participation in an EP election in May 2019 prior to leaving the EU in December 2019, 'unpromising candidates were statistically significantly less likely to mention a party's priority issue than 'safe' candidates.

discipline, may witness greater campaign individualisation from candidates lower in the party hierarchy.

Taking these arguments on party strategy and resources into consideration, I expect that, contrary to what has been observed in mainstream parties (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022), less viable candidates of *feminist parties* would be those most likely to diverge from the party platform in their social media campaigns. This candidate individualisation may ultimately impede *feminist parties*' ability to accurately and effectively communicate their issue concerns. Hence, in Chapter 6, I will investigate *feminist parties*' issue communication on social media and will examine in particular, the intra-party dynamics of candidate communication.

2.4 Conclusion

To conclude this Chapter, I link the discussion from this literature review to the three empirical Chapters of the thesis. I then end with a reflection of the contributions that I will make in my analyses.

In the first section of this Chapter, I provided an overview of how women's parties are defined. Women's parties are parties that field candidates for electoral office and seek to represent women's interests, either through advocating policies to secure women's material needs and/or by challenging structures, processes, and institutions that marginalise women. Women's parties have emerged consistently across European countries (and around the world) in the 20th and 21st centuries and commonalities in their naming patterns, emergent conditions, and ideology offer convincing evidence for the existence of a women's party family.

However, my review of extant comparative literature on women's parties highlights the need for further empirical analysis of the issue concerns and shared ideology of the party family. At present, the ideology of the women's party family is defined broadly as 'a desire for gender equality, meaning that women and men should have equal citizenship rights and a pro-women perspective on social justice' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 13). Empirical analysis of women's parties' issue concerns is needed to investigate the extent to which this ideology is indeed shared across women's parties and to provide a clearer picture of how women's parties specifically seek to increase women's descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation.

Moreover, while extant research on party emergence has indicated the existence of two types of women's parties (Cowell-Meyers, 2016) – *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* – empirical analysis of party platforms is needed to substantiate these frameworks. This will improve the conceptualisation of the party family for future comparative research.

Finally in the first section, I outlined the importance of situating women's parties in the broader field of study of comparative party politics. Engaging in more depth with the concepts and methodologies of studies on party issue competition and issue communication offers better insight into women's parties' issue offerings. It recognises that women's parties are not only doctrinal organisations that aim to substantively represent women's interests, but also strategically motivated parties constructing carefully crafted policy platforms in pursuit of electoral and policy-seeking goals.

Specifically, I have argued that contemporary European *feminist parties* meet the definitional criteria of a niche party based on their mobilisation around a narrow set of neglected issues (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). Defining *feminist parties* this way offers a path to investigate their issue communication as strategic actors. I expect *feminist parties* to pursue issue campaigns centered on increasing the salience of their own issues, both to appeal to their voters and to influence a contagion effect on mainstream parties' platforms.

Therefore, in Chapter 4 I investigate the issues that are emphasised in women's parties' manifestos and test whether *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* emphasise different issues. To do this I collect an original dataset of European women's party manifestos over a thirty-year period, 1990-2020 and use an in-depth mixed-method text analysis research design to measure issue attention. As I offer one of the first (if not *the* first) comparative investigations of women's parties' issue concerns, I approach my analysis with exploratory research questions and utilise inductive methods.

The findings from Chapter 4 lay the groundwork for Chapters 5 and 6 in which I investigate the strategic issue communication of three contemporary European *feminist parties* in Finland (Feministinen Puolue (FP)), Sweden, (Feministiskt Initiativ (FI)) and the UK (Women's Equality Party (WEP)) in traditional news media and social media. I take *feminist parties* as my focus because, as addressed in the first section of this Chapter (2.4.1), I argue that only *feminist* women's parties can be defined as niche parties and be assumed to pursue issue ownership strategies through their communication. In Chapters 5 and 6 I explore the extent to which their status as small/niche parties affects the success of this strategy.

Thus, in the second section of this Chapter, I set out my expectations of the issue coverage received by *feminist parties*. My review of the literature demonstrated that small/niche parties receive less news coverage than larger parties and have less of an ability to influence the media agenda (Meyer et al., 2020). This results in an 'agenda dissonance' (Hughes, 2016) between the content of small/niche parties' policy platforms and the issues that they are linked to in news

coverage. This dissonance is commonly premised on stereotypes of parties' owned issues. I therefore expect *feminist parties* to be subject to an agenda dissonance motivated by longstanding gendered stereotypes of women politicians' issue concerns that have been established in the literature on candidate media coverage (Kahn, 1994; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Ross et al., 2013; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020).

To test my expectations, in Chapter 5 I analyse the results of a quantitative content analysis of issue mentions in the newspaper coverage of the three European *feminist parties* and their candidates across European Parliament and municipal election campaigns. I construct an original code scheme of issue categories, developed from the analysis of party manifestos in Chapter 4, to identify issue mentions in party and candidate news coverage. Using the results, I test specific hypotheses on the presence of gendered issue stereotypes in the news coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates.

Finally, in the third section of this Chapter, I outlined that in the face of limited and misrepresentative news coverage, small/niche parties turn to social media as a platform to evade media gatekeepers and openly and accurately communicate their issue concerns (Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013). Equalisation theory has demonstrated that the low-cost opportunities of social media have seen a strong uptake by small parties (Ahmed et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019; Gibson and McCallister, 2011; Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013; Southern, 2015) and empirical evidence demonstrates that these parties devote a great deal of attention to their issue platforms in their online communication (Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021). I therefore expect *feminist parties* to pursue issue ownership strategies in their social media communication.

However, social media also encourages candidates to build individualised campaigns (Karlsson and Enroljas, 2016; Zittel and Gschwend, 2008) and I argue that the opportunities of candidate individualisation that have been tested in relation to mainstream candidates, may also apply to small/niche parties such as *feminist parties*. Yet, I also theorise that the findings from extant research - that more viable candidates are those less likely to reflect the party platform in their communication (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022)- may not hold true for policy-oriented small/niche parties, for whom increasing the salience of their core issues is a primary aim. I therefore expect that candidate viability will influence *feminist party* candidate communication on social media, with less viable candidates being those most likely to diverge from the party platform.

To test these expectations, in Chapter 6 I apply the same original code scheme of issue categories to a novel dataset of 29,499 original tweets from the party and candidate accounts of Feministiskt Initiativ, Feministinen Puolue, and the Women’s Equality Party across the same European Parliament and municipal campaigns. My analysis will test several hypotheses focused on the extent to which *feminist party* and candidate social media communication is reflective of the party platform.

To conclude, I will provide a brief summary of the contributions that this thesis will make to the gaps that I have identified in gender and party politics and political communication research. First, I aim to improve the conceptualisation of the women’s party family and typologies of women’s parties through analysis of their issue concerns. This will both add weight to arguments for the existence of a women’s party family and provide an empirical basis for future work on women’s parties’ issue concerns.

Second, I seek to bring women’s parties – specifically *feminist parties*- into the field of comparative party politics research. This will first benefit research on women’s parties by examining their issue communication strategies more appropriately as both representatives of gender-based issues and as strategically motivated political parties. It also offers benefits to the current field of research on small/niche parties which has focused overwhelmingly on green parties and the radical right. We are currently witnessing a growing (re)mobilisation of gender-based issues across Europe (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021) and thus *feminist parties* offer an interesting and relevant case to examine the role of niche parties in competition over these issues.

Third, I aim to find out if *feminist parties* are subject to the same gendered issue stereotypes as are observed in media coverage of women political actors. This will first contribute to the field of literature on gendered mediation and add a specific focus on gendered issue stereotypes at the party level (see Greene and Lühiste, 2018). Moreover, it will contribute reflections to ongoing study of small/niche parties’ issue coverage and agenda-setting capabilities (Hughes, 2016; Meyer et al., 2020).

Fourth, I investigate whether *feminist parties* and their candidates pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media communication and whether and how this is affected by candidate viability. In doing so I present the first comparative empirical analysis of *feminist parties*’ social media communication. This will add to the small body of literature on the content of small/niche parties’ social media campaigns and will contribute to current research on intra-party communication dynamics which have yet to focus in detail on small/niche parties.

Taken together Chapters 4,5, and 6 seek to holistically examine whether *feminist parties*' issue concerns are accurately and effectively communicated across three different communication mediums. This will contribute the most in-depth research to date on *feminist parties*' issue communication and contributes to wider research on small/niche party strategy, which has rarely examined parties' issue communication in comparative focus.

Chapter 3. Data and Methods

The central aim of this thesis is to investigate the issue concerns of European women's parties and to investigate the extent to which the issue concerns of European *feminist parties* are accurately and coherently communicated during election campaigns. In Chapter 4, I investigate issue mentions in European women's party election manifestos. The aim of this research is to better conceptualise the shared issue concerns of the women's party family and to substantiate suggested typological frameworks of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). Additionally, I seek to conceptualise contemporary European *feminist parties* as niche parties, mobilising around a narrow set of mostly neglected gender-based issues.

The following two empirical Chapters then focus on the issue communication of three European *feminist parties* in Finland, Sweden, and the UK across two second-order election campaigns. The aim is to assess the extent to which these parties' issue concerns are effectively communicated as small/niche parties mobilising gender-based issues. Thus, in Chapter 5 I investigate issue mentions in *feminist parties*' newspaper coverage and in Chapter 6 I study party and candidate's campaigns on Twitter.

The structure of this Chapter maps against the three empirical Chapters. In the first section I discuss my rationale for using election manifestos as a source to examine women's parties' issue concerns. I then outline the data collection and data preparation processes, including translation of the manifestos. I then explain my rationale for using a mixed-method text analysis approach and provide detail on the specific techniques that are used.

I then move from analysis of women's parties as a whole toward a focus on *feminist parties* in Chapters 5 and 6. Firstly, I provide an overview of the three cases I have selected for the analysis of *feminist parties*' newspaper coverage and social media campaigning. I also present rationale on the choice of election timeframe. I then detail the data collection and preparation process for the news items and provide rationale for my choice of manual quantitative content analysis. I explain the production of the code scheme as an output of the analysis of party manifestos and detail the coding process, including data validation measures.

In the third section, the discussion of social media data and analysis follows a similar structure. I provide information on the data collection process and data preparation. I then outline the code scheme used to measure issue mentions and detail the coding process including data validation.

3.1 Analysis of women's parties' election manifestos

To investigate the issue priorities of European women's parties and the sub-types of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, I utilise a mixed-method text analysis of party election manifestos between 1990-2020. Manifestos are defined as documents that consist of 'statements connoting intentions, emphases, promises, pledges, policies or goals to be activated should that party achieve office' (Bara, 2005: 585). I chose to use party manifestos as they represent the parties' collectively agreed policy positions for the election campaign (Eder et al., 2017; Klingemann et al., 2006: xvi; Mudde, 2013: 20). They therefore offer more useful data on a party's centrally agreed issue priorities than other party material, such as press releases or party speeches, which may be reactive to political events and not centrally agreed by the party.

The study of manifesto material has an established basis in comparative political party research. In areas such as party competition, issue ownership and saliency theory, scholars have argued that manifesto data presents the best source for information on parties' policy positions (Dolezal et al., 2014: 58; see also Budge and Farlie, 1983; Robertson, 1976). The study of manifestos continues to be relevant in contemporary research as evidenced by the number of projects utilising the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Lehmann et al., 2023) and Euromanifesto Study (Carteny, et al., 2023) to compare political parties' issue attention and positioning. Moreover, in the specific study of the shared issue concerns of party families, manifestos have been used as a common source of data as they are considered to 'represent and express the policy collectively established by the party' (Mudde, 2013: 20).

Manifestos and electoral programs thus present themselves as a unique and appropriate data source for this exploratory investigation of the shared issue concerns of the women's party family and differences in issue concern among *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. Most importantly, as electoral manifestos contain the unmediated expression of parties' specific policy interests and broader ideals, they also offer a baseline to compare both the media coverage received by the parties and their social media communication in Chapters 5 and 6.

However, some scholars have raised concerns with the use of manifesto data in the study of party issue emphasis, positioning, and broader ideology. Manifestos, while presenting the issue priorities of a political party, are ultimately 'strategic documents written by politically sophisticated party elites with many different objectives in mind' (Laver and Garry, 2000: 620). The primary function of a manifesto is to convince the electorate to vote for the party. Therefore, manifestos combine both a party's 'ideal policy positions', meaning the party's true beliefs, and its 'stated policy positions', being the strategically presented positions intended to appeal to the electorate (Laver, 2001: 67).

Additionally, research has long recognised that the majority of the general public do not read manifestos and so have posited that manifestos instead fulfil multiple ancillary functions (Eder et al., 2017; Harmel, 2018). These include inward-facing functions such as appeasing factions within a party, as well as outward facing functions such as attracting media attention or attempting to influence competitor's issue emphases or positions (Harmel, 2018). However, these considerations are not a limitation to my research, as the *strategic* construction and use of manifestos is central to my investigation of *feminist parties'* issue competition and communication strategies as small/niche parties. Moreover, in this thesis I analyse *feminist parties'* issue communication across three different communication mediums, providing a comprehensive and holistic investigation of parties' issue competition and communication strategies.

Alternative methods of assessing parties' issue concerns and ideology that have been suggested in literature include analysis of internal party documents (Mudde, 2013) and expert surveys (e.g., The Chapel Hill Expert Survey). However, these methods are not appropriate for the current study for several reasons. First, many women's parties no longer exist and there is little potential that internal party documents will be available. Second, as I outlined in Chapter 2, women's parties are small parties and rarely achieve a large national vote share. They are therefore largely excluded from existing measures of party issue attention such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey.²⁰

On the whole, literature broadly concurs that the consistent and primary function of a manifesto is to function as a 'compendium of valid party positions' (Eder et al., 2017: 76). These 'short term policy profile[s]' (Mair and Mudde, 1998: 224) thus present valid and useful data to assess parties' emphases and issue positions across time and geography (Eder et al., 2017: 75). I therefore compiled an original dataset of European women's party manifestos to investigate the shared issue concerns of the women's party family and to examine differences in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

3.1.1 Collecting manifestos

To construct my dataset, I collected party manifestos produced by European women's parties over a 30-year period (1990-2020). I focus on European parties as commonalities in the party systems and electoral systems across Europe provide a sound basis for comparison of parties' platforms, limiting the number of confounding contextual factors. Moreover, while women's parties have been formed in regions around the world including North America (Zaborsky,

²⁰ CHES includes parties that obtain at least three percent of the vote in the national election immediately prior to the survey year or that elect at least one representative to the national or European parliament.

1987), Asia (Karan, 2009; Shin, 2020) and the Middle East (Levin, 1999), there has been a particular concentration (or at least a recorded concentration) of parties forming in European countries (see Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 9).

I chose to focus on manifestos produced between 1990-2020 as the breadth of this thirty-year period allowed me to collect a wide range of manifestos and measure issue concerns across the party family, but also examine changes over time and differences across party type. Extending the timeframe to 1990 allowed me to capture the wave of women's parties formed in new democracies following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Ishiyama, 2003). While women's parties did compete in Europe before 1990 (for example Kvennalistinn (Women's List) won seats in the Icelandic parliament throughout the 1980s), past research suggests a higher concentration of women's parties from 1990-onward (see Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 9). Moreover, there is a lower likelihood of accessing useful data on women's parties before 1990, given their generally limited electoral success. Finally, the focus on European parties in the period 1990-2020 allows me to compare my findings against past comparative research on women's parties which have examined similar geographic contexts and timeframes (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Ishiyama, 2003).

As comparative research on women's parties is a relatively unexplored area, there is no publicly available resource or database of women's parties or related contextual information (for example year of formation or electoral results). Thus, the initial step in collecting party manifestos was to first identify the women's parties that have competed in Europe since 1990. The search for women's parties involved a number of strategies, beginning with identifying parties from the existing case study and comparative literature (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Cowell-Meyers, 2014; Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers, 2020; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Dominelli and Jónsdóttir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019a; Ishiyama, 2003).

Following this, I conducted a search of political party and electoral databases using key words common to women's party labels such as 'woman' 'feminist' 'mothers' and 'daughters'.²¹ This produced the bulk of the women's parties identified. One potential issue in identifying women's parties from electoral databases is that they commonly rely on data from electoral results or a party's parliamentary representation. Some databases also utilise a threshold of national vote share for party inclusion, so as to not obscure their dataset with so-called marginal or fringe

²¹ Databases that were searched include: Database of Political Institutions (Scartasceni, 2017), *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook* (Nohlen and Stöver, 2010), Global Elections Database (Brancati, no date), Political Party Database (Poguntke et al., 2017), Psephos Election archive (Carr, no date), Party Facts (Bederke et al., no date).

parties. Many women's parties achieve little to no electoral success and do not hold seats in legislative bodies, meaning that they are largely excluded from these datasets. Therefore, I expanded the search to search engines such as ProQuest and Google, as well as the news archives Lexis Nexis and Newsstand.

Finally, Professor Kimberley Cowell-Meyers kindly supplied the dataset of women's parties compiled for her 2020 paper co-written with Elizabeth Evans and Ki-Young Shin (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). This dataset included the names of parties, their year of formation and any years they participated in elections. These data were very useful in cross-referencing and extending my own dataset.

From this extensive search I constructed a database of information on 54 women's parties in Europe 1990-2020, including meta-data where available on year of formation, names of party leaders, and years the party participated in elections alongside any available electoral results (see Appendix A for an overview).²² The oldest party in the dataset is the Icelandic party Kvinnalistinn (Women's List) which formed in 1983 and participated in five national elections before dissolving in 1999. The longest-running party is Feministische Partei DIE FRAUEN (Feminist Party THE WOMEN), founded in Germany in 1995 and still contesting local and national elections as of 2023. The most recently formed party is Feministisk Initiativ (Feminist Initiative) which formed in Denmark in 2017, joining the group of Feminist Initiative parties operating across Europe in Norway, Poland, Spain, and Sweden.

I used this database of women's parties' labels and metadata to search for party manifestos published between 1990-2020. To allow for the most expansive dataset possible, I searched for manifestos from any election type including national, European Parliament, devolved assembly, and municipal elections. A small number of manifestos are available from established manifesto datasets such as the Comparative Manifesto Project (Lehmann, et al., 2023).²³ However, due to the exclusion criteria used in this dataset²⁴, few women's party manifestos were included. I found the majority of manifestos from party websites, located either through an internet search of the party's name or via the internet archive 'Wayback Machine'. I found several more manifestos in national political archives or national library collections. For example, the manifestos of the Swedish Feminist Initiative since 2006 were available from the Swedish National Data Service.

²² The dataset includes parties that were formed pre-1990 if they were operational and participating in elections after 1990.

²³ Shamiram, Armenia (1995); Nadzeya, Belarus (1995); Women of Russia, Russia (1993, 1995).

²⁴ All parties that gain one seat in parliament in the focal election are included.

I made several key choices when deciding whether to include a document in the dataset. First, some women's parties publish general party programs outlining the party's core beliefs, but these were omitted from the dataset as they did not fit the criteria of an electoral manifesto as a publication of 'statements connoting intentions, emphases, promises, pledges, policies or goals to be activated should that party achieve office' (Bara, 2005: 585). Second, several parties have published multiple manifestos for different elections, for example the UK Women's Equality Party published three manifestos in 2016 for the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament, and London Assembly elections. In these cases, a judgement was made as to whether these documents contained sufficiently different information as to be included separately. After these refinements, the final dataset comprises a total of 45 manifestos from 20 women's parties across 18 European countries. The full dataset of manifestos is shown in Table 3.1.

As well as listing the party name, country, publication year, and election type of each manifesto, Table 3.1 also classifies parties as either an *essentialist women's party* or *feminist party* (Shin, 2020). This is an important step because in Chapter 4 I examine issue mentions across the women's party typology and statistically test the extent to which issue emphases differ across the two groups.

I determined whether parties are *essentialist women's parties* or *feminist parties* using parties' labels and emergent conditions, as indicated by past research (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Ishiyama, 2003). As I discussed in Chapter 2, Cowell-Meyers observes that parties emerging in 1990s Eastern Europe and in contexts of political and economic turbulence promote platforms focused on essentialist-traditionalist women's issues such as women's caring roles (2016: 14). Alternatively, women's parties forming in post industrialist Western European democracies in the 21st century are suggested to be explicitly feminist in their approach and issue concerns (Cowell-Meyers, 2016: 14; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). Shin (2020) develops a typology of women's parties that distinguishes between two party types (proactive and feminist) based on essentialist-traditionalist and feminist approaches to women's substantive representation (though Shin does not connect this to parties' emergent contexts). My investigation in Chapter 4 tests whether the differentiation in issue focus that is suggested in past research (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020) is empirically observable in party manifestos. Therefore, I prioritised parties' emergent conditions and naming patterns in assigning parties to each category. This avoids, as much as possible, the error of selecting on the dependent variable.

Table 3.1 Summary of women's party manifesto dataset

Country	Party	Typology	Year	Election Type
Armenia	Shamiram	Essentialist	1995	National
Belarus	Nadzeya (Hope)	Essentialist	1995	National
Bulgaria	Partiya na Bulgarskite Zheni (Party of Bulgarian Women)	Essentialist	2013	National
Croatia	Demokratska Stranka Žena (Democratic Party of Women)	Essentialist	2007	National
			2011	National
			2017	Local
Denmark	Feministisk Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	Feminist	2017	Local
Finland	Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party)	Feminist	2017	Local
			2019	National
			2019	European Parliament
France	Feministes Pour Une Europe Solidaire (Feminists for a United Europe)	Feminist	2014	European Parliament
Germany	Die Frauen (The Women)	Feminist	2009	European Parliament
			2019	European Parliament
Moldova	Asociația Femeilor din Moldova (Association of Women of Moldova)	Essentialist	1994	National
Norway	Feministisk Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	Feminist	2015	Local
			2017	National
Poland	PartiKobiet (Women's Party)	Feminist	2007	National
Russia	Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia)	Essentialist	1993	National
			1995	National
Slovenia	Glas Žensk Slovenije (Voice of Slovenian Women)	Essentialist	2018	Local
Spain	Iniciativa Feminista (Feminist Initiative)	Feminist	2009	European Parliament
			2014	European Parliament
			2015	National
			2019	European Parliament
			2019	National
Sweden	Partido Feminista de España (Feminist Party of Spain)	Feminist	2015	National
Sweden	Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	Feminist	2006	National
			2009	European Parliament
			2010	Local
			2010	National
			2014	National
			2014	Local
			2014	European Parliament
			2018	Local
			2018	National

Country	Party	Typology	Year	Election Type
Turkey	Kadin Partisi (Women's Party)	Feminist	2014	National
Ukraine	Solidarnist' Zhinok Ukrayiny (Solidarity Women of Ukraine)	Essentialist	2012	National
United Kingdom	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition	Essentialist	1998 2003	Devolved assembly National
	Women's Equality Party	Feminist	2016 2016 2016 2017	National National Local National
			2019	European Parliament

In many cases, the assignment of party type is simple. For example, parties such as Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party) or Partido Feminista de España (Feminist Party of Spain) are self-identified *feminist parties*. For parties that do not make their type clear in their party label, I determined their categorisation using previous literature on the emergent conditions of European women's parties. Thus, following the work of Cowell-Meyers (2016) and Ishiyama (2003) all parties emerging in new democracies in the 1990s are classed as *essentialist women's parties*²⁵, whereas parties formed in stable democracies in Western Europe are classed as *feminist parties*.

Some parties present difficulty, for example the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) which emerged in a period of political instability during the 1990s peace process but has been identified in previous research as having a platform oriented towards gender equality (Cowell-Meyers, 2017). However, NIWC did not themselves identify as a *feminist party* (Cleary, 1996) and therefore are included in the *essentialist women's party* category, in line with their emergent conditions.

As shown in Table 3.1, nine parties are categorised as *essentialist women's parties* from which I have collected 13 manifestos. I collected 32 manifestos from 11 *feminist parties*. It is important to acknowledge that this split in party type may not be reflective of the actual variety in women's parties that have formed and competed in Europe over the last 30 years. Differences in the

²⁵ Also included in this category are parties that have emerged in post-communist countries in the 2000s such as Croatia's Demokratska Stranka Žena (Democratic Party of Women). This party is categorised as an *essentialist women's party* because the party label does not indicate a feminist approach and the parties' emergent context is more familiar to other *essentialist women's parties* than to other *feminist parties* in the dataset.

number of manifestos that I collected is likely also a result of the greater availability of data on contemporary *feminist parties* in Western Europe.

3.1.2 Translating manifestos

Before conducting my mixed-method text analysis, I translated the manifestos into English. One of the most common barriers to cross-national analysis of small parties, such as women's parties, is the translation of textual material (Muller-Rommel, 1991: 2). Party programs and manifestos from smaller parties, particularly older parties, are rarely available in English. Of the 45 manifestos in this dataset, only 10 were available in English. Developments have been made in multilingual approaches to working with political texts, such as constructing multilingual dictionaries for automated content analysis (Lind et al., 2019). Yet I chose to translate all the manifestos in my dataset to English, as my exploratory research design benefits from a single language text corpus to allow nuanced analysis of parties' issue concerns and issue framing.

Due to the range of languages within the manifesto dataset and the length of some documents, I deemed human translation to be too costly and unfeasible as part of a PhD project. Instead, machine translation was used to convert all documents into English. Machine translation is an automated process whereby software is used to translate text between two natural languages. I used the Microsoft Translator API for this project to translate all non-English manifestos into English. This software has the capability to translate text between 90 languages and can process large volumes of text very quickly, demonstrating its utility in this study.

While even the most sophisticated software cannot translate texts with the accuracy and fluency of a human translator, the benefits in terms of accessibility and efficiency are considerable. Moreover, evidence from contemporary research suggests that machine translation produces reliable results in comparison to either human translation or multilingual methods (de Vries et al., 2018; Lucas et al., 2015; Windsor et al., 2019). For example, de Vries et al. (2018) compare the machine translation and human translation of parliamentary speeches for LDA topic modelling and demonstrate that the machine translated corpus produces very similar topics to a human translated corpus.

The potential minor loss in quality from machine translation is also somewhat alleviated in my study because I use bag-of-words models in the quantitative analyses of party manifestos. I explain the bag-of-words approach in more detail later in the Chapter but, in brief, bag-of-words models remove individual words from their original structure within a document. Thus, as Lucas et al. (2015) highlight, when using bag-of-words methods such as topic models, as long

as the machine translation software has translated each individual word correctly, the analyses will still produce robust results.

The qualitative analysis requires more nuanced deep reading of the texts. Therefore, I translated the non-English manifestos in the sub-sample used for qualitative analysis using a second translation software (DeepL) and cross-referenced the results for each sentence. The outputs from both software were very similar and only minor adjustments were made, predominantly where words had been incorrectly pluralised, or people were referred to by the wrong gender. After translation, all manifesto documents were converted into docx. formats (with the originals stored separately), producing the data to be used in my analysis. In the following section I outline the rationale for my mixed-method research design and provide detail on the specific analytical techniques that I used.

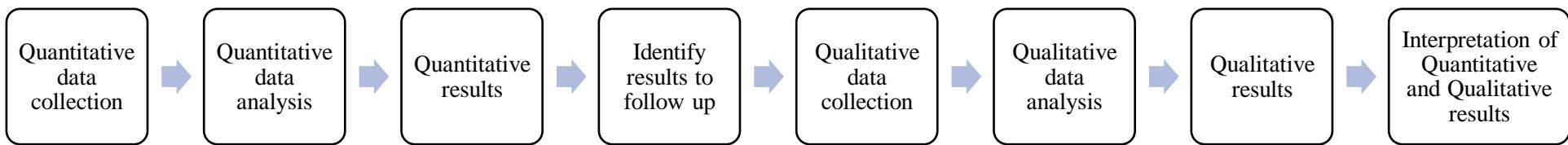
3.1.3 Why mixed method text analysis?

I analysed issue mentions in women's party manifestos using a mixed method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative text analysis approaches. I used a mixed method design because my investigation of women's parties' issue concerns is exploratory and inductive but also comparative and cross-national. The benefits of both qualitative and quantitative methods speak to different aspects of this research project. Quantitative methods are beneficial to comparative research involving large amounts of data, while qualitative textual analysis methods such as thematic analysis are appropriate to exploratory studies where the goal is to understand rather than to explain (Mudde, 2013: 22) and where there is no pre-existing analytical framework to be applied. Each approach also addresses some of the disadvantages of the other, for example qualitative analysis can provide further depth to the results of quantitative analysis.

Of the three main types of mixed methods research design (explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential and convergent), I adopted an explanatory sequential approach (see Figure 3.1).²⁶ In an explanatory mixed method model, quantitative data is first collected and analysed, and the results of this quantitative analysis inform the subsequent qualitative data collection and analysis. The purpose of this sequential model is that the qualitative data expands upon and provides depth to the initial quantitative results (Crewell and Plano Clark, 2017: 65). The explanatory mixed-method design of the analysis of women's party manifestos is outlined in Figure 3.2. In the following sections I discuss the specific methods that I used within each stage.

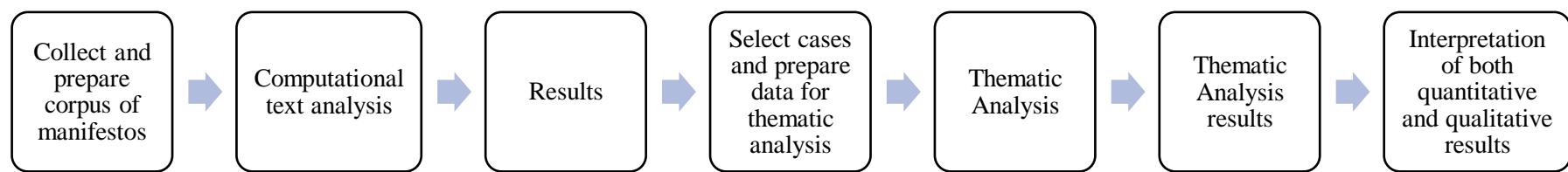
²⁶ Although this study is exploratory in nature, the so-named 'exploratory' sequential mixed method design is not suitable as in this model the qualitative data collection and analysis precedes the quantitative analysis.

Figure 3.1 Creswell and Plano Clark's (2017) explanatory sequential mixed method research design



Notes: Developed and visualised from the explanatory sequential mixed methods research design outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2017:65-67)

Figure 3.2 Women's party manifesto analysis research design



3.1.4 Quantitative text analysis

The purpose of the quantitative analysis is to identify and map the issues emphasised by women's parties in their manifestos and to offer statistical comparative analysis of the extent to which *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* emphasise different issues. Hence, I used a number of inductive computational text analysis methods, including word frequency analysis, keyness analysis, and structural topic modelling. I chose to use inductive and unsupervised methods because they are best suited to my exploratory research design.

Existing research on issue salience and positioning in party manifestos have commonly relied on deductive methods such as content analysis. For example, many studies utilise the issue code schemes produced by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Lehmann et al., 2023) and Euromanifesto Study (Carteny, et al., 2023) (studies relevant to this thesis include: Abou-Chadi, 2016; Adams et al., 2006; Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Spoon and Hobolt, 2014; Wagner, 2012). However, these well-established code schemes are not applicable to women's parties and their manifestos at present, because they lack granular coding of sex- and gender-based issues.

For example, the CMP code scheme includes references to women's rights and gender equality in the sub-category of 'non-economic demographic groups' alongside university students and age groups.²⁷ Further, neither the CMP nor Euromanifesto Study code schemes have specific measures to code mention of sex- and gender-based issues such as abortion and reproductive rights or gendered violence. Therefore, these well-established code schemes are not suited to my project as they would almost certainly miss important issue concerns in women's parties' manifestos.

In 2020, the Regional Manifestos Project (Gómez et al., 2023), an extension of the Comparative Manifestos Project, announced that their code scheme would be updated to include a domain comprising four gender-based measures: (i) gender welfare and labour market policies, (ii) representation, (iii) gender violence, and (iv) values and gender identity. However, at the time in which my analysis took place, this code scheme had not been implemented or tested. Moreover, the four measures included in the code scheme are still fairly broad and would not capture mention of specific gender-based issues such as reproductive rights.

²⁷ The full code including women in the CMP code scheme is as follows: "Non-economic Demographic Groups: General favourable mentions of demographically defined special interest groups of all kinds. They may include: Women; University students; Old, young, or middle-aged people. Might include references to assistance to these groups, but only if these do not fall under other categories (e.g., 503 or 504)."

Alternative deductive approaches to measuring issue salience include automated dictionary analysis (see for example: Bartels and Remke, 2023; Ruedin and Morales, 2019). This method is more applicable to my study than the CMP or Euromanifesto code schemes as I could construct a tailor-made dictionary of gender-related issues to search within the manifestos. However, the disadvantage of both deductive methods is that there remains a possibility of missing important data within the texts by approaching the analysis with pre-determined categories.

Therefore, on review, inductive and exploratory text-analysis methods are best suited to my research aims. The specific methods that are used in Chapter 4 are: word frequency analysis, keyness analysis and structural topic modelling. In Chapter 4 I will provide more detail on how each of these was applied to the data, but here I provide a brief overview of each method and its benefits. Each of these methods fall under the broader category of ‘bag-of-words’ models. As mentioned in the previous section, ‘bag of words’ models extract words from texts and place them in a ‘bag’ for analysis, meaning that information about the grammar, placement of words, and structure of a document is discarded. This allows ‘messy’ text data to be converted into numerical data that can be analysed with quantitative techniques. A further benefit of this approach is that irrelevant information can be removed from the ‘bag’ of words, such as stopwords (‘and’, ‘if’, ‘but’). This can improve the performance of the analytical techniques in producing substantive content that is useful for interpretation (Welbers et al., 2017). An overview of the specific steps I took to prepare the data for analysis, such as removing stopwords, is provided in Chapter 4 (p.104).

To explore the shared issue concerns of women’s parties, I first used relative word frequency analysis to identify and map the issue-related terms that are most emphasised in women’s parties’ manifestos. I also review changes in the most highly relatively mentioned issue terms over time. This provides an initial indication of the issue priorities within and across the women’s party family. For a more comprehensive analysis, I used structural topic models (STMs) to identify latent themes within the manifestos. Topic models use an unsupervised machine learning algorithm to identify patterns within a text corpus by clustering terms that frequently occur together (Eisele et al., 2023: 210). Human interpretation is then required to assign labels to the clustered terms based on their substantive content. Thus, I implemented an STM on the corpus of women’s party manifestos to identify shared themes within the texts. Detail on the specifications of the model is provided in Chapter 4 (pp.104-105).

To investigate the differences between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties’* issue concerns, I again begin with relative word frequency analysis as an initial exploration of the

issues emphasised within each group's manifestos. Moving to explanatory analysis, I used keyness analysis to identify key words within *feminist party* and *essentialist women's party* manifestos. Keyness analysis is a chi-square association measure of the frequency of terms within a target corpus in comparison to a reference corpus. More simply, keyness analysis compares the frequency of words within two groups of texts and produces a list of 'keywords' which occur with an 'unusual' frequency in each group in comparison to the other (Scott, 1997: 236).

Finally, I return to the STM to compare the distribution of topics across party type. The significant benefit of the structural topic model, in comparison to other types of topic model, is that document-level metadata can be included in the model as covariates (Roberts, et al., 2019: 2). The researcher can then compare the prevalence of topics identified by the model across these covariates. Thus, in Chapter 4, I added party type – either *essentialist women's party* or *feminist party*- into the STM and used the 'estimateEffect' function which employs an OLS regression to estimate the relationship between the covariates, in this case party type, and the model topics.

In sum, the range of inductive and unsupervised techniques I have outlined above are very well-suited to my exploratory research design. These quantitative methods allow me to identify and map issue concerns across the full corpus of 45 women's party manifestos and statistically test differences between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

3.1.5 Qualitative text analysis

In the second stage of the mixed method research design, I used thematic analysis to analyse the issue concerns and issue framings within a sub-sample of six European women's party manifestos. I chose thematic analysis as it allows me to explore both the issue concerns that women's parties emphasise and to investigate the narratives in which they frame them. For example, Cowell-Meyers (2016) suggests that *essentialist women's parties* connect issues of women's representation to a broader need for democratic stability, due to their origins in turbulent political contexts. Shin (2020) contends that *feminist parties* link gender-based issues to narratives of challenging patriarchal structures and norms. Through thematic analysis, I explore whether these framings are present in the subsample of party manifestos.

Table 3.2 presents metadata on the six manifestos that I have chosen for the thematic analysis subsample. I decided on six manifestos to produce a sample that was both reflective of the variety within the full manifesto dataset in terms of time and geography, but also manageable enough to allow for deep investigation of the texts and nuanced results.

Table 3.2 Sub-sample of women's party manifestos for thematic analysis

Country	Party	Typology	Year	Election Type
Russia	Zhenshchiny Rossii (WOR)	Essentialist	1993	General Election
UK	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC)	Essentialist	1998	Devolved Assembly
Spain	Iniciativa Feminista (IF)	Feminist	2009	European Parliament
Bulgaria	Partiya na Bulgarskite Zheni (POBW)	Essentialist	2013	European Parliament
UK	Women's Equality Party (WEP)	Feminist	2017	General Election
Finland	Feministinen Puolue (FP)	Feminist	2019	European Parliament

The chosen parties reflect diversity in political system, time period, and sociopolitical context in which women's parties mobilised in Europe 1990-2020, as well as an expected variety in their issue focus. Due to these choices, the manifestos within the subsample also cover different election-types. Homogeneity over election-type would have been preferable, but I prioritised selecting a sample that represented variety in parties' emergent conditions and supposed issue focus. In Chapter 4 I provide some quantitative analysis of differences in issue concern across election-type within the full corpus.

Here I provide a brief overview of the sample. Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia (WOR)) is a classic example of an *essentialist women's party*, emerging in the post-USSR period and promoting a party platform centred on political and economic stability. Bulgaria's Partiya na Bulgarskite Zheni (Party of Bulgarian Women (POBW)), whilst not emerging in a period of democratic transition, existed in a tumultuous political system, and explicitly branded itself as a non-feminist party promoting traditional Christian values. The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), although formed in period of political instability and transition, promoted a platform containing issues of gender equality, yet did not identify as a *feminist party*. Spain's Iniciativa Feminista (Feminist Initiative (IF)), the UK's Women's Equality Party (WEP), and Finland's Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party (FP)) are all self-identified *feminist parties* that emerged in established democracies, but do not necessarily occupy the same space on the spectrum of feminist thought and activism.

Table 3.3 Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis procedure

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes in the data:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing a report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Notes: *Thematic analysis procedure developed by Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)*

To conduct the thematic analysis, I followed the well-established method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined in Table 3.3. My thematic analysis followed each step in turn, while recognising that coding the texts is an iterative process that requires moving fluidly to and from steps, and returning to previous steps, as the analysis progresses, and new ideas and themes emerge.

The first step involved deep reading of the manifestos to familiarise myself with the text and gain an initial understanding of the manifest and latent themes within and across the texts.²⁸ Following this deep reading I generated a set of initial codes, relating both to specific policy focuses and positions as well as to underlying discourses and narratives which speak to party's ideological positions. For example, policy-related codes include 'education' and 'economics', whereas discourse/narrative codes include 'essentialist discourse' and 'feminist discourse'.

From the deep reading of the manifestos, I generated a set of 17 codes relating to issue concerns and issue framings. Many codes contained several sub-codes, for example the 'social policy/social welfare' code contained nine sub-codes for specific policies such as education and

²⁸ Because the thematic analysis was conducted after the quantitative analysis (see research design in Figure 3.2) it is not a fully inductive process, as my reading and interpretation were informed from the results of the topic models and word frequency analyses. Thus, I entered the analysis with the expectation of finding issues that had been explored in the quantitative analysis on the full dataset.

healthcare. The full table of codes is presented in Appendix B. Each manifesto was coded using this schema, which was updated and modified when new codes were identified or when codes were not a full and accurate fit to the text. This process was repeated until a point of saturation was reached, and no new codes were identified (a final total of 18 codes and 59 sub-codes).

Because the coding process was not entirely inductive and was driven by a pre-conceived goal to identify issue concerns and issue framings, I did not code every line within a manifesto text. Instead, I coded only parts of the text that were most relevant to my research questions. For example, in this section from the WEP (2017) manifesto only the final sentence would be coded as including content relevant to my research aims:

“The Women’s Equality Party was founded in 2015. WE have grown into a robust political force with over 65,000 members and registered supporters.

Our manifesto has been shaped by their passionate engagement and clear vision for the world they would like to see. WE have also consulted with advocacy groups, campaigning organisations and policy-makers to build on existing expertise.”

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative methods within the mixed method research design allow me to identify and map issue concerns across the full corpus of women’s party manifestos, test differences in issue concern between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties* and explore how different parties frame their issue concerns. The aim of these analyses is to better conceptualise the shared issue concerns of the women’s party family and to substantiate existing typological frameworks. In particular, I aim to conceptualise European *feminist parties* as niche parties mobilising gender-based issues. In the following two empirical Chapters of the thesis, I explore *feminist parties*’ issue communication in traditional news media and on social media.

3.2 Analysis of *feminist party* and candidate news coverage

In Chapter 5 I investigate *feminist parties*’ issue communication in traditional news media. The aim is to assess whether there is a dissonance between the issues emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos and the issues that are emphasised in news coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates. Specifically, I examine whether such a dissonance is motivated by gendered issue stereotypes.

To test my expectations, I use quantitative content analysis to measure issue mentions in news coverage of three European *feminist parties* and their candidates from two second-order election

campaign periods. In the following sections I outline the rationale for my case selection and time frame. I then provide details on the data collection and data preparation. I offer rationale for my choice of quantitative content analysis and explain how I developed the code scheme of issues and what other data is coded from news items. Finally, I outline the coding process and data validation measures.

3.2.1 Case selection and time frame

My cases for the analysis of *feminist party* news coverage are Finland's Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party (FP)), Sweden's Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative (FI)), and the UK's Women's Equality Party (WEP) (from this point I will use the parties' names in their own language or their abbreviations). These are also the three cases that I use in my investigation of party and candidate issue communication on social media in Chapter 6.

These parties are three of the largest, most visible, and most electorally successful *feminist parties* currently operating in Europe. Each has fielded candidates in local, national, and European elections. They have achieved varying success at the national and supranational level, but each has secured some form of local representation. Each party has also received considerable media interest, stemming from their own campaign tactics, electoral success, and their connection to well-established political actors and celebrity endorsements. Finally, they are all self-identified *feminist parties* and all espouse an intersectional feminist ideology. In this section I briefly outline each party's trajectory and provide an explanation of why these three cases are the most appropriate to address my research questions.

Feministiskt Initiativ

Feministiskt Initiativ is the oldest of the parties that I study, having formed in 2005 as a pressure group before quickly developing into a political party and fielding candidates in the 2006 Swedish Riksdag elections, where they received 0.7% of the votes and no seats. The party's co-founder and long-time party leader was Gudrun Schyman, an experienced and well-known Swedish politician. Schyman was formerly the leader of the Left Party (1993-2003) and member of the Swedish Riksdag (1988-2006) and regularly championed policies on women's issues, with feminism becoming embedded in the Left Party's ideology under her leadership (Saxonberg, 2012).

Schyman left the Left Party in 2005 to form FI and under her leadership the party contested local, national and EP elections with mixed success, securing a range of local seats but no national representation. The party's most notable electoral result came in 2014, when 5.5% vote

share secured candidate Soraya Post a European Parliament seat.²⁹ In the Riksdag election of the same year, Gudrun Schyman narrowly missed out on a seat, falling just below the 4% threshold with 3.1% of the vote (yet FI remained the largest non-parliamentary party). Since 2014 the party's electoral fortunes have dropped, achieving only 0.05% of votes in the 2022 parliamentary elections but retaining several municipal seats. Moreover, Post lost her European Parliament seat in 2019 when the party's votes dropped to just 0.8%. During the 2019 EP campaign, Schyman stood down as party leader, being succeeded by joint leaders Gita Nabavi and Farida al-Abani.

The party makes an obvious case to study news coverage of *feminist parties* during the 2019 European Parliament campaign, being the only *feminist party* running an incumbent in that election. In the study of local election news coverage, I have chosen the party's campaign and subsequent success in the 2018 Stockholm City Council election. FI fielded a party list of twenty candidates in this election and three were elected: Anna-Rantala Bonnier, Lisa Palm, and Sissela Nordling Blanco, the latter of which had served as party spokesperson between 2011-2016.³⁰ As the first municipal election following Post's election to the European Parliament and featuring a prominent member of the party in an important council district, this election campaign presents an interesting case to study party and candidate news coverage.

Feministinen Puolue

Feministinen Puolue formed in Finland in 2016 and registered as a political party in 2017, making them the youngest party that I study. The party fielded 40 candidates for the 2017 municipal elections, with co-chairwoman (and co-founder) Katju Aro the only successful candidate, securing a seat on the City Council of Helsinki with 1.5% of the votes. She subsequently lost this seat in 2021 with party support slipping to 0.8%.

The party has also fielded candidates in both national and European Parliament elections in 2019, receiving 0.2% vote share in both contests and securing no seats. For the 2019 national parliament election, the party formed an electoral alliance with other small parties including the Liberals, Green Party and Pirate Party, but together the alliance failed to gain enough votes to secure a seat. The party was officially de-registered by the Finnish Ministry of Justice in 2023 having secured no representation in the previous two national elections. However, the party is still operational, holding a party conference in August 2023 where they elected the first male party president, Lauri Alhojärvi. Feministinen Puolue thus makes an interesting case, as the

²⁹ Former Liberal People Party MEP Maria Robsahm defected to FI in 2006 and served as an MEP until 2009, but Soraya Post was the party's first *elected* MEP.

³⁰ Nordling-Blanco resigned her position in 2020 due to health issues and was replaced by Maria Jansson who had also stood for election in 2018.

youngest party in this study, achieving consistently low vote share across elections, yet having secured some short-lived representation at the local level.

The Women's Equality Party

The Women's Equality Party formed in slightly unusual circumstances, when journalist Catherine Mayer and broadcaster Sandi Toksvig, met at the Women of the World festival in London 2015 and decided to form a women's party borne from their frustration with the lack of substantive representation of women in mainstream parties (Evans and Kenny, 2019: 855). The party formed in 2015 but fielded no candidates in the general election of that year. They ran their first candidates in the 2016 London Assembly elections, where party leader (and former journalist) Sophie Walker stood as candidate for London Mayor. This campaign received a relatively large amount of media attention, in part thanks to the existing high profiles of Walker, Meyer and Toksvig, as well as several celebrity endorsements, including actor Emma Thompson who received attention for publicly switching as a life-long supporter of the Labour Party to support WEP (Stewart, 2016).

The 2016 London Assembly election also marked the party's biggest electoral success. Walker received just 2% of the votes (53,000), placing WEP fifth after the more established parties (Labour, Conservative, Green, Liberal Democrat and UKIP). While a low vote share, this is nevertheless an impressive result for a party that entered the electoral register less than a year prior. In the following Mayoral election in 2021, the party's candidate Mandu Reid (again leader at the time) secured only 0.8% of votes (21,000). Due to the level of media coverage and relative success that WEP achieved in 2016, this is the municipal election that I study. Moreover, the unique circumstances of the 2021 London Mayoral election, which was delayed due to the coronavirus pandemic, also make 2016 a more appropriate case.

At the national level, WEP has secured no seats, with all candidates fielded in the 2017 and 2019 elections losing their deposits (BBC News, 2019). The party nominated eight candidates on the London Regional list in the 2019 European Parliament elections, securing only 0.5% of the total votes (23,000). However, the party's relative success (particularly within a two-party majoritarian system) and relatively high visibility make it an appropriate case to analyse party and candidate media coverage.

Together, these three *feminist parties* make suitable cases for my analysis as each is currently operating and has contested a range of first- and second-order elections with varying degrees of electoral success. The parties all adopt an intersectional feminist approach and campaign on similar gender-based issues (see analysis in Chapter 4 and detail of issue concerns in these

parties' manifestos in Appendix H). Each party also seems to have followed a similar pattern, where a flash of popularity (often combined with an electoral victory or near-victory) is immediately followed by a sharp decline in support. All three fielded unsuccessful candidates in the 2019 European Parliament election and contested a municipal election between 2016-2018 that resulted in sizeable electoral support and media attention.

Moreover, these three *feminist parties* are broadly representative of the range of contemporary *feminist parties* competing across Europe. Feministiskt Initiativ in particular has inspired the formation of other 'Feminist Initiatives' in Denmark, Norway, Poland, and Spain. These parties use the same party label and party branding and campaign on similar platforms to FI. Additionally, all three of my cases joined the Feminists United Network (FUN), alongside parties and feminist organisations in other European countries, and developed a common platform of issues in preparation for the 2019 European Parliament elections. Therefore, these parties are not only cohesive in their issue focus but representative of the wider organisation of *feminist parties* in Europe.³¹

For each party, I collected news coverage from two electoral campaigns. First each party's news coverage in the year preceding the 2019 European Parliament election (26th May 2018-26th May 2019). The second election studied is a municipal election within each country. I chose to study news coverage of second-order elections as literature shows that small and niche parties are more successful in second-order elections (Lindstam, 2019). Indeed, as outlined in my case rationale above, each party has secured local representation but no national representation. Therefore, following a media logic, I expect these *feminist parties* to receive a higher proportion of news coverage during these campaigns. While this presents a selective sample, I believe that the overviews of each party above provide strong rationale for the timeframe. The similar timeframe of the municipal elections is also beneficial for a comparative approach and reflects the broader popularity and attention paid to *feminist parties* across Europe in the late 2010s.

News coverage was gathered from six months before election day in each country:

- London Mayoral and Local Assembly election: 05/12/2015-05/05/2016
- Helsinki Council election: 09/10/2016-09/04/2017
- Stockholm City Council election: 09/03/2018-09/09/2018

The time frame is less for the municipal elections (six months) as an initial search did not find any coverage in relation to these elections from a year prior.

³¹ In Chapter 4 I present evidence of the shared issue concerns of *feminist parties* and in Appendix H I offer evidence that these issue concerns are specifically present in the party manifestos of FI, FP and WEP.

There are several important caveats to note in my selection of time frame. The first is that the Stockholm City Council election period overlaps with the European Parliament campaign period. Thus, when coding the news items, I determined to which election the item was related. If the item was not clearly related to either election but was published in the municipal campaign period, it was coded as municipal under the principle that news organisations were more likely to be discussing the most immediate upcoming election. I recognise that this may inflate the number of items covering Feministiskt Initiativ during the municipal campaign.

In addition, both Sweden and Finland held parliamentary elections during the timeframe for which I collect data. The Swedish parliamentary election fell on the same day as the municipal elections, 09/09/2018 and the Finnish parliamentary election was held one month prior to the European Parliament election on 14/04/2019. Both FI and FP fielded candidates in these elections. In Finland, only Katju Aro (leader of FP) was a candidate in both the national and European Parliament elections. However, in Sweden, there was considerable overlap between the candidates running in the parliamentary and EP election, although it was more common for candidates lower on party lists to be registered in both elections.

In coding the news coverage, I distinguish only between news items published in the municipal campaigns and EP campaigns and do not code whether items refer to the national campaign. Due to these data limitations, I am not able to provide explanatory analysis of differences in media coverage across election type, however I do provide descriptive overview of coverage of issues mentioned within each data collection period in Chapter 5.

3.2.2 Collecting news data

In the following section I describe the data collection process for identifying and collecting the newspaper coverage of the three *feminist parties* and their candidates throughout the two campaign periods. For the 2019 European Parliament campaign, I collected newspaper items from five of the highest circulating national newspapers in each country. This data represents a range of morning and evening papers, broadsheets, and tabloids, with both left- and right-leaning political outlook.³² For the municipal elections, the same national newspapers were used and were supplemented with a highly circulating local newspaper within each country's

³² The classification of newspapers as left-leaning and right-leaning relied on a range of past literature (Andersson, 2013; De Cock et al., 2019; Garz and Rickardsson, 2023; Isotalus and Almonkari, 2014; Lyytimäki, 2011; Nord and Strömbäck, 2006) as well as newspaper's profiles in the 'Eurotopics' database (www.eurotopics.net). Scholars have noted that the left-right distinction is less applicable to news media in Nordic countries as it is in the UK (Strömbäck and Shehata, 2007: 801). More commonly newspapers are described as 'conservative', 'liberal' and 'social democratic'. For ease of comparison, in Table 3.4 these are labelled as left, centre and right accordingly.

capital city. These newspapers were less partisan, focused primarily on reporting local news events. Table 3.4 provides an overview of the newspapers.

I collected all news items mentioning either the party label or name of any candidates on the party list within each time frame, for example ‘Feministinen Puolue’ or ‘Katju Aro’. Candidate names were identified from party lists, either found on party websites or through election data collected by each country’s national data authority. I chose this deliberately broad data collection strategy as one factor I examine in Chapter 5 is the extent of the issue coverage received by *feminist parties* and their candidates. Therefore, I collected any news item that mentioned the party or a candidate, regardless of the focus, in order to investigate the extent to which parties are linked to political issues. This provides a broad measure of whether *feminist parties* receive *meaningful* coverage, for example which discusses parties and candidate’s issue concerns, compared to more superficial coverage, for example the publication of the party’s candidate list.

I collected newspaper coverage of the different parties using different methods. News items mentioning WEP and its candidates were collected from the Lexis Nexis UK database, which contains both online and print versions of newspapers. Using party and candidate name search strings, a total of 262 news items were collected for the European Parliament election and London Mayoral and Assembly election. These items were downloaded as word documents, each containing 100 items, alongside meta data including the headline, author name and publication date. Duplicate news items were manually removed.

I was not able to secure access to an equivalent news database to collect the Finnish or Swedish news items (for example Mediaarkivet or the Proquest Factiva database). Instead, I scraped items mentioning FP and FI using R’s *Rvest* and *Rselenium* packages.³³ These packages utilise the html codes that structure webpages to identify ‘elements’ of the page, for example photos or blocks of text and then scrape these elements into a data frame. Web-scraping is a pragmatic and flexible method of collecting online data and has been used in previous media and political communication research as a data collection tool, particularly when working with big data (see for example Brugman et al., 2022; Ghosh et al., 2022; Kaiser et al., 2020).

³³ The *Rvest* and *Rselenium* packages are similar in their operation, the key difference being that *RSelenium* uses a pop-up browser, allowing the user to use point-and-click functions to scrape more adeptly from dynamic webpages, such as those that utilise infinite scrolling or operate a paywall.

Table 3.4 News coverage data sources

Feministinen Puolue			Feministiskt Initiativ			Women's Equality Party			
	Newspaper	Political Orientation	Type	Newspaper	Political Orientation	Type	Newspaper	Political Orientation	Type
European Parliament & Municipal	Helsingin Sanomat	Centre	Broadsheet	Aftonbladet	Left	Tabloid	The Guardian	Left	Broadsheet
	Aahmulehti	Right	Broadsheet	Expressen	Centre	Tabloid	The Daily Mail	Right	Tabloid
	Ilti Sanomat	Centre	Tabloid	Dagens Nyheter	Centre	Broadsheet	The Telegraph	Right	Broadsheet
	Savon Sanomat	Centre	Broadsheet	Svenska Dagbladet	Right	Broadsheet	The Sun	Right	Tabloid
	Keskisuomalainen	Centre	Broadsheet	Göteborgs-Posten	Centre	Broadsheet	The Independent	Left	Broadsheet
Municipal	Helsingin Uutiset	Centre	Tabloid	Mitt i Stockholm	Centre	Tabloid	London Evening Standard	Centre-Right	Tabloid

Notes: Feministinen Puolue and Feministiskt Initiativ news items scraped from news websites. Women's Equality Party news items collected from Lexis Nexis database.

To collect my data, I first searched for items on news websites using the party and candidate search strings. A first piece of code scrapes the url of each news item webpage from the search results and stores this as a list. A second piece of code uses the html code corresponding to specific elements of the webpage, in this case the headline, article body, publication date and author, to scrape the relevant material. This process is looped over every url from the search list and the results are saved into a data frame. I exported these data frames as word documents in preparation for the content analysis.

While *Rvest* and *Rselenium* are incredibly efficient in extracting large amounts of text from webpages, the resulting data is inevitably messy given differences in how elements are presented and stored on different webpages. Therefore, I manually cleaned the data, for example, by removing irrelevant elements like hyperlinks to other news items and white space. I also corrected errors in UTF-8 encoding, where the program does not recognise Swedish and Finnish language characters such as ‘å’ or ‘ö’. Finally, any missing metadata that had not been successfully scraped was manually added.

I collected a total of 111 FP and 840 FI news items. Table 3.5 provides an overview of the number of news items collected for each party in each election campaign. The significant differences in the total number of items collected is explored in detail in my analysis in Chapter 5. However, I note here that the total number of items collected for each party bears reflection on the relative success of the party within their country. Thus FI, with an incumbent MEP and strong showing in the 2014 parliamentary election receives the most coverage, whereas FP, the newest party with limited electoral experience received the least. This aligns with past literature that links the visibility of parties to their size or relevance in the electoral system (Hopmann et al., 2012).

In total I collected 1213 news items mentioning one of the three *feminist parties* and/or their candidates. The final step was to translate the Finnish and Swedish articles into English. I again use the Microsoft Translator API to translate the texts. A full discussion of the process of translation using the Microsoft Translator API and an evaluation of its accuracy and reliability in comparison to alternative methods is provided above (Section 3.1.2, pp.64-65).

3.2.3 Quantitative content analysis rationale

The purpose of this media analysis is to investigate the extent to which news coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates relates them to stereotypically feminine issues.

Table 3.5 Number of news items mentioning *feminist parties* and candidates in European Parliament and municipal campaign periods

Party	European Parliament	Municipal	Total
FI	511	329	840
FP	69	42	111
WEP	123	139	262
Total	703	510	1213

My expectations are that news coverage will not reflect the issues prioritised in *feminist party* manifestos (to be explored in Chapter 4) but instead emphasise stereotypically feminine issues, based on previous research on the gendered mediation of women political actors. I expect this emphasis to persist, even relative to *feminist parties*' own communication on gender-based issues.

Therefore, in my analysis, I sought to measure three things: (i) the issues that are mentioned in *feminist party* and candidate news coverage, (ii) which actors mention those issues, and (iii) how many issues are mentioned per news item. These questions are best answered using quantitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis has long been used in communication research as it offers an 'objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content' in large volumes of media texts (Berelson, 1952: 18). The deductive nature of quantitative content analysis is well-suited to research projects focused on mapping the presence and frequency of specific terms or broader themes across large corpus of texts, retaining validity and reliability. Thus, whereas in Chapter 4 I pursued an inductive exploratory approach to the issue mentions in party manifestos, in Chapter 5 (and Chapter 6) I use deductive methods to map the presence and frequency of these issue mentions in media and social media texts.

Quantitative content analysis is popular in news media research and has been used consistently to investigate the gendered media coverage that women politicians receive. Studies have used content analysis to measure the amount of coverage women and men receive, as well as map differences in issue coverage, trait coverage, and tone/sentiment (Banwart et al., 2003; Bode and Hennings, 2012; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Jalalzai, 2006; Lavery, 2013; Lühiste and Banducci, 2016; Meeks, 2012; Robertson et al., 2002; Ross et al., 2013; Semetko and Boomgaarden, 2007). My study therefore builds on a strong foundation of existing research using quantitative content analysis to map the presence and type of issues mentioned in coverage of parties and candidates. Quantitative content analysis is also

particularly useful for comparative research, across countries and across time, allowing for a holistic review of trends together with an ability to investigate fine-grained detail where needed.

Quantitative content analysis can be performed manually using human coders, in a fully automated process using machine software, or in a hybrid approach combining the two. The use of automated techniques has grown in communication research and advocates contend that these methods are more reliable, more objective, and more efficient than human coding (Evans, et al., 2007: 1008; Matthes and Kohring, 2008: 261). However, in this study I have chosen manual content analysis as it offers particular benefits over automated methods.

Firstly, one of the key advantages of manual coding is that it allows greater interpretive flexibility than automated methods in identifying the presence of terms within texts and assigning them to the appropriate categories. A common technique in automated content analysis is to apply pre-written dictionaries of terms to texts, resulting in frequency counts of specific terms and topics. While an obvious benefit of this is a high degree of accuracy in the identification of terms within texts, a clear limitation is that computer programs are unable to detect differences in word usage in different contexts, for example homonyms, or to understand rhetorical devices such as metaphors or humour which are commonly found in news texts. It is widely assumed that human coders are better able to interpret these various meanings with greater accuracy (Conway, 2006) and are able to use their existing knowledge of texts, linguistic norms, and the topic under study to evaluate texts in more detail (Mayring, 2002).

Secondly, while automated dictionary techniques are theoretically likely to produce more valid and reliable results at a lower cost to human coding, there are significant constraints. Achieving high accuracy and reliability requires meticulously constructed dictionaries that include an array of terms and possible synonyms to create exhaustive and exclusive coding categories. These dictionaries are resultingly highly specific to their subject and difficult to use comparatively. For example, a small number of political issue and policy dictionaries exist that could be used to investigate the issue coverage in my dataset of news items, such as Laver and Garry's (2000) policy dictionary. However, this dictionary includes few gender-related issue areas and is context-specific to the UK, meaning it is unsuitable to my comparative analysis.

Finally, manual coding is also more appropriate to my study because of the size of the news data sample. Automated text analysis methods, including dictionary analyses and supervised text classification models, are often implemented where researchers have collected a large amount of data that would be unfeasible to analyse manually. I have collected 1213 news items mentioning either a *feminist party* or candidate. This is a very feasible sample to manually code

and moreover is too small a sample for automated methods, such as machine learning models, to produce robust results. Overall, while automated content analysis offers certain benefits in terms of validity, reliability, and efficiency, in this study human coding is deemed more suitable.

3.2.4 Issue coverage code scheme

To conduct the content analysis, I developed an original code scheme to measure the issue mentions in the media coverage of the three *feminist parties* and their candidates. It comprises three main measures: (1) whether a news item mentions a political issue in relation to a *feminist party/candidate*; (2) if so, what that issue is; (3) and finally who mentions the issue.³⁴ In addition, I coded metadata such as the newspaper name, publication date, and author name, gender, and profession. Figure 3.3 visualises the process of coding the news items. The full code scheme can be found in Appendix C.

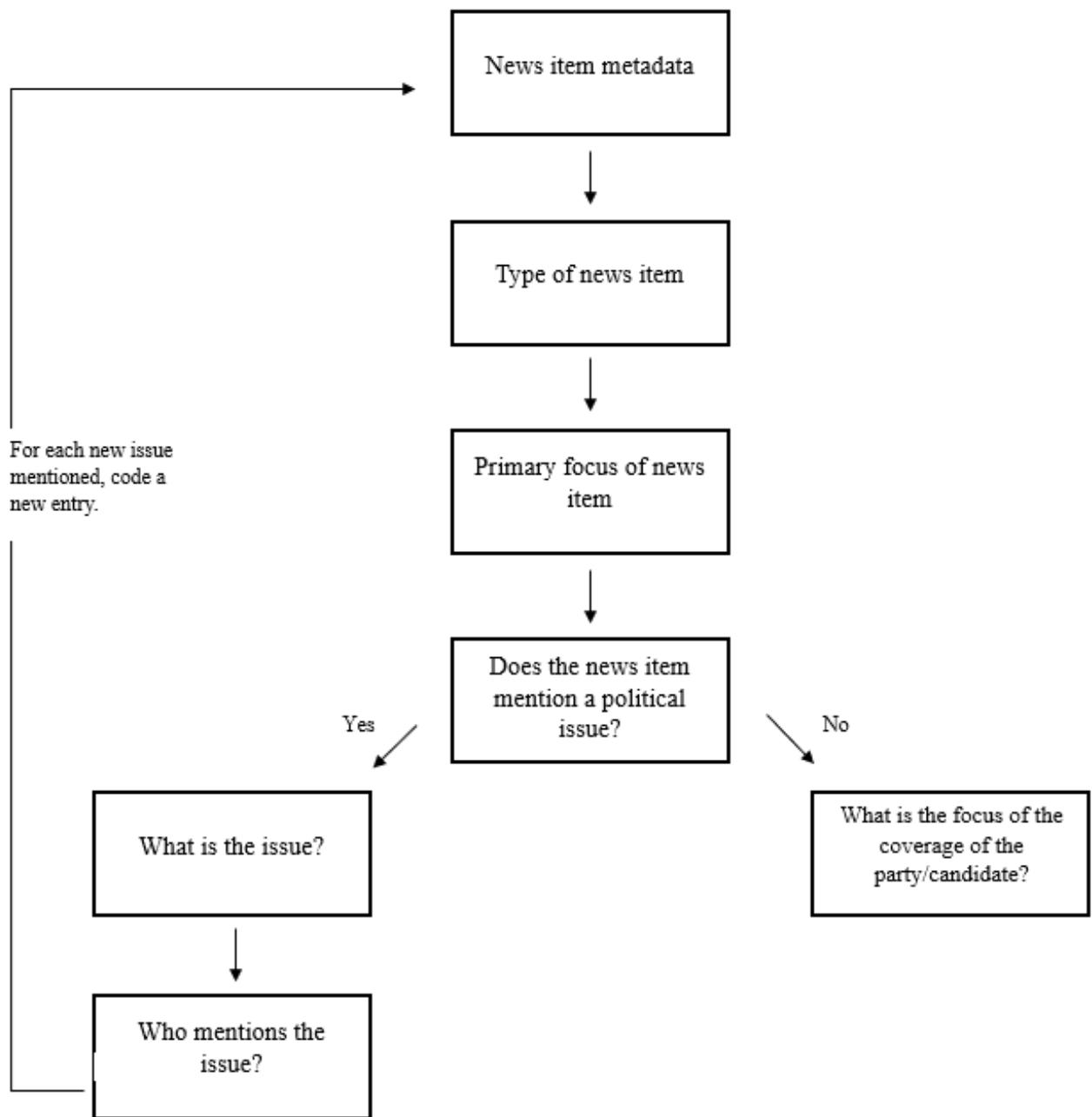
(1) Does the news item mention a political issue in relation to a feminist party or candidate?

First, the code scheme measures whether the news item mentions a political issue in relation to a *feminist party* or candidate. This is a necessary first step to produce the sample that includes issue coverage of parties and candidates. However, it also offers an additional measure of the *extent* of issue coverage that *feminist parties* and candidates receive. Two additional questions capture the *type* of coverage received by parties and candidates. The first asks the primary focus of the news item. Examples include ‘*feminist party* activities’, ‘profile of party leader or candidate’, ‘focus on a different party/parties’, or ‘factual election information’ e.g., candidate lists or election results. A second question later in the code scheme asks: “if *feminist parties* are not discussed in relation to a political issue, what is the primary focus of *feminist party* coverage?” This is an open-ended category and common answers included electoral lists, discussion of party coalition with other parties, news of *feminist party* activity e.g., a campaign event or publicity stunt.

The first of these questions offers descriptive information on the types of news items in which *feminist parties* are mentioned. The second drills down in more detail into the type of coverage *feminist parties* and their candidates receive. This indicates whether the coverage is substantive, such as engaging with the activities and issue positions of parties, or whether parties and candidates are mentioned only in passing, with minimal attention.

³⁴ The original code scheme also measured the trait coverage of candidates (where mentioned), using a list of gender-stereotypical traits drawn from past literature. However, the total number of observations of traits mentioned in relation to a *feminist party* candidate was very low ($n = 41$). This is too low for any meaningful analysis to be conducted and thus I did not include this analysis in the final results.

Figure 3.3 Steps for coding for news items



Without comparing against the coverage of other parties, it is difficult to properly assess the extent of media attention that *feminist parties* receive but the questions in the code scheme at least allow a relative indication of substantive versus superficial coverage.

(2) *What political issue(s) are mentioned?*

Second, the code scheme captures what political issue(s) are mentioned in relation to a *feminist party* or candidate. I constructed a comprehensive range of issue categories, which were

developed from a number of areas. Foremost, I compiled a set of issues that are mentioned in women's party manifestos, as explored in Chapter 4. I used the results of the word frequency analyses, topic models and the thematic analysis code scheme to develop an initial set of issues that are mentioned by women's parties. Building from this starting point, I performed an additional review of the manifestos produced by FP, FI and WEP for the 2019 European Parliament election and the municipal elections under study (FI, 2018b; FI 2019; FP, 2017; FP, 2019; WEP, 2016; WEP, 2019). This included additional quantitative analysis and deep reading of the texts to pull out primary issue concerns, for example as indicated in the contents page and section headings (see an overview of issue concerns within these specific manifestos in Appendix H). The results from this review were combined with the results from the analysis in Chapter 4 to produce a comprehensive list of *feminist party* issue concerns. This is an important starting point, as the broad goal of my analysis in Chapter 5 is to explore the extent to which *feminist parties*' news coverage reflects the issues that they emphasise in their manifestos.

Next, I compared my code scheme against past literature that has used quantitative content analysis to code stereotypically masculine and feminine issue coverage of political actors (see Table 3.7). These code schemes commonly use far fewer categories than I capture and are often drawn from the US context, so I found no additional categories to add to my code scheme. Finally, I reviewed my code scheme against the code scheme produced for the 2019 round of the Euromanifesto project (Carteny et al., 2023). This is a large-scale comparative project which codes the issue concerns of all major parties competing in European Parliament elections. By comparing my code scheme to this, I could add any missing issues that are expected to be found in European party manifestos and thus may also be found in news coverage from the same period. Unfortunately, no comparable code scheme was available for municipal level issues. The only specific issue area that I added from the review of the Euromanifesto code scheme was 'housing and infrastructure'.

My code scheme includes 26 issue categories (including an 'other' category where coders could specify the issue mentioned) (see full list in Appendix C). It comprises traditional women's issues, feminist issues, and issues that are often not considered to be gender-based (but which *feminist parties* view through a gendered lens). This code scheme is an important output of the analysis in Chapter 4 and makes a contribution to study of the salience of gender-based issues beyond a focus on women's parties. As discussed previously, current widely used political issue code schemes (such as the CMP and Euromanifesto Study) do not include measures of several gender-based issues such as reproductive rights and gendered violence. Thus, my code scheme

addresses this gap and offers a novel instrument to code gender-based issues in political texts such as manifestos, news media, and social media.

In Chapter 5 I provide descriptive analysis of the relative frequency of the mention of these issues in *feminist party* and candidate news coverage. However, the primary investigation in this Chapter is statistical analysis of the extent to which *feminist parties* and candidates are related to gender-stereotypical issues. To conduct this analysis, I assigned each of the issues in my code scheme to three categories: stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, or neutral (Table 3.6). This classification is not applied in the coding process itself but is used later in my statistical models. Here I will provide a brief discussion on how the issues were assigned to each category.

As a first step, I reviewed the code schemes used in previous research on gendered issue stereotypes in media coverage of political actors (Banwart et al., 2003; Bode and Hennings, 2012; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Jalalzai, 2006; Meeks, 2012; Robertson et al., 2002; Semetko and Boomgaarden, 2007). Table 3.7 provides an overview of how these studies have categorised political issues according to gender-stereotypes. Using this literature, I was able to classify the majority of the issues in my code scheme. However, because my code scheme is comprehensive and because much of the past literature is focused on the US context, there were some issue categories in my code scheme that were not included in past research. These include ‘culture/media’, ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ and ‘immigration’. I discuss the categorisation of these issues below.

However, first it is important to note that my categorisation makes a significant departure from much of the past research on gendered mediation, as I include a ‘neutral’ category of issues. Not all political issues can be straightforwardly categorised as either stereotypically masculine or stereotypically feminine. Past research has circumvented this by examining only a few evidently gender-stereotypical issues in politician’s media coverage. For example, Semetko and Boomgaarden (2007) compare the percentage of mentions of two stereotypically masculine issues - economics and foreign policy - and two stereotypically feminine issues- social care and education- in coverage of the 2005 German Bundestag elections. However, my research aims to examine in detail the full range of issues mentioned in coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates, meaning this approach is not appropriate for my aims.

Table 3.6 Classification of issues into gender-stereotypical categories

Stereotypically feminine	Neutral	Stereotypically masculine
Abortion/reproductive rights	Culture and media	Economics
Childcare/parental leave	Democratic values/anti-extremism	Foreign policy/security
Environment	Employment/labour	Immigration
Education	European Union	Law and order
Equal pay	Housing/infrastructure	Transport
Gender equality		
Healthcare		
Human rights		
Refugees		
Sexual violence		
Social care		
Minoritised groups		
Violence against women		
Welfare		
Women's descriptive representation		

In the literature I have reviewed on gender-stereotyping in politician's issue coverage, only Jalalzai (2006) includes a neutral category of issues (see Table 3.7), yet these are fairly specific to the US context. My category of neutral issues first includes issues for which there is no clear gender-based association. For example, both 'European Union' and 'democratic values and anti-extremism' do not feature in any of the coding schemes that I have reviewed and have no strong stereotypical association with either men or women, based on socialised traits and gender roles, and are thus coded as neutral.

Secondly, I also include in the neutral category issues for which there are a mix of both masculine and feminine associations. For example, I have categorised 'employment/labour' as neutral. Whereas some authors have coded 'employment and jobs' as stereotypically masculine (Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008), others have coded 'unemployment' (which is included in my coding category) as feminine (Jalalzai, 2006). Similarly, I have categorised 'housing and infrastructure' as neutral because past research considers some housing policy, such as social housing, to have a feminine association (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2017), whereas infrastructure and housing construction is commonly coded as stereotypically masculine (Atkeson and Krebs, 2008).

Table 3.7 Gender-stereotypical issue categorisation in past literature

Stereotypically feminine	Neutral	Stereotypically masculine
Abortion and reproductive rights; Childcare; Drug abuse; Education; Elderly care; Environment; Equal pay; Equal rights; Gender quotas; Gun control; Health care; LGBT rights; Parental leave; Pensions; Poverty; Social Security; Violence against women; Unemployment; Welfare; Women's rights and gender equality; Women's issues	Campaign finance reform; Gambling; Religion; Transportation	Agriculture and farming; Arms control; Budget; Business; Crime; Defence; Economy; Employment/jobs; Energy/Oil; Foreign policy; Infrastructure; Justice; Military; Nuclear arms; Taxes
Banwart et al., 2003; Bode and Hennings, 2012; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Jalalzai, 2006; Meeks, 2012; Robertson et al., 2002; Semetko and Boomgaarden (2007)	Jalalzai (2006)	Banwart et al., 2003; Bode and Hennings, 2012; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Jalalzai; Meeks, 2012; Robertson et al., 2002; Semetko and Boomgaarden (2007)

Lastly, I categorised ‘culture and media’ as neutral. This category did not feature in any of the literature on gendered mediation that I reviewed. Past research on men and women politician’s gendered communication has coded ‘arts and culture’ as stereotypically feminine (Sullivan, 2023). Yet my coding category also includes mentions of sport, which is typically understood as a stereotypically masculine issue domain (Sullivan, 2023). The category also includes mentions of ‘mass media’, which has no strong gendered association. Therefore, due to the mix of gender-stereotypes, I assigned this issue as neutral.

Some other specific issue assignments require further clarification. First, I categorised ‘environment’ as stereotypically feminine. Although ‘energy’ has been stereotyped as a masculine issue (Dan and Iorgoveanau, 2013; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008), the broader issue domain of the environment is widely perceived to have a stereotypically feminine association (Atkeson and Krebs, 2008; Banwart et al., 2003; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Jalalzai, 2006; Robertson et al., 2002). My code scheme does not distinguish between energy and environmental issues; therefore, I categorise this as stereotypically feminine, in line with the wider environmental issue domain.

Next, the issue of ‘immigration’ was not covered in any of the gendered mediation literature that I reviewed. I categorised immigration as stereotypically masculine due its close connection to other stereotypically masculine issues such as economics, labour, and foreign policy. Alternatively, I categorised ‘refugees’ as a stereotypically feminine issue, due to the connection to themes such as human rights, minoritised groups, and welfare, which are all stereotypically feminine.

Lastly, I categorised ‘transportation’ as a masculine issue area. Jalalzai (2006) codes ‘transport’ as a neutral issue area but does not provide an explanation for this decision. I code this issue as stereotypically masculine, following examples from other gendered mediation studies (Atkeson and Krebs, 2008) as well as research on gendered dynamics in cabinet appointments and portfolio allocation (Goddard, 2019; Taylor Robinson and Gleitz, 2018).

(3) Who mentions the political issue?

The third key aspect of *feminist party* and candidate news coverage that is captured in my code scheme is the actor that mentions the individual issue. My unit of analysis in the coding is the unique issue mention. Thus, every unique issue mention within a news item is captured alongside the actor that mentioned the issue. This allows me, in Chapter 5, to compare whether journalists mention the same issues in news items as *feminist party actors*. This provides a test of the gendered issue coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates that incorporates a measure of their own communication. Thus, the code scheme measures whether an issue is mentioned by one of nine actors:

- Journalist³⁵
- *Feminist party* candidate
- *Feminist party* leader
- *Feminist party* member (e.g., spokesperson or general party member)
- Other party candidate
- Other party leader
- Other party spokesperson/other member
- Member of public
- Other e.g., celebrity/public figure, expert

³⁵ The journalist category includes individual journalists as well as instances where the item was written by an editorial team or news agency e.g., ‘TT’.

In Chapter 5 (pp.154-155) I explain in more detail how this measure is constructed as an independent variable in my analysis.

3.2.5 Inter-coder agreement

The primary coding of the 1213 news items was performed by myself. However, to ensure that the coding was both valid and reliable, a random sample of 150 items (12% of the dataset) were additionally coded by two Research Assistants. Consensus holds that 10% of texts is a reliable sample for inter-coder reliability to be determined (Lombard, et al., 2002:601). Coders were provided with a training session where the aims of the research project were explained, the code scheme was outlined in detail and a coding exercise was conducted to demonstrate how to code the items in practice.

Following this a pilot test was conducted where Research Assistants coded a random sample of 20 news items (not included in the 12% used for inter-coder checks). The similarity scores from the pilot test averaged at 88% between myself and the two Research Assistants. The coders were provided thorough feedback on their coding and assigned a sample of 150 items to code.

I assessed the inter-coder reliability using two measures. I used Krippendorf's Alpha as a statistical test of inter-coder reliability, calculated using the *irr* package in R. This has strong application to nominal coding schemes and is appropriate to relatively small sample sizes (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007). I also included simple percent agreement scores as comparison. Full results of the inter-coder reliability results can be found in Appendix D.

In Chapter 5 I use the results of the content analysis to investigate my expectations on the gendered issue coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates. I present detailed descriptive analysis of the issues mentioned in *feminist party* and candidate coverage. In Chapter 5 I also develop a set of specific hypotheses to test my expectations that *feminist parties*' news coverage will overrepresent stereotypically feminine issues, relative to *feminist parties*' own communication on these issues. I use multinomial logit regression models to test these hypotheses. I provide specific details on these models, including my independent and dependent variables, and control variables in Chapter 5.

3.3 Analysis of *feminist party* and candidates' social media campaigns

In Chapter 6 I investigate the issue mentions in the tweets of Finland's Feministinen Puolue (FP), Sweden's Feministiskt Initiativ (FI) and the UK Women's Equality Party and their candidates throughout the 2019 European Parliament election campaign and a municipal

campaign in each country's capital. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the extent to which party and candidate tweets mention the same issues that are emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos. In Chapter 2, I outlined my expectations that as small/niche parties, *feminist parties*' issue communication should emphasise their core issues. However, I also argued that the incentives of candidate individualisation may lead party candidates, particularly less viable candidates, to diverge their communication from the party platform.

3.3.1 Case selection and time frame

To test my expectations, I analyse original tweets sent by the main party accounts, municipal party accounts and candidates accounts of FP, FI and WEP. The time frame is the same as that analysed in news coverage of parties and candidates. Thus, for all parties, this is the year preceding the 2019 European Parliament election (26/05/2018-26/05/2019) and from the six months preceding a municipal election in the country capital:

- London Mayoral and Local Assembly election: 05/12/2015-05/05/2016
- Helsinki Council election: 09/10/2016-09/04/2017
- Stockholm City Council election: 09/03/2018-09/09/2018

The rationale for the selection of these parties and campaign periods is detailed above (pp.74-78). Here I only add that utilising the same cases in investigation of *feminist parties*' social media communication allows me to compare their issue mentions against those issues identified in the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4, as well as the issues that are linked to these parties in their news coverage in Chapter 5. I therefore build a holistic picture of the issue communication of European *feminist parties* across three different communication mediums.

3.3.2 Collecting party and candidate tweets

The first step in the data collection process was identifying party and candidate Twitter accounts. First, the main party account and any municipal accounts for each party were identified by searching party websites and searching Twitter for party names. Each party has an active main account which operates as a voice for the central party, however the number of municipal accounts operated by each party differed greatly. FI, for example, has both a main account (@Feministerna) and a separate account for every region, so in this case the Stockholm region account was identified (@FIStockholm). FP had no municipal account, using the central party account to represent both the national party and the municipal council operating out of Helsinki. WEP has one national account (@WEP) and a multitude of municipal accounts, seemingly run by local members. There is not one single London municipal account, but for the

2016 London Assembly election an account was created representing almost every London borough (24 accounts were identified from 26 boroughs). A quick review of these accounts demonstrated that they mostly retweeted the primary WEP account. As retweets are not collected or coded in this analysis, this imbalance is not a significant issue. A total of 28 party accounts were identified, three national accounts for each party, one municipal account for FI and 24 municipal accounts for WEP.

Second, I identified the accounts of party candidates running in the European Parliament and municipal elections. The search process involved using party lists to search Twitter for candidate names and searching party websites to find links to Twitter accounts. Finally, I checked the accounts that were followed by the central party accounts to locate any missing candidate accounts. A total of 56 candidate accounts were identified (out of a total of 76 candidates). Again, the number of operating candidate accounts differed by party and across election type. For example, every WEP and FP candidate for the EP campaign held an account. Yet surprisingly for the EP elections, two of FI's five candidates had no identifiable account, including former party spokesperson Stina Svensson (the other non-tweeting candidate was and Toktam Jahangiry).³⁶ In the municipal elections, fewer candidate accounts were identifiable and across all parties and I found that candidates lower on the party list were less likely to have an identifiable Twitter account.

Overall, a total of 84 *feminist party* and candidate Twitter accounts were identified (Table 3.8 provides an overview). I scraped tweets from these accounts across the campaign periods using the *AcademicTwitter* package in R. This package operated through the Academic Track of the Twitter API, allowing the user access to the full archive of tweets from accounts.³⁷ The 'get_all_tweets' function in the *AcademicTwitter* package allowed the user to scrape the tweets and associated metadata of users by supplying the username or user ID. Tweets and metadata are stored as JSON files which are then hydrated in R and exported as excel files containing the full tweet text as well as the date and time of tweet publication, account name and unique ID, type of tweet (i.e. original tweet, retweet, reply) as well as information on the number of retweets, likes and metadata on the account itself (number of followers etc.).

³⁶ Alternatively, these candidates may have had Twitter accounts that were deactivated before my search began.

³⁷ As of 2023, access to the full archive of tweets via the Twitter API is no longer available.

Table 3.8 Summary of party and candidate Twitter accounts

Party Accounts	Candidate accounts (Total no. of candidates)		Total Accounts
	European Parliament	Municipal	
FI	2	3 (5)	16 (25)
FP	1	3 (3)	15 (24)
WEP	25	8 (8)	11 (11)
Total	28	14 (16)	42 (60)
			84

I scraped a total of 96,390 tweets. My analysis focuses only on original tweets, those published by the account itself. Therefore, retweets and replies were removed from the dataset. Tweet threads were kept, i.e., a connected set of original tweets created by a user replying to their own tweet. This left a final dataset of 29,499 tweets from 57 party and candidate accounts (14 party accounts and 43 candidate accounts) across the two election campaign periods.³⁸

Table 3.9 provides an overview of the number of tweets across party and election type. There is significant variation in the number of tweets sent by party and candidate accounts across my three cases. WEP accounts by far tweeted the most, sending a total of 14,977 tweets, compared to 9,954 from FP and only 4,968 from FI. There is also variation across election type. Both FI and WEP accounts produced a similar number of tweets across the two election campaigns, whereas I collect almost four times as many tweets from FP during the EP campaign compared to the municipal campaign. The similar volume in FI and WEPs tweets across both campaigns is interesting, as the data collection period was shorter for the municipal campaign (six months compared to one year for the EP campaign), suggesting that party and candidates were more active on Twitter during the municipal campaign.

Finally, there is variation across the parties in the number of tweets sent by party and candidate accounts. The FI party accounts produced slightly more tweets than the candidate accounts in the full dataset. In comparison, WEP and FP candidates produced a much higher volume of tweets than the party account, with FP candidates tweeting seven times more than the party account during the EP campaign. More information on the distribution of tweets across party and candidate accounts is provided in Chapter 6.

³⁸ 27 of the identified accounts sent no original tweets during the two election campaign periods for which I collected data.

Table 3.9 Distribution of tweets across party and election campaign

All tweets			European Parliament			Municipal			
	Candidate	Party	Total	Candidate	Party	Total	Candidate	Party	Total
FI	2267	2701	4968	1400	1073	2473	867	1628	2495
FP	8231	1323	9954	6995	929	7924	1236	394	1630
WEP	10827	4150	14977	5235	2150	7385	5592	2000	7592
Total	21355	8174	29499	13630	4152	17782	7695	4022	11717

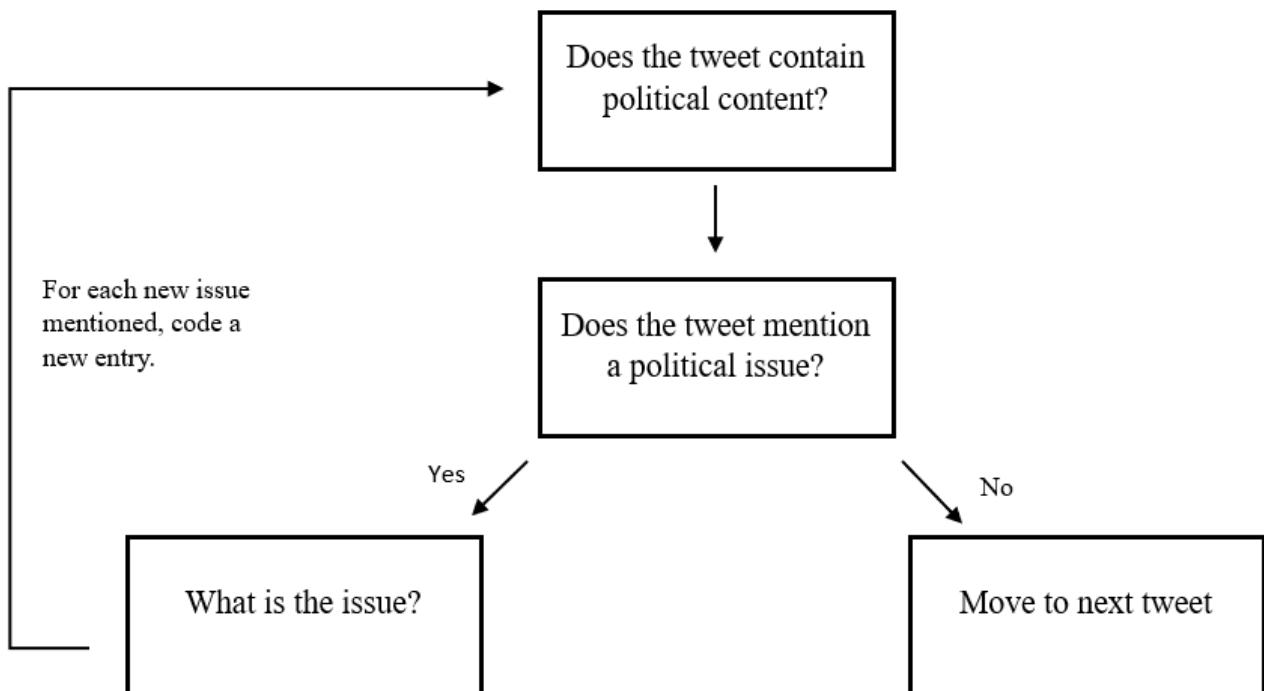
In preparation for the analysis, I translated the Finnish and Swedish tweets was using the Microsoft Translator API. A full discussion of the process and advantages of this method is provided earlier in this Chapter (Section 3.1.2, pp.64-65). I only add that past research has shown machine translation to have good accuracy and reliability in the translation of short-form text such as tweets (Chew et al., 2023; de Vries et al., 2018).

3.3.3 Party and candidate tweet code scheme

As discussed previously in this Chapter, quantitative content analysis offers advantages as a text analysis method that provides systematic descriptive measurement of large volumes of text (Berelson, 1952). As my focus in Chapter 6 is deductive and comparative, this method is most appropriate. Moreover, quantitative content analysis is an established method in the study of the content of tweets. For example, studies discussed in Chapter 2 (such as Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011) use this method in their analysis of candidate Twitter communication. While more recent studies have made use of automated methods, such as supervised machine learning, applied to large datasets of tweets (see for example Gelman et al., 2021), the dataset in this thesis is manageable enough for manual coding to be employed. Moreover, as the code scheme for coding tweets uses the same issue categories as used to code the news items, it is more appropriate to use a comparable method.

The code scheme for the tweets captured three things: (1) First It identifies whether a tweet contains political content; then, (2) whether the political content contains a mention of a political issue; and finally, (3) which specific issue is mentioned. Figure 3.4 outlines the coding process for the tweets and the full code scheme can be found in Appendix E. Again, as with the news coverage, the unit of analysis is the unique issue mention, allowing me to better capture the breadth and range of issues covered in party and candidate tweets.

Figure 3.4 Steps for coding *feminist party* and candidate tweets



(3) Does the tweet contain political content?

First tweets are classified as either ‘personal’, ‘political’ or ‘other’. ‘Personal’ tweets are those that contain no political content and/or relate to a candidate’s personal life and activities. This category therefore contains both obviously personal tweets, for example those wishing someone a happy birthday, as well as all tweets where no discernible political content can be identified. ‘Political’ tweets are classified as any tweet mentioning a political issue, actor, institution, or message. If any political content can be inferred by the coder, the tweet is coded as political. The ‘other’ category contains tweets where no words/content can be identified. For example, tweets that contain only web links or strings of emojis.

(2) Does the tweet mention a political issue?

If a tweet was coded as ‘political’, the code scheme then categorises that tweet as either ‘political issue’, ‘campaign’, or ‘other’. A ‘political issue’ tweet is one that contains any reference to a discernible political issue. A ‘campaign’ tweet is one that advertises a political event, hustings, debate etc., or which encourages citizens to vote for the party or vote in general, or which contains factual information about the election, e.g., the location of polling stations. These categories are not mutually exclusive, as a tweet may contain both a mobilisation to vote and mention a political issue. In this case the tweet would be coded as ‘political issue’ and the issue identified. Tweets coded as ‘other’ are those that contain political content but neither

mention a political issue nor a campaign message. For example, a tweet critiquing the Prime Minister in general terms would be considered ‘other’.

(3) *What political issue(s) are mentioned?*

If a tweet is coded as ‘political issue’, the code scheme includes 26 categories for the coder to choose from. These are the same issue categories that are used to code issue mentions in *feminist party* and candidate news coverage (see Table 3.6 on p.88). To summarise the key points, I developed the code scheme directly from my analysis of women’s party manifestos in Chapter 4 and a further review of the party manifestos of WEP, FP, and FI for the specific elections under study (Appendix H). I also compared my code scheme with the 2019 Euromanifesto Study code scheme, to determine if any additional issues needed to be added.

My focus in the analysis of *feminist party* and candidate tweets is the extent to which their social media campaigns emphasise the issues that are prioritised in the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos (as will be examined in Chapter 4). Thus, in Chapter 6 I do not categorise the issues according to gender stereotypes.

3.3.4 *Inter-coder agreement*

Given the size of the dataset (29,499 tweets), tweets were jointly coded by myself and two additional Research Assistants. Coders were provided with a one-hour training session, where the coding scheme was discussed in detail and examples were provided of how to code tweets in practice. Each coder was then assigned 150 randomly selected tweets to code and provided detailed feedback. The unit of analysis in the tweet coding is the unique issue mention and coders could assign up to six issue mentions per tweet. Following the pilot test, all coders coded the same batch of 4500 (15% of the full dataset) randomly selected tweets to allow for intercoder reliability checks to be performed.³⁹ I calculated both percent agreement and Krippendorf’s Alpha for each coding category, the full results are provided in Appendix F.

The majority of dissimilarity in coding came, not from assigning the issue categories, but in first classifying tweets as either ‘personal’, ‘political’ or ‘other’. The percent agreement for this first classification was 91.1% with a K alpha of .81. The second question, asking whether the tweet mentioned a political issue, contained only campaign-related content, or other political content had a percent agreement score of 88.4 and K alpha of .74. After review of the tweets that were coded differently and discussion with coders, it was established that these errors were the result of coders being less familiar with names of parties, politicians, and institutions in the

³⁹ Coders were assigned 4500 tweets to code because at this stage in the collection and analysis process I had not removed replies from the dataset. Therefore 4500 represented 10% of the 45,000 original and reply tweets.

Swedish and Finnish cases, leading them to miss political content in tweets. To counteract this, I created a glossary of relevant terms for each coder including party names, candidate names, and names of political institutions and events, such as Järvaveckan and Almadelan, which are annual political forums held in Sweden.

Meanwhile, coding of issue mentions showed high similarity, with all percent agreement scores above 90% and all K alphas (bar ‘Other’) above .6. With percent agreement high in all issue categories, low K alphas are likely a result of there being few observations of certain issue categories in the inter-coder sample. After the inter-coder agreement and feedback, each coder was assigned a unique random selection of 7500 tweets that were supplied in batches of 1000 at a time. I coded the remaining 10,000 tweets.

In Chapter 6 I use the results of the quantitative content analysis to test my expectations outlined in Chapter 2. First, I present descriptive analysis of the range of issues that are mentioned in FP, FI, and WEP’s party and candidate tweets throughout the campaigns for the 2019 EP election and municipal elections. In addition, I use multilevel binomial regression models to test specific hypotheses concerning the extent to which party and candidate tweets emphasise the issues which are emphasised in party manifestos, and further whether there are differences in issue mention between viable and non-viable candidates. I provide the development of these hypotheses and the details on the statistical models that I use in Chapter 6.

In conclusion, I believe that the data and methods presented in this Chapter are suitable to investigate the expectations that I outlined in Chapter 2. In the following empirical Chapters of the thesis, I develop my expectations in more specific detail and provide further information on the statistical techniques that I use to investigate them.

3.4 Research ethics and open data

3.4.1 Research Ethics

Each empirical Chapter of this thesis presents analysis of originally collected data; hence I took ethical considerations into account throughout the research design, data collection and analyses. At the outset of the project, the proposal received ethical approval from my institution and the data was deemed to be ‘low risk’. For instance, the manifesto data is publicly available to access from open repositories, such as the MARPOR database or national libraries. Where I collected additional manifestos, these were from party websites, which are open and public. Similarly, the UK newspaper data was collected from the open access Lexis Nexis database. The Swedish and Finnish newspaper data are also available via the Factiva/ProQuest databases. I did not have access to these databases and therefore I scraped the data directly from news websites.

Additional ethical consideration was required in collecting and analysing the Twitter data, as this concerns individual political candidate's communication. In general, it is widely accepted that political actors' communication is public data, as these are political elites speaking in the public domain on behalf of the party or themselves as political candidates and/or representatives. Moreover, Twitter makes clear to users that their data is public and may be used for research purposes and offers controls for public visibility. Hence, there is implicit ethical consent within these terms and conditions. However, it must also be acknowledged that these individual political candidates have not directly approved nor received notice that their tweets are to be analysed and published in this study.

I collected tweets using the Academic Track API administered by Twitter, which required an application that was manually reviewed before access to the API was granted. The application included a description of the research project, a detailed explanation of the methods that would be used to analyse the data, and a statement of whether the data would be presented on aggregate or individually. In this case, the quantitative analysis is aggregated at the party level, with some individual party/candidate tweets displayed for further qualitative analysis. Finally, it was required to state exactly how the outcomes of the research would be presented. The data I have collected is presented in this thesis and may also be included in future journal publications. Based on this application, the project was approved for access to the Twitter API and thus meets criteria of ethical approval set out by Twitter themselves.

3.4.2 Open Data

This thesis includes three sets of original data, which alone make contributions to further study of women's parties and of gender issues in political communication. First, is the database of information about women's parties in Europe, including their party labels, party leaders, election years and results, where available (Appendix A). Additionally, I constructed a dataset of European women's party manifestos 1990-2020. I hold the manifestos both in their original language and translated into English. My intention is to publish both datasets for use in further investigation of women's parties and their communication.

Additionally, the dataset of *feminist party* and candidate tweets collected over several election campaigns presents highly useful data for future study of *feminist parties'* communication online, as well as further study of small/niche party communication and communication on gender-based issues. The JSON files of these tweets can be made publicly available via a data repository. Finally, in future publication of the research presented in this thesis, I will include the R code used to analyse the data, to allow for replication study.

Chapter 4. Issue concerns in women's parties' election manifestos

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the issue concerns of European women's parties and to evaluate whether the issue concerns of European *feminist parties*- a sub-type of the women's party family- are accurately and effectively communicated across party manifestos, news media, and social media. Women's parties have emerged consistently across Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries yet have received little empirical attention. In particular, in contemporary European politics, *feminist parties* have regularly formed and have achieved electoral success across second-order elections. Moreover, research has indicated that *feminist parties* may be successful in increasing the salience of gender-based issues on the issue agenda and in other parties' manifestos (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Cowell-Meyers, 2017). It is therefore important to investigate the role that contemporary *feminist parties* may be playing in the (re)mobilisation and competition over gender-based issues that is being witnessed across Europe in recent years (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021).

While *feminist parties* may be acting as critical actors of women's representation, we know little about the specific issues that they mobilise around or how they communicate them. In fact, comparative research has yet to examine the issue concerns of the broader women's party family in detail. Investigation of women's parties' issue concerns is thus needed to better conceptualise the party family and distinguish the different types of women's parties. Investigating the issue concerns of contemporary European *feminist parties* will also provide a step toward situating these parties in the field of party politics by approaching their issue platforms as constructed by strategic political actors.

To investigate *feminist parties*' strategic issue communication, we therefore first need to know what the issue concerns of women's parties are and whether *feminist parties* do constitute a distinct type of women's party. In this Chapter I present the results of a mixed-method inductive text analysis of European women's parties' election manifestos over a 30-year period. Through this in-depth comparative analysis, I aim to establish the shared issues concerns of the women's party family and to investigate whether past typological frameworks of women's parties have an empirical basis. I begin in the next section by outlining the specific research questions that I address in my analysis.

4.1 Research Questions

In Chapter 2, I outlined that the extant comparative research on women's parties has provided convincing evidence for the existence of women's party family based on shared naming patterns, emergent conditions, and ideological outlook (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). However, the ideology of the women's party family is empirically understudied. At present, the shared ideology uniting women's parties is defined in broad terms as 'a desire for gender equality, meaning that women and men should have equal citizenship rights and a pro-women perspective on social justice' (Cowell-Meyers, 2020: 13).

This definition is deliberately broad because past research has sought to acknowledge that the concept of gender equality can be contextual to individual parties as well as different political, social, and cultural contexts (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020, see also Beckwith, 2000). Indeed, women's parties span different positions on the left-right ideological continuum (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020) and case study evidence indicates that different women's parties have campaigned on a variety of issues including reproductive rights, gendered violence, social policy, economics, the environment, and foreign policy (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019a; Karan et al., 2008; Levin, 1999; Zaborsky, 1985).

However, the disadvantage of this deliberately broad definition is that it offers little indication of what the shared *issue concerns* of women's parties may be, making measurement of party ideology empirically complex. It is particularly difficult because comparative party politics research has commonly measured the ideology of parties or party families using the issue concerns and positions presented in their party manifestos (see Dinas and Gemenis (2010), for an overview of these methods). Using issue salience and issue position, party ideology is determined by placing parties on a left-right continuum, often encompassing both economic and non-economic (authoritarian vs liberal) dimensions (Dinas and Gemenis, 2010: 430, see also: Laver, 2001).

Such approaches may be inapplicable to women's parties which occupy various positions on the left-right continuum or even occupy a 'third dimension' outside of the traditional left-right cleavage (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 13). Instead, Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020) argue for an alternative approach to ideology in which it is understood as 'a body of normative or normative-related ideas about the nature of man[kind] and society as well as the organisation and purposes of society' ((Sainsbury, 1980: 8) in Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 12). Using this definition, the ideology of the women's party family is defined as a shared commitment to values such as gender equality and social justice, rather than a specific position on the left-right continuum.

While this means that examination of the women's party family cannot as easily be approached through conventional methods, defining ideology in this way does not preclude rigorous examination of party ideology or specific issue concerns. Mudde (2013), in one of the seminal works aiming to conceptualise the ideology of the extreme right party family in Europe, advocates for inductive analysis of party material such as election manifestos and internal communication. Analysis of these texts can reveal both the specific issues that parties mobilise around as well as the latent ideological themes that underpin them.

Applying such an approach to women's parties would then address the gaps in the literature about the extent to which norms of gender equality and social justice *are* present in women's parties' platforms and identify what commonalities might exist in specific issue concerns of women's parties.

Therefore, in this Chapter I have used inductive mixed-method text analyses to analyse the issue concerns in European women's party manifestos to address the following research question:⁴⁰

RQ1: What are the shared issue concerns of the women's party family?

Following this exploration of women's parties' issue concerns, I then investigate the supposed differentiation in issue focus between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. As discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.3, pp.18-21), extant research on women's parties' emergence has identified two types of women's parties with supposedly different issue concerns (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). *Essentialist women's parties* emerge in contexts of political and economic instability, with the aim of representing women's interests as new political institutions and processes are developed (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Ishiyama, 2003; Shin, 2020). Alternatively, *feminist parties* are typically formed in established democracies where there is a perceived imbalance between women's economic empowerment and their political representation (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). Their platforms focus explicitly on feminist issues and seek to challenge patriarchal structures and discourses (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020).

Comparative research on party emergence offers indicative evidence of the existence of these two subtypes of women's parties (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). Additionally, the typological framework constructed by Shin (2020, see Table 2.1 on p.20) grounds these party types in past research on the different ideological approaches identified across women's movements

⁴⁰ As I offer the first large-scale comprehensive examination of women's parties' issue concerns, I approach my investigation with exploratory research questions and utilise inductive methods rather than approaching the analysis with preconceived expectations of what issues women's parties will emphasise.

(Alvarez, 1990; Molyneux, 1988). Taking this extant literature together with case study evidence of the heterogeneity in women's parties' approaches to women's representation (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Dominelli and Jonsdottir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019a; Karan et al., 2008; Levin, 1999; Zaborsky, 1985), there is good indication of the existence of these two types of women's party.

However, this typology is yet to be empirically substantiated through cross-national examination of women's parties' issue concerns. Without such examination, it is unclear whether these two types of women's party exist in practice and whether they do in fact take different approaches toward the representation of women and gender-based issues. Addressing these questions is important to both better conceptualise the women's party family and to take a step toward the inclusion of women's parties in comparative party politics research. Therefore, the second research question that I answer in this Chapter is:

RQ2: Do *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* constitute distinct types of women's party?

To answer these two research questions, I undertook a computational text analysis of an original dataset of 45 European women's party manifestos spanning a 30-year period and a thematic analysis on a subset of six manifestos representing the breadth and variety of parties within the full dataset. My analysis provides both a broad comparative investigation of issue emphasis across the party family as well as an in-depth analysis of parties' issue positions and framing. I also empirically test the differentiation in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

The final aim of this Chapter is to examine the extent to which European *feminist parties* can be defined as niche parties. In Chapter 2 I theorised that *feminist* type women's parties meet the criteria of a niche party because they mobilise around a narrow set of gender-based issues that are relatively neglected by mainstream parties (Bischof, 2017; Bischof and Wagner, 2020; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). Conversely, I argued that *essentialist women's parties* would not be classed as niche parties because they supposedly operate on traditional issue areas such as economics and welfare. Therefore, they do not mobilise around novel issues and accordingly are not considered niche (Bischof, 2017).

My analysis of women's parties' manifestos is not a direct test of party nicheness as I do not measure women's party issue emphasis relative to other parties. However, my results offer indication of whether different types of women's parties appear to strategically emphasise

specific issue areas in their election platforms which would meet the definitional criteria of a niche party.

To answer my research questions, I utilised a mixed-method inductive text analysis. In the following section, I provide a brief summary of the data and research design for this analysis. I then provide specific details on the preparation of the manifesto text for the range of quantitative and qualitative methods that I implemented.

4.2 Data and Methods

In Chapter 3 I provided information on the collection of women's party manifestos and a rationale for my choice of a mixed-method inductive research design (Section 3.1, pp.57-68). To summarise this discussion, the data for this analysis is an original dataset of 45 European women's party manifestos collected from a 30-year period, 1990-2020. I identified women's parties through past literature and a key word search of electoral and party databases. I then collected manifestos of identified parties from existing manifesto databases, national archives and libraries, and party websites. Table 3.1 (pp.62-63) provides details on the party, year, and election type of each manifesto collected. A summary is provided in Table 4.1. Parties were categorised as either *essentialist* or *feminist* following past research, party naming patterns, and information of party's emergent conditions (see pp.61-63). Finally, before conducting my analysis, I translated the manifestos into English using machine translation software (see Section 3.1.2, pp.64-65, for a discussion of this process).

4.2.1 Quantitative Analysis

My analyses of the manifestos followed a mixed method research design (see Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3 for more detail). The first stage involved quantitative text analysis using a range of methods that utilise bag-of-words models, where words are extracted from their context within a document and placed into a matrix (or bag) for further analysis (see Section 3.1.4, pp.68-70, for a full discussion of why I chose this approach).

In order to prepare the manifestos for analysis, the text first had to be constructed as a bag-of-words and a number of pre-processing techniques applied to improve the performance of the models and the utility of the results. Using the *quanteda* package in R, the manifesto texts were first tokenised, meaning split into smaller units, in this case individual words.

Table 4.1 Summary of manifesto data

	Municipal	Devolved Assembly	National	European Parliament	Total
Essentialist women's parties	2	1	10	0	13
Feminist parties	7	0	14	11	32
Total	9	1	24	11	45

Notes: A full summary of the manifesto dataset can be found in Table 3.1 and more information on individual women's parties in Appendix A

This first step is crucial to implement bag-of-words analysis techniques such as frequency analysis and topic modelling, which count the occurrence of individual terms in a corpus. I also removed punctuation, numbers and symbols, which add unnecessary noise to the data.

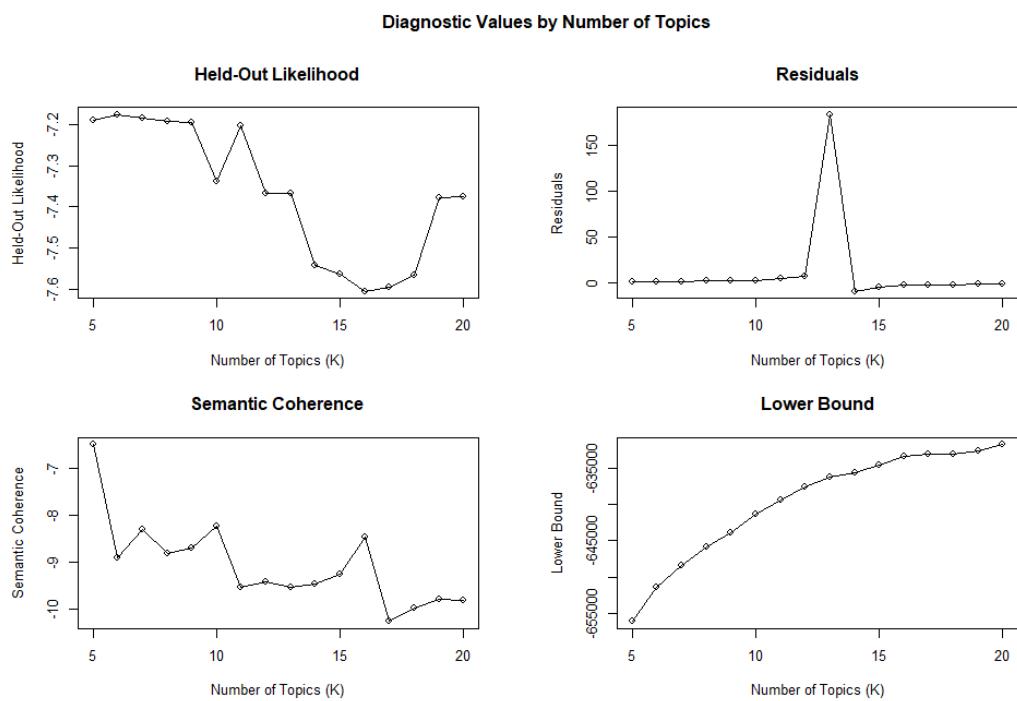
Second, I applied several well-established techniques to 'normalise' the text, meaning to 'transform the words into a more uniform form' (Welbers et al., 2017: 251). Text was converted to lowercase, solving the issue of the computer not recognising two identical words as the same if one is capitalised. A function was employed to remove stopwords such as 'the', 'and', 'if' etc. These words are often irrelevant to the focus of study and their removal is beneficial in reducing the dataset size which in turn reduces 'computational load' (Welbers, Van Atteveldt, and Benoit, 2017: 251).

As well as stopwords, I removed a dictionary of party names and country/city names from the corpus. This improves the ability of the frequency analysis and topic models to identify frequently occurring issue-related terms rather than party labels, which are likely to be highly frequently mentioned in manifestos. Additionally, commonly co-occurring words that featured together more than 20 times throughout the corpus were conjoined to create single terms (known as bi-grams), thus for example 'human_rights' is identified as one term in the corpus.

Finally, stemming was applied to convert words to their 'stems' or base forms, using a rule-based algorithm. This is beneficial for the frequency analyses and topic models as it treats words with the same stem, for example 'economic', 'economy', 'economies' as 'econom', making it easier to identify common themes among texts. As a final step, the corpus was converted into a document term matrix (DTM) with 5,678 features and 87.18% sparsity.

I conducted word frequency and keyness analysis on the DTM of women's party manifestos using the *quanteda* package in R. Following this, I identified latent topics across the manifestos using structural topic models (STMs) in R's *stm* package (Roberts et al., 2019). STMs use an unsupervised machine learning algorithm to identify latent meaning across the texts by clustering words into topics that appear with a high frequency and exclusivity within texts.

Figure 4.1 Model diagnostic for STM, comparing 5-20 topics



Thus, it is not only the frequency of words that is important but also their likelihood of appearing alongside other words within a text. Human interpretation is then required to assign labels to the clustered terms. STM therefore combines quantitative analysis of word frequency with qualitative interpretation of shared meaning. Structural topic modelling is particularly useful as document-level metadata can be added into the model and comparisons in topic prevalence can be made across document-level characteristics. Hence, I first use the STM to identify topics across the full corpus of women's party manifestos. I then add party type -either *essentialist women's party* or *feminist party*- as a covariate and use the 'estimateEffect' function to perform a regression that compares topic prevalence across the different party types.

As the topic models require an element of human interpretation to make meaning of the outputted topics, diagnostic tests are run to fit a model that balances exclusivity, the frequency of independent words across topics (Roberts et al., 2019), and semantic coherence, a measure of how frequently terms co-occur across topics (Mimno et al., 2011). As the purpose of STM in this project is to act as a precursor to more in-depth qualitative study, semantic coherence is prioritised. Diagnostic tests in Figure 4.1 suggest a model containing five topics to be the optimal number to produce robust and interpretable results.

4.2.2 Qualitative analysis

Following the quantitative analysis on the full dataset of 45 women's party manifestos, I performed a thematic analysis on a sub-sample of six manifestos, representing a variety of women's parties across time, geography, and election type (see Table 3.2 in Chapter 3 and Table 4.2).

The aim was to investigate in greater detail the specific policies advocated by different parties and how these policies were framed. To conduct the thematic analysis, I followed the well-established method developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (see Table 3.3 on p.72). From the deep reading of the manifestos a set of 18 codes were generated, with many containing several sub-codes. Codes indicated both specific issue concerns, for example 'education' as well as issue framings, for example 'Mention of patriarchy/structural discrimination'.

The full table of codes is presented in Appendix B. Each manifesto was coded using this schema, which was updated and modified when new codes were identified or when codes were not a full and accurate fit to the text. This process was repeated until a point of saturation was reached, and no new codes were identified. The coding process is outlined in more detail in Chapter 3 (pp.72-73).

Overall, the mixed-method research design allows me to both map the issue concerns that are emphasised in women's party manifestos using quantitative methods and to dig deeper into the ideological approach underpinning those issue concerns through qualitative analysis. In the following sections I present my findings on the shared issue concerns across the women's party family and differences in issue concern and framing across types of women's parties. I end with a reflection on the extent to which the issue concerns presented in party manifestos support the classification of *feminist parties* as niche parties.

Table 4.2 Sub-sample of women's party manifestos for thematic analysis

Country	Party	Typology	Year	Election Type
Russia	Zhenshchiny Rossii (WOR)	Essentialist	1993	General Election
UK	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC)	Essentialist	1998	Devolved Assembly
Spain	Iniciativa Feminista (IF)	Feminist	2009	European Parliament
Bulgaria	Partiya na bulgarskite zheni (POBW)	Essentialist	2013	European Parliament
UK	Women's Equality Party (WEP)	Feminist	2017	General Election
Finland	Feministinen Puolue (FP)	Feminist	2019	European Parliament

4.3 Shared issue concerns of the women's party family

4.3.1 *Relative word frequency analysis*

The first aim of my empirical analysis is to investigate what (if any) issue concerns are shared across the women's party family. I begin with an initial exploration of the most relatively frequent terms within women's parties' manifestos, which offers a first indication of the issues emphasised by women's parties. I follow this with analysis of a structural topic model that identifies latent topics within the full corpus. Throughout, I substantiate the quantitative results with supporting evidence and examples from the themes that I have identified in the thematic analysis on the sub-sample of women's party manifestos.

As a first exploration, Table 4.3 presents the 30 terms that occur with the highest relative frequency across the manifesto corpus, where 'relative frequency' denotes the expected word frequency per 100 terms. For a more expansive overview, Figure 4.2 visualises the 100 most relatively frequent terms as a word cloud, with more frequent terms appearing in larger text. The most common terms in the corpus relate to women's rights and equality, such as 'women', 'right' and 'equal'.⁴¹ These terms have a high relative frequency and high document frequency, each present in least 90% of the manifestos. Figure 4.2 also shows a high frequency of other terms related to a broader theme of equality such as 'free', 'freedom', 'protect', and 'discrimin[ation]'.

⁴¹ KWIC searches indicate that the term 'work', the second most frequent term in the corpus is predominantly used as an action phrase found in many political documents, for example "we will **work** to...". Explanation of KWIC analysis is provided on p.112.

Table 4.3 Top 30 relatively frequent terms in women's parties' manifestos

Feature	Relative frequency	Document Frequency
<i>women</i>	87.25	44
<i>work</i>	47.75	42
<i>social</i>	33.30	42
<i>right</i>	33.10	40
<i>people</i>	31.67	43
<i>equal</i>	28.05	41
<i>state</i>	25.87	36
<i>children</i>	25.85	40
<i>develop</i>	24.78	37
<i>need</i>	23.97	41
<i>polit</i>	23.62	40
<i>polici</i>	23.48	39
<i>educ</i>	22.14	36
<i>society</i>	20.70	41
<i>men</i>	19.92	36
<i>increase</i>	19.88	40
<i>violenc</i>	19.62	38
<i>ensur</i>	18.67	33
<i>support</i>	18.66	36
<i>free</i>	18.42	42
<i>famili</i>	18.33	35
<i>live</i>	18.13	41
<i>care</i>	17.63	38
<i>school</i>	17.37	31
<i>eu</i>	16.96	25
<i>life</i>	16.29	38
<i>econom</i>	16.15	40
<i>europ</i>	16.03	23
<i>protect</i>	15.99	39
<i>make</i>	15.75	39

Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

Figure 4.2 Top 100 most relatively frequent terms in women's parties' manifestos



Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

I found gender equality and equality for all people to be a theme that was highly prevalent in the thematic analysis of the subsample of women's party manifestos (see Appendix G for a visualisation of the main themes found in the thematic analysis). In the thematic analysis I observed both an emphasis of gender equality but also an interest in equality and justice for minoritised groups. In particular, I found that even those parties that were most vocal about gender equality and women's rights were equally, if not more, vocal about the broader necessity of social justice and equal treatment of all people.

For example, Feministinen Puolue (FP) begin their manifesto: “we defend human rights and place the principle of non-discrimination at the heart of politics” (FP, 2019). Women of Russia (WOR) claim to defend the “the rights and interests of Russian Citizens, regardless of gender, nationality, social status, religious beliefs and political views” (WOR, 1993). In fact, in the case of the Party of Bulgarian Women (POBW), the central focus of the party platform is social justice for all people, with no specific mention of the need for gender equality. Where women’s parties do discuss gender equality, it is often framed within a broader narrative of social justice. A recurring message articulated by the UK’s Women’s Equality Party (WEP) was that “equality is better for everyone” and that women’s equality contributes to broader social justice (WEP,

2017). This is supported in Figure 4.2 which demonstrates that the terms ‘human_right’, ‘everyon[e]’ and ‘people’ are also highly frequent across the corpus.

Thus, I find empirical evidence in support of the definition of women’s party ideology as centered around gender equality (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). Although my findings suggest that women’s parties’ focus extends beyond the single axis of gender equality to include other minoritised groups, as all manifestos in the thematic analysis sub-sample included policies supporting a range of minority groups beyond women. Returning to the quantitative data, this focus is demonstrated in Figure 4.2 where the top 100 most relatively frequent terms in the corpus include ‘disabl’ and ‘sexual’.⁴²

As well as a focus on gender equality, Table 4.3 indicates several other issue areas emphasised by women’s parties. Terms such as ‘children’, ‘education’ and ‘school’, ‘social’, ‘care’ and ‘famil’ indicate an emphasis of social policies including care and education. Terms such as ‘econom’ occur with high frequency and are easily associated with economic policy. Whereas the term ‘violenc’ also features highly yet requires further analysis to interpret the associated issue area.

Considering social policy in more detail, one of the major shared themes that I identified through the thematic analysis was a concern with social justice, both as a social virtue and in specific policy priorities (see thematic map in Appendix G). Theoretically, social justice relates to the goal of equal treatment of all people within a society (Alkire, 2003). In practice, this translates to the fair and just distribution of opportunities and resources. The concept of social justice is particularly familiar within feminist thought as it pertains to the equitable treatment of all people within a society, regardless of their personal characteristics and calls for the fair distribution of resources.

This commitment to social justice is first present in women’s parties advocacy of equality for women and minoritised groups. It is also present in their advocacy of specific social policies. A shared theme across women’s parties is that they advocate policies for increased and improved provision of childcare and education. For example, all women’s parties promoted policies advocating for better provision of childcare, especially providing increased support for single mothers. They often framed these arguments around the needs of children and the benefits to wider society:

⁴² KWIC searches show that the term ‘sexual’ is often used in conjunction with ‘violence’, however there are also frequent mentions of “sexual orientation”.

“Preservation of the state system of preschool and out-of-school children’s institutions and ensuring their accessibility for every family” (WOR, 1993)

“High-quality, affordable day-care should be available to all who need it.” (NIWC, 1998)

“States ensure sufficient and quality public services for the care of dependents and minors from age 0 to 3 or until the date of entry into standardized education.” (IF, 2009)

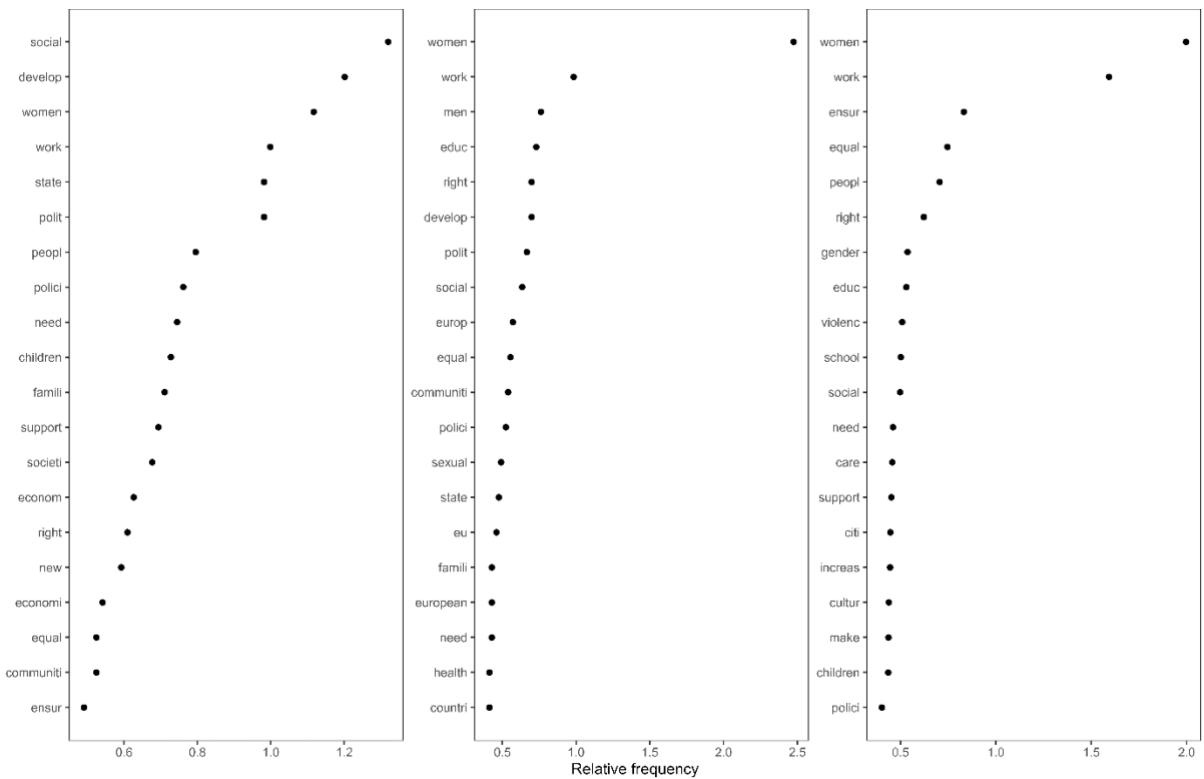
“Construction of a sufficient number of municipal and national centres for children, covering a maximum number of children in their spare capacity and receiving appropriate funding to do so.” (POBW, 2013)

Both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest an emphasis of social policy issues in women’s party manifestos and a common framing of these issues around social justice, with reference to the need for equality for all people. This therefore offers good empirical evidence to substantiate the definition of the shared ideology of the women’s party family as focused on ‘gender equality’ and a ‘pro-women’s perspective on social justice’ (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020).

To further explore these shared issue concerns, I map the developments in issue focus of women’s parties over time. Figure 4.3 plots the 20 most frequent words (weighted by document length) in manifestos published in each decade of my 30-year time period. The emphasis of social policy is consistent over time, as across the 30-year period terms including ‘social’, ‘children’, and ‘family’ are consistently frequent. However, some differences are present, as Figure 4.3 shows that education emerges as more of a focus in the later manifestos, with ‘educ[ation]’ becoming frequent in the 2000-2009 and 2010-2020 groups and ‘care’ and ‘school’ among the most frequent terms in the 2010-2020 group.

Figure 4.3 also demonstrates that some issue concerns appear only with a high relative frequency in particular decades. For example, ‘violence’ only become a highly frequent term in the 2010-2020 manifestos, despite featuring with a high relative frequency in the full dataset. However, rather than changes in issue focus over time, this may instead reflect differences in issue focus across different types of women’s party. Of the 33 manifestos in the 2010-2020 group, 28 are produced by a *feminist party*. Therefore, observed developments over time may instead be differences across party type. In the next section of this Chapter, I will explore this in more detail.

Figure 4.3 Distribution of relatively frequent terms in manifestos by decade



Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps.

4.3.2 Structural topic models

Next, to investigate shared issue concerns across women's party manifestos in greater detail, I implemented a structural topic model (STM). The results of a model fitted with 5 topics are shown in Table 4.4. It presents the 10 most frequent and exclusive terms that are associated with each of the five topics produced by the STM, along with the labels that I have assigned to each topic based on these terms. Figure 4.4 plots the prevalence of each of these topics within the corpus of manifestos.

I will now discuss each topic in turn, explaining why I have assigned each topic label and exploring the most frequent and exclusive terms through KWIC analysis. KWIC (Key Word in Context) analysis allows me to search for a 'key word' within the corpus and produces a window of words around that key word which reveals the immediate context in which it is used. In essence it allows me to examine specific terms from the STM topics within the context of the sentence in which they are used in the manifesto, providing deeper insight into their meaning and context.⁴³

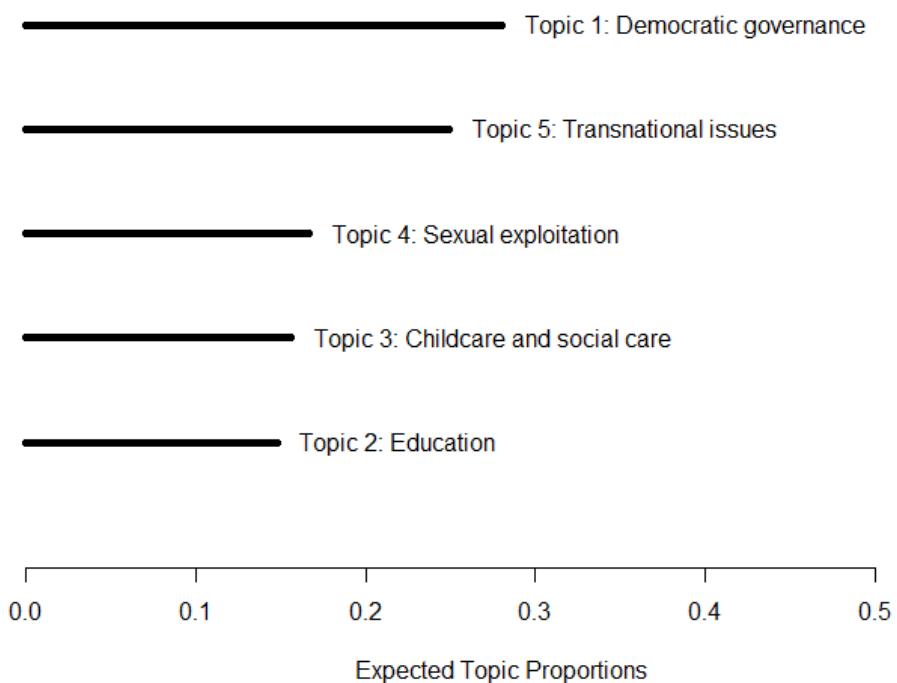
⁴³ KWIC analyses works with the corpus of manifesto text *before* it was transformed into a bag-of-words model where information about the order or structure of words in the document is discarded.

Table 4.4 STM topics and their top 10 most frequent and exclusive terms in women's parties' manifestos

Topic 1: Democratic governance	Topic 2: Education	Topic 3: Childcare and social care	Topic 4: Sexual exploitation	Topic 5: Transnational issues
pension	citi	across	sexist_viol	climat
state	municip	childcar	articl	welfar
labor	racism	recognis	propos	secur
rural	anti	disabled_women	sexist	asylum
citizen	lgbtq	tackl	prostitut	feminist
parti	school	social_car	audiovisu	lgbtqia
civil	knowledg	talent	male	climate_chang
creation	public_transport	parental_leav	patriarch	global
modern	car	push	european_parlia	militari
interest	preschool	carer	european	europ

Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

Figure 4.4 Expected topic proportion of STM topics in women's party manifestos



Let us begin with Topic 1, which I have labelled ‘Democratic governance’, and which is the most prevalent topic in the corpus. It is identified by terms such as ‘civil’, ‘citizen’, ‘partici[pation], and ‘state’. KWIC analysis indicated that the term ‘modern’ is often used in conjunction with ‘civilisation’ and ‘society’, primarily by parties competing in unstable or newly formed democratic contexts. This topic therefore groups together terms relating to democracy, governance, and political stability and legitimacy.

In the thematic analysis, I also identified a consistent theme across manifestos relating to democracy and legitimacy. In particular there was a link between the representation of women and minoritised groups and democratic legitimacy, as summarised in WOR’s battle cry: “Without women there is no democracy!” (WOR, 1993).

The second issue-related topic identified by the STM is labelled ‘Topic 2: Education’. This topic clusters terms such as ‘school’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘preschool’. However, it also includes terms relating to local level governance, such as ‘citi’ and ‘municip’, as well as ‘public_transport’ which is often an issue governed by municipal councils. However, I have assigned it the label of ‘Education’ as KWIC searches of terms such as ‘anti’, ‘racism’ and ‘lgbtq’ find evidence of their inclusion in some *feminist parties*’ education policies. For example, advocating a norm critical curriculum:

“Reduce sexual harassment with norm-critical education, stop racism from getting a hold in the everyday life of young people and improve the study results of boys by dismantling harmful masculinity norms, such as anti-education attitudes and low levels of reading.” FP (2019)

Thus, some terms within this topic appear to be drawn from a smaller number of women’s parties’ platforms. Nevertheless, in the word frequency analysis (Table 4.3), terms such as ‘educ’ and ‘school’ were found to be among the top 30 relatively frequent terms in the full corpus. Figure 4.3 shows that education emerges as more of a focus in the later manifestos as the term ‘educ[ation]’ is relatively frequent in the 2000-2009 and 2010-2020 groups and ‘school’ is among the most frequent terms in the 2010-2020 group. Thus, taking these analyses together, there is indication that education is a salient issue across women’s parties, but perhaps the STM has clustered terms drawn from specific policies of some women’s parties which have a high semantic coherence.

The third topic identified by the STM is labelled ‘Topic 3: Childcare and social care’ as it groups terms relating to social care and childcare to terms relating to equal parenting as demonstrated

clearly by ‘parental_leave’.⁴⁴ Social care (and social policy more broadly) is an issue area that was frequently mentioned in the word frequency analysis and I found all parties in the thematic analysis sub-sample to discuss policies on increasing the provision of childcare. The STM offers further evidence that women’s parties emphasise social policies that disproportionately impact women, such as childcare and social care.

The fourth topic identified by the STM is labelled ‘Topic 4: Sexual exploitation and violence’. It groups together terms relating to exploitation and violence towards women (‘sexist violence’ and ‘prostitution’) alongside themes of patriarchy and discrimination, as seen in the terms ‘sexist’, ‘male’ and ‘patriarch’. Returning to the frequency analysis, Table 4.3 shows that the term ‘violence’ features among the top 20 most relatively frequent terms within the dataset. However, Figure 4.3 shows that it only enters the most frequently mentioned terms in the 2010-2020 manifestos. As previously discussed, these manifestos are almost exclusively from *feminist parties*. Therefore, while this topic has been identified by the STM, assessed alongside the word frequency analysis, the results suggest that sexual violence may be a salient issue among *feminist parties* but not *essentialist women’s parties*. This is a finding that I will explore in more detail in the following section.

The final topic identified by the STM has been labelled ‘Topic 5: Transnational issues’. Frequent and exclusive terms in this topic relate to transnational governance (‘europe’ and ‘global’) and transnational issues such as foreign policy and security (‘security’, ‘militari’, ‘asylum’) and the environment (‘climate’). This is perhaps the most interesting result from the STM, as terms relating to foreign policy did not feature with a high relative frequency in the full corpus (Table 4.3), or across any decade (Figure 4.3).

Nevertheless, KWIC analysis of the term ‘security’ finds it to be mentioned by 13 of the 20 parties represented in the dataset. Furthermore, in the thematic analysis, I found several parties to include foreign policy pledges:

“*Strengthening the international authority of Russia, developing an equal, mutually beneficial cooperation with CIS countries, and other foreign states in the interests of stability, peace and security.*” (WOR, 1993)

⁴⁴ The terms ‘talent’ and ‘recognise’ in this topic are less clear, yet KWIC analysis finds that these terms are used by self-identified *feminist parties*, in particular the UK Women’s Equality Party, to promote the advantages of equal parenting and flexible working in allowing businesses and the broader economy to ‘recognise’ and benefit from women’s ‘talent’. The connection of childcare to parental leave and women’s employment may explain why this topic has limited prevalence across the corpus despite terms such as ‘social’, ‘state’, ‘children’, ‘educ[ation]’, ‘famili’, ‘school’, and ‘care’ appearing with a high relative frequency within manifestos and across the full dataset (each of these terms appears in at least 31 of the 45 manifestos in the dataset). (Table 4.3).

“Finland must act to prevent military threats, to strengthen arms control and to further disarmament.” (FP, 2019)

However, KWIC searches of other terms in this topic such as ‘environ[ment]’ and ‘asylum’ finds that they predominantly feature in self-identified *feminist parties*’ manifestos. This provides some indication that this topic is one that is coherent in the corpus but perhaps not shared across women’s parties. Therefore, I will explore this in more detail in the following section where I compare the differences in issue concern between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties*.

I end this section with a summary of my findings from analysis of the full corpus of women’s party manifestos. Utilising word frequency analysis, structural topic modelling and thematic analysis, I have identified two core themes within the women’s party family: (i) the pursuit of equal rights for women and minoritised groups and (ii) the promotion of social policy oriented towards social justice. Across parties I found mutual emphasis of discourses around the protection of women and minority rights, and particularly policies to support vulnerable women. Parties commonly framed these policies within a narrative of social justice and equality for all people. In a similar vein, I identified a shared concern across women’s parties with social policy, specifically in areas like childcare, social care, and education, which disproportionately impact women. Word frequency and structural topic modelling has indicated that these issues are consistently salient across the women’s party family. Therefore, my analyses present empirical evidence that supports the definition of the shared ideology of the women’s party family as focused on ‘gender equality’ and a ‘pro women perspective on social justice’ (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020).⁴⁵

However, while I have identified shared issue concerns that unite the heterogenous group of women’s parties, my analyses also consistently suggested differences in issue concern across the party family. For example, some issues were only mentioned frequently in certain time periods or by particular parties. In particular, the results of the STM developed in more detail through qualitative analyses offer early indication of a difference in issue focus between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties*. Therefore, in the next section, I investigate the extent to which the two types of women’s party do in fact have different issue concerns.

⁴⁵ In this Chapter, I have discussed the ideology of women’s parties as a collective, with the aim of evaluating the shared ideology of the party family. However, it is important to note that, like issue concern, the ideology of individual women’s parties is influenced by their specific political and socio-economic contexts. This is recognised in Cowell-Meyers et al.’s (2020) suggestion that women’s parties may operate on a ‘third dimension’, beyond the left-right or liberal-authoritarian cleavages. Hence, while singular parties’ ideologies are nuanced and context-dependent, the discussion I have presented in this Chapter focuses more broadly on the commonalities in women’s parties’ approaches to the representation of sex/gender.

4.4 Differences in issue focus between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*

To test the extent to which *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* do mention different issues in their election manifestos, I first categorised the 20 women's parties for which I have collected a manifesto into these two categories. This classification was based on parties' emergent conditions, naming patterns and previous research (the classifications can be found in Table 3.1). I categorised nine parties as *essentialist women's parties*, comprising 13 of the 45 manifestos, with 11 *feminist parties* producing 32 manifestos. This split is not necessarily an accurate representation of the variety of European women's parties but is likely also due to the greater availability of data on contemporary *feminist parties* in Western Europe.

I used word frequency analyses and keyness analysis to examine what issues are relatively emphasised by each type of women's party. I then add party type as a covariate in the STM presented in the previous section to compare the extent to which *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* emphasise topics. Throughout I supplement the quantitative results with the rich data from the thematic analysis (which contained a balance between the two party types) to provide a more nuanced understanding of the differences in *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*' issue concerns and framing of issues.

4.4.1 Relative word frequency analysis

As an initial exploration, Table 4.5 compares the relative frequency of terms in *essentialist women's party* and *feminist party* manifestos. First, in support of my analysis in the previous section, I find a high relative frequency of terms relating to women's rights and equality in each group. In the *essentialist women's party* manifestos, among the most frequently mentioned words are 'women', 'right', 'protect' and 'free'. In *feminist party* manifestos, the emphasis of 'gender equality' is particularly apparent with terms such as 'women' and 'gender' as well as 'equal' and 'discrimin[ation]' featuring with a high relative frequency. This supports the earlier finding that a commitment to gender equality is shared across women's parties.

However, the differences in language use, specifically the emphasis of 'gender' and 'discrimin[ation]' in *feminist party* manifestos, indicates a difference in focus across party type. This is an argument that is supported through the results of the thematic analysis. Overall, I found support for equality for women and other minoritised groups to be a shared theme across the women's parties in the sub-sample of manifestos (see thematic map in Appendix G). However, I also identified a difference in how *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* framed their discussion of gender equality.

Table 4.5 Top 30 most relatively frequent terms in *essentialist women's party* and *feminist party* manifestos

Essentialist			Feminist		
Feature	Relative Frequency	Document Frequency	Feature	Relative Frequency	Document Frequency
<i>women</i>	17.43	10	<i>women</i>	74.52	34
<i>state</i>	16.55	9	<i>work</i>	42.09	33
<i>social</i>	16.46	10	<i>right</i>	28.81	33
<i>develop</i>	13.57	10	<i>peopl</i>	25.74	34
<i>children</i>	10.87	9	<i>equal</i>	25.52	33
<i>citizen</i>	10.47	11	<i>need</i>	19.41	32
<i>free</i>	8.16	10	<i>polici</i>	19.14	31
<i>construct</i>	8.10	9	<i>violenc</i>	19.02	34
<i>famili</i>	7.82	7	<i>social</i>	17.67	32
<i>polit</i>	7.17	8	<i>men</i>	17.60	30
<i>arti</i>	6.74	9	<i>polit</i>	16.89	32
<i>pension</i>	6.49	9	<i>educ</i>	16.25	27
<i>people</i>	6.45	9	<i>europ</i>	16.03	23
<i>educ</i>	6.23	9	<i>societi</i>	15.90	33
<i>work</i>	6.15	9	<i>gender</i>	15.83	29
<i>new</i>	5.95	10	<i>children</i>	15.81	31
<i>nation</i>	5.87	8	<i>increas</i>	15.77	32
<i>citi</i>	5.84	5	<i>care</i>	15.48	31
<i>econom</i>	5.63	9	<i>support</i>	15.18	31
<i>economi</i>	5.50	7	<i>school</i>	14.88	26
<i>activ</i>	5.19	9	<i>ensur</i>	14.87	25
<i>benefit</i>	5.12	8	<i>make</i>	14.61	33
<i>protect</i>	5.10	9	<i>live</i>	14.40	32
<i>society</i>	5.10	8	<i>discrimin</i>	13.93	32
<i>create</i>	4.99	9	<i>eu</i>	13.84	21
<i>need</i>	4.88	9	<i>feminist</i>	13.41	24
<i>law</i>	4.67	8	<i>time</i>	13.09	30
<i>polici</i>	4.58	8	<i>life</i>	12.55	31
<i>increase</i>	4.50	8	<i>countri</i>	12.52	29
<i>right</i>	4.46	7	<i>develop</i>	12.00	27

Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

Essentialist women's parties mostly used language focused on diversity and tolerance, an example being the POBW commitment to “ethnic tolerance and active integration through programmes and legislative initiatives” (POBW, 2013). Their policies primarily focused on practical support for socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, such as single mothers, disabled people, and the unemployed.

Feminist parties also supported policies of this type but extended support of minority groups into statements against discrimination such as racism and homophobia and made explicit reference to structural discrimination and intersectionality. This is summarised in the following quote from WEP:

“Our policies aim to recognise and address the fact that many women experience additional inequalities due to the intersections of socio-economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, disability, immigration status and gender identity.” (WEP, 2017.)

In addition, all women's parties in the thematic analysis sub-sample framed other policies through the lens of equality for women and minoritised groups. Yet here again I identified a difference in the specific frames used by *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. For example, WOR (1993) shape their economic policy around the “labor interests of youth, women, including pregnant women and nursing mothers, single parents with children, persons of pre-retirement age, disabled people”. On the other hand, the self-identified *feminist parties* in the sample took this one step further in adopting an explicit intersectional lens across their issue platforms, as seen in this WEP quote:

“Over 85% of such cuts and changes affect women, and BAME women and disabled women are hit particularly hard.” (WEP, 2017)

Thus, my analysis indicates that different types of women's parties do share a concern for women's rights and equality for minoritised groups. However, *feminist parties* utilise more language around gender equality and make explicit connections to the structural discrimination of women and minoritised groups, whereas *essentialist women's parties* do not engage with these discourses.

This difference in framing of support for minority groups complements earlier work that has argued that *essentialist women's parties* focus on women's practical needs whereas *feminist parties* campaign on women's strategic interests (Shin, 2020, see also Alvarez, 1990; 1999; Molyneux, 1988). My analysis indicates that *essentialist women's parties* focus on securing protection and benefits for minoritised groups, while *feminist parties* challenge the structures

of marginalisation themselves. This therefore suggests a distinction in ideological approach between the two types of women's party.

However, an alternate consideration is that these differences in parties' framing of rights and equality for women and minoritised groups instead stem from the socioeconomic and cultural contexts in which individual women's parties emerge and compete in elections. *Essentialist women's parties* often framed the representation of social groups within appeals to political stability. For example, POBW (2013) begin their manifesto by recognising that the Bulgarian population "feel an acute need for genuine guarantees of security and stability" and therefore advocate the inclusion of a range of social groups in policy making to provide "responsible governance with a genuine interest in people's lives". Similarly, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC) state their primary focus to be political stability: "to move Northern Ireland society out of conflict, to create a culture of tolerance and inclusion" and consistently call for a "democracy that will increase the participation of people" and institutions that "reflect the diversity of communities in their make-up" (NIWC, 1998). Thus, *essentialist women's parties*' focus on women's and minority rights is often connected to their common emergent conditions in newly formed or volatile democratic systems.

Differences in the language used by *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* may also be explained by the growing popularity of discourses around intersectionality and its centrality to the growth of third wave feminism in the 1990s and 2000s (Mann and Huffman, 2005; Evans, 2016b). The language of intersectionality was perhaps not as readily available to the earlier women's parties forming in Eastern European states. Indeed, I find that as well as policies targeted at specific vulnerable groups, all manifestos analysed within the thematic analysis included policies aimed to assist vulnerable women, including women living in poverty, victims of domestic violence, single mothers, and immigrant and refugee women:

"The Women's Coalition will continue to prioritise women's needs for housing and social services -- a key factor in their ability to remove themselves and their children out of violent situations." (NIWC, 1998)

"The amount of family monthly benefits received by the uninsured mothers to raise a child in the first year, be provided with the changed from 100 BGN to the equivalent of the minimum wage." (POBW, 2013)

"A new immigration system needs to respond to the gendered realities of migration and the multiple marginalisation of women refugees." (WEP, 2017)

Thus, even without using the specific language of intersectionality, there is a shared consideration among both types of women's parties of the increased disadvantage of certain

groups and a priority of those most vulnerable. The specific time and space contexts of different women's parties' emergence and competition therefore arguably accounts for some of the differences that I have identified in the framing of approaches to equality and minority rights.

However, there is still some indication of an ideological difference across parties' approaches. For example, the words 'feminist' and 'feminism' do not appear at all in the *essentialist women's party* manifestos in the dataset.⁴⁶ This cannot alone be attributed to time and space contexts as there are parties from a similar time period that were explicitly feminist, such as Kvinnalistin (Women's List) in Iceland or Die Frauen (The Women) in Germany. Moreover, in the thematic analysis, I identified a more general disengagement with feminist discourse in manifestos of *essentialist women's parties* in the 21st century, such as POBW in Bulgaria. Therefore, while the contexts of party emergence do appear to play a role in how parties frame their approach to representing women, there remains evidence of a difference in approach to women's substantive representation between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. Nevertheless, the prevalence of gender and equality related terms in the platforms of both types of women's parties indicates that a focus on equality issues and policies aimed to protect minority rights does span the party family.

In further support of my analysis in the previous section, Table 4.5 also indicates that both *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* share a focus on social policies such as childcare and social care. As discussed in the previous section, all women's parties promote policies advocating for better provision of childcare, especially providing increased support for single mothers. Parties framed these arguments around the needs of children and the benefits to wider society. However, I find that *feminist parties* extend these policies by making an explicit connection between increased childcare provision and discussion of the unequal care burden placed on women:

"In all member countries, it is much more time women spend performing household chores and caring for other people than employed by men. In particular, Spanish women spend four more hours each day than they do in such tasks." (IF, 2009)

"We all need care at some point in our lives. Yet the old political parties treat care as separate from the economy, as if our communities and businesses could survive without the paid and unpaid care work that is mainly undertaken by women." (WEP, 2017)

⁴⁶ KWIC analysis shows that the terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' appear 0 times in *essentialist women's party* manifestos compared to 227 times in *feminist party* manifestos, even when party names have been removed from the text corpus.

To tackle this entrenched inequality, *feminist parties* advocate restructuring current systems through the introduction of universal childcare and parental leave. In comparison, *essentialist women's parties* focus solely on addressing women's practical needs through increased and improved provision in existing systems, such as increased in maternity pay and welfare benefits to single mothers (POBW, 2013).⁴⁷ In part, the differences in the specific policies advocated by different parties may reflect the specifics of baseline provision of services within country contexts. However, the consistent framing by *feminist parties* of childcare within discourses on the subordination of women reflects a broader difference in ideological approach. Thus, while childcare may be an issue that is equally salient to *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, there are observed differences in their approach to solutions to addressing women's needs in this area.

Table 4.5 also shows a high relative emphasis of terms relating to education in *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties'* manifestos. This supports the results of the word frequency analysis and STM in the previous section which suggested education to be a highly salient issue for women's parties. However, looking in more detail in the thematic analysis, I again identify a difference across women's parties in the way that these issues are framed. First, all parties advocate the extension or improvement of education provision to a wider range of children.

“Availability of free quality education and healthcare along with the development of paid education and medical services.” (WOR, 1993)

“At the request of the parents free full-time education of children up to 7th grade.” (POBW, 2013).

“Supply free pre-primary education for five-year-olds and extend compulsory education until the end of secondary education or until the child turns 19.” (FP, 2019)

However, while *essentialist women's parties* are focused solely on improving the provision and quality of education, *feminist parties* additionally challenged structural gender inequality within the education system. All three self-identified *feminist parties* in the sample addressed the existence of patriarchal norms in school curricula that socialise boys and girls into gendered roles. To counter this, Iniciativa Feminista (IF) and WEP call for increased inclusion of women's achievements and contributions in curriculum content and an increase in female teachers in stereotypically masculine subject areas such as maths and science. FP extend the

⁴⁷ In the case of childcare, NIWC reflect a more feminist position, tackling socialised gender roles: “Caring for children is often stereotyped as a 'women's issue” (NIWC, 1998). Their solutions include offering more parental leave for fathers.

critique of structural bias in curriculum content beyond gendered discrimination, advocating for a ‘norm-critical’ curriculum including anti-racist and feminist education and LGBTQ+ friendly sexual health and relationship education.

Therefore, the findings of the frequency analyses indicate that issues of social policy -such as childcare and education- have a similar level of salience across different types of women’s parties. However further nuance provided through my thematic analysis demonstrates that the positions taken by *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties* correspond with different approaches to women’s substantive representation.

It must be acknowledged that some of the variation in the specific measures parties propose to target inequality in social policy (as indicated in the quotes above) can be partly attributed to different welfare systems and baselines of provision across countries. Nevertheless, I identify a clear pattern in policy framing, wherein *essentialist women’s parties* focus on the immediate needs of women, particularly vulnerable women, whereas *feminist parties* tackle structures and institutions that perpetuate discrimination against women. This therefore supports the differentiation between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties* that has been suggested in previous research (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020) and supports similar typologies more broadly applied to women’s political organisation (Alvarez, 1990; Molyneux, 1988; see also Beckwith, 2000).

Beyond issue framing, the comparative frequency analysis presented in Table 4.5 also indicates some differences in issue focus between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties*. For example, the term ‘violence’ appears with high frequency in the *feminist party* manifestos but does not feature in *essentialist women’s party* manifestos’ top 30 terms. Alternatively, terms relating to economics such as ‘econom’ and ‘economi’ feature frequently in *essentialist women’s party* manifestos but not in *feminist party* manifestos.

These issues map against the findings from Figure 4.3. in the previous section which indicated that there were changes in the salience of issues mentioned in women’s parties’ manifestos over time. However, by comparing across party types, the word frequency analysis in Table 4.5 now indicates that these changes may in fact be differences in issue focus between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties*. From the word frequency analysis alone, it is difficult to specifically delineate which mechanism is at play here because in my sample, all the manifestos from the 1990-2000 period are from *essentialist women’s parties* and only 5 of the 33 manifestos published between 2010-2020 are from *essentialist women’s parties*. Hence, there may be some correlation between differences across party type and differences over time. In the next two

sections I use statistical analyses supplemented with in-depth qualitative thematic analysis, to offer a more comprehensive test of differences in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

4.4.2 Keyness analysis

Figure 4.5 presents a keyness plot comparing the top 20 'key words' from *essentialist women's party* and *feminist party* manifestos. Key words are defined as those that occur 'with unusual frequency in a given text... by comparison with a reference group of some kind' (Scott, 1997: 236). Keyness is therefore a relative measure, where observed word frequencies across two specific corpora determine the key word output.

Beginning with *essentialist women's parties*, key words from these parties' manifestos include 'develop', 'sovereign', 'peac[e]', 'agreement', 'communiti', 'feder[al]' and 'state'. These can be grouped under the theme of state-building and democratic consolidation. This was a theme that I identified in the frequency analysis of the full corpus of women's party manifestos (Table 4.3), It was also one of the topics which was identified in the STM on the full corpus (Table 4.4). However, the keyness analysis suggests that this topic is specifically emphasised by *essentialist women's parties* relative to *feminist parties*.

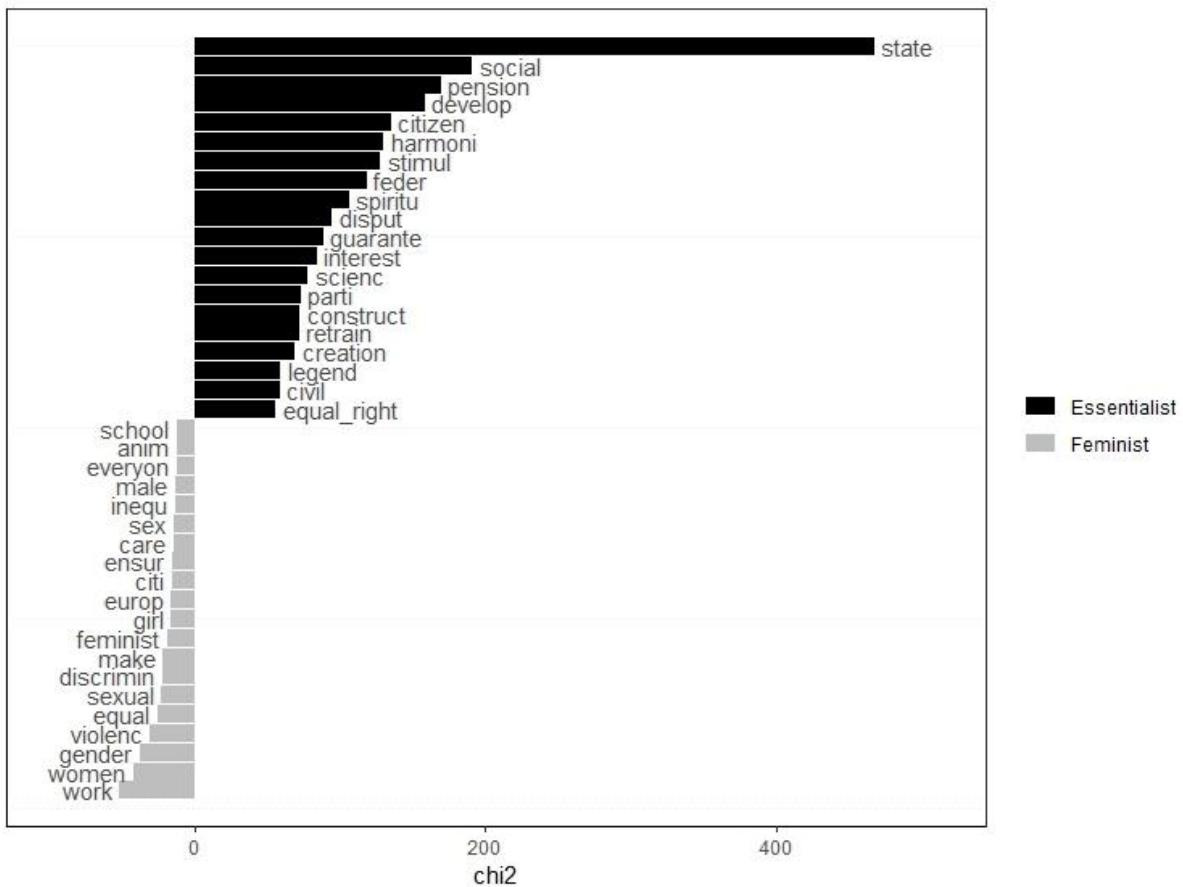
This finding again points back to the emergent conditions of the *essentialist women's parties* in the dataset which predominantly formed in Eastern European countries in the 1990s or other new and unsettled democratic contexts, such as during the Northern Ireland peace process. These are parties that wanted to ensure that women had a seat at the table when new forms of governance and political institutions were being formulated (Ishiyama, 2003).

Thus, while in the previous section I explained that the thematic analysis had revealed references to democratic norms and values more generally in all women's parties' manifestos. Within this broader theme, *essentialist women's parties* talk specifically about democratic legitimacy and stability:

"Politics - is not a struggle for power, but a means of achieving peace and national harmony." (WOR, 1993)

"Our primary concern is to move Northern Ireland society out of conflict, to create a culture of tolerance and inclusion." (NIWC, 1998)

Figure 4.5 Key words in *essentialist women's party* and *feminist party* manifestos



Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

“At the moment, we all feel an acute need for genuine guarantees of security and stability, more fairness in allocating burdens of the crisis, greater protection of our political, economic and social rights.” (POBW, 2013)

On the other hand, *feminist parties*’ discussion of democracy is commonly directed towards increasing the descriptive representation of women and protecting democracy from increasing far right nationalism. In terms of descriptive representation, *feminist parties* promote policies including quotas and all-women shortlists:⁴⁸

“Common rules are adopted in elections to the European Parliament which establish a mandatory system to ensure that 50% of the lists are made up of women and that they occupy at least all the even or odd posts on the list.” (IF, 2009)

⁴⁸ I also find that *feminist parties* relate policies on descriptive representation to the democratic value of increased symbolic and substantive representation of women. Thus WEP (2017) argue that increased numbers of women MPs would allow women’s experiences to “be better reflected in the decisions Parliament takes and the policies government makes”. Similarly, FP (2019) contend that increased “participation of women and minorities in society makes their needs and rights visible in... decision making”.

“Encourage other political parties to use all women-shortlists – or other methods – so that at least 66% of candidates replacing retiring MPs, and 66% of other candidates, are women for the next two Parliamentary terms or until gender parity has been achieved.” (WEP, 2017)

This focus is reflective of the emergent contexts of *feminist parties* forming in systems where women already have a relatively high degree of political representation (Cowell-Meyers, 2016). Therefore, the differences that I have identified in *essentialist women’s parties*’ and *feminist parties*’ discussion of democracy can largely be explained by their specific emergent conditions, rather than a difference in ideological approach. Whereas *essentialist women’s parties* are focused on getting women a seat at the table, *feminist parties* want to increase the number of seats. Thus, I argue that this difference, while interesting, does not indicate a clear difference in issue concern across women’s parties.

Let us now turn to the key words of the *feminist parties*. On the whole, key words from the feminist manifestos are far more overtly gendered and there is clear evidence of a feminist ideological approach shown through key words such as ‘discrimination’, ‘patriarchy’, and ‘feminist’.⁴⁹ Although ‘equal_right’ does feature as a key word in the essentialist group, further indicating that equality for women (and other minoritised groups) is a shared theme across the party family.

There is also evidence of a difference in issue focus between *essentialist women’s parties* and *feminist parties*. Key words in the *feminist party* manifestos include ‘prostitution’, ‘abuse’ and ‘sexual’ ‘violence’. This was an issue area that had been indicated as a concern for *feminist parties* relative to *essentialist women’s parties* in the word frequency analysis (Table 4.5). The keyness analysis adds robustness to these results through statistical analysis.

To explore this topic further, I used KWIC analysis to search for the term ‘violence’ in the full corpus of manifestos. I found that 97.6% of mentions of the term ‘violence’ come from *feminist parties*. Only 16 of the 665 mentions of this term within the manifesto data are found within *essentialist women’s party* manifestos and most are not related to sexual violence or gender-based violence.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ In the data preparation, party names were collocated as singular terms and removed from the corpus to ensure that they did not skew the results of the frequency analysis due to their consistent repetition in manifestos. Therefore, the high frequency of the term ‘feminist’ is not just because it is present in self-labelled *feminist party* manifestos.

⁵⁰ I also explored mentions of terms from the base stem ‘sexual*’ in the corpus and found only three mentions in *essentialist women’s party* manifestos. Twice by NIWC in reference to sexual health services for young people (NIWC, 1998; 2003) and once by WOR (1993) in discussion of pornography and the “commercial exploitation of sexuality”. Thus, in neither of these instances is ‘sexual’ used to refer to sexual violence against women.

For example, the mention of violence from Belarusian party Nadzeya (1995) is focused on immorality: “protect citizens from preaching inhumane ideas, violence and immorality” whereas Solidarity of Women of Ukraine (2012) discuss violence in reference to foreign policy and security:

“The Solidarity of Women of Ukraine party sees the protection of human rights as the creation of guarantees of security against violence, declares the right and duty of the state to strict control over weapons and drugs; considers it necessary to organize a system of social rehabilitation for victims of violence; ensuring environmental and mental security of man.”

However, two *essentialist women’s parties* do mention either sexual violence or domestic violence. For example, the NIWC (2003) state: “There are 12 domestic violence assaults every day in Northern Ireland and a more proactive strategy is needed to protect and support the cycle of violence.” Women of Russia (1993) also discuss violence from a gender-based perspective. They discuss the need for the “prohibition of social and ethnic hatred, propaganda of violence, pornography, commercial exploitation of sexuality” as well as for a “system of rehabilitation for women and children affected from violence including in the family” (WOR, 1995).

Thus gender-based violence does receive some attention from *essentialist women’s parties*, but the keyness analysis (supported through the KWIC analysis) demonstrates that gender-based violence is a topic that has a much higher salience in *feminist parties’* manifestos. In further support of this, in the thematic analysis I identified a theme of gender-based violence (including all aspects of male violence toward women and children) as being of particular focus to *feminist parties*. *Feminist parties* highlighted the severity of male violence towards women and children and advocated for greater resources for their protection:

“Ensure all women and children fleeing domestic abuse are offered a stable place to live and that they are never forced out of their homes unless it is necessary for their safety.” (WEP, 2017)

“End violence against women. Make Finland the safest country for women in Europe by the year 2030. Implement a structural reform that creates permanent, expert and well resourced support services on national as well as provincial and municipal levels.” (FP, 2019)

Feminist parties also challenged the gendered structures that enable male violence toward women and children:

“These are not individual or isolated phenomena. This is structural violence that limits women’s opportunities and restricts their freedom. Violence against

women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality.” (WEP, 2017)

“The EU must establish a regulatory framework for all Member States based on the express recognition that violence against women is part of the social structure and therefore that all means must be available to change the individual or collective behaviours that help, protect and justify it.” (IF, 2009)

“Reduce sexual harassment with norm-critical education, stop racism from getting a hold in the everyday life of young people and improve the study results of boys by dismantling harmful masculinity norms.” (FP, 2019)

Finally, *feminist parties* discussed prostitution and human trafficking as forms of sexual exploitation of women and children. Iniciativa Feminista (IF), advocated strong policies against the selling and purchase of sexual services:

“All states must establish a policy framework to dismantle business related to the sexual exploitation of women...All member states must incorporate and promote actions aimed at deactivating and delegitimising male demand for prostitution.” (IF, 2009)

WEP followed a similar line in their manifesto:

“WE demand an end to the abuse of women and girls through the sex industry by introducing legislation that fully decriminalises those who sell sex, establishes and funds support and exit services and then moves to criminalise the purchase of sex.” (WEP, 2019)

Overall, while the STM implemented on the full corpus of women's party manifestos (Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4) identified a shared topic relating to sexual exploitation, the keyness analysis and thematic analysis have demonstrated that sexual exploitation (and gendered violence more broadly) is an issue emphasised mostly by *feminist parties*. This is the first empirical evidence of a difference in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. Moreover, the thematic analysis demonstrated that *feminist parties* link the issue of violence against women and children to patriarchal structures. This offers further support to frameworks that differentiate between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* based on their concern with women's practical interests compared to women's strategic interests (Shin, 2020).

Finally, the keyness analysis indicates that terms relating to social policy including 'school' and 'care' are key words for *feminist parties* but not for *essentialist women's parties*. In the frequency analysis and STM on the full corpus and in the thematic analysis I identified social policy to be a concern for all women's parties (though education did appear to become more salient over time, alongside the emergence of *feminist parties*). Moreover, in the comparative

frequency analysis in Table 4.5 I demonstrated that both types of women's party emphasised social policy issues.

Therefore, the keyness analysis may be identifying these terms as key words only for *feminist parties* because they use more cohesive language in their discussion of social policy. For example, in the thematic analysis I find that POBW (2013) discusses the need for a strong social security system and particularly increased child benefit. This focus on the financial aspect of social policy may explain why terms such as 'social' feature as key words in the *essentialist women's party* manifestos alongside terms relating to economic policy, whereas terms relating to 'care' are key words for *feminist parties*.

In sum, the keyness analysis supports and extends the findings of the comparative word frequency analysis. First, I find that *essentialist women's parties* emphasise discourses around democratic legitimacy and political stability. This is specifically rooted in many *essentialist women's parties*' emergent contexts in unstable political systems. Thus, while this is a difference in the discourse parties use to frame their policies, I argue that it does represent either a difference in issue concern or ideological approach between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

On the other hand, the keyness analysis indicates that *feminist parties* have a near-exclusive concern with issues relating to gender-based violence, particularly sexual violence. While some *essentialist parties* touched on these issues, KWIC analysis and thematic analysis demonstrate that they were highly emphasised by *feminist parties*. This links to the difference in ideological outlook between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, where *feminist parties* are seen to challenge the structural marginalisation of women, for example structures that uphold male violence against women.

Interestingly, both the areas of democratic legitimacy and sexual violence were identified as topics in the STM that I implemented on the full corpus of women's party manifestos in the previous section. In the next section I offer a test of whether there is a statistically significant difference in the extent to which *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* emphasise these topics.

4.4.3 Covariate structural topic models

I now return to the STM that was implemented on the full corpus of women's party manifestos in the previous section. I add party type as a covariate into the STM to test whether there is a difference in the prevalence of the identified topics across *essentialist women's parties*' and

feminist parties' manifestos. Fig 4.6 presents the differences in mean topic proportions within the manifestos of each party type, with 95% confidence intervals.

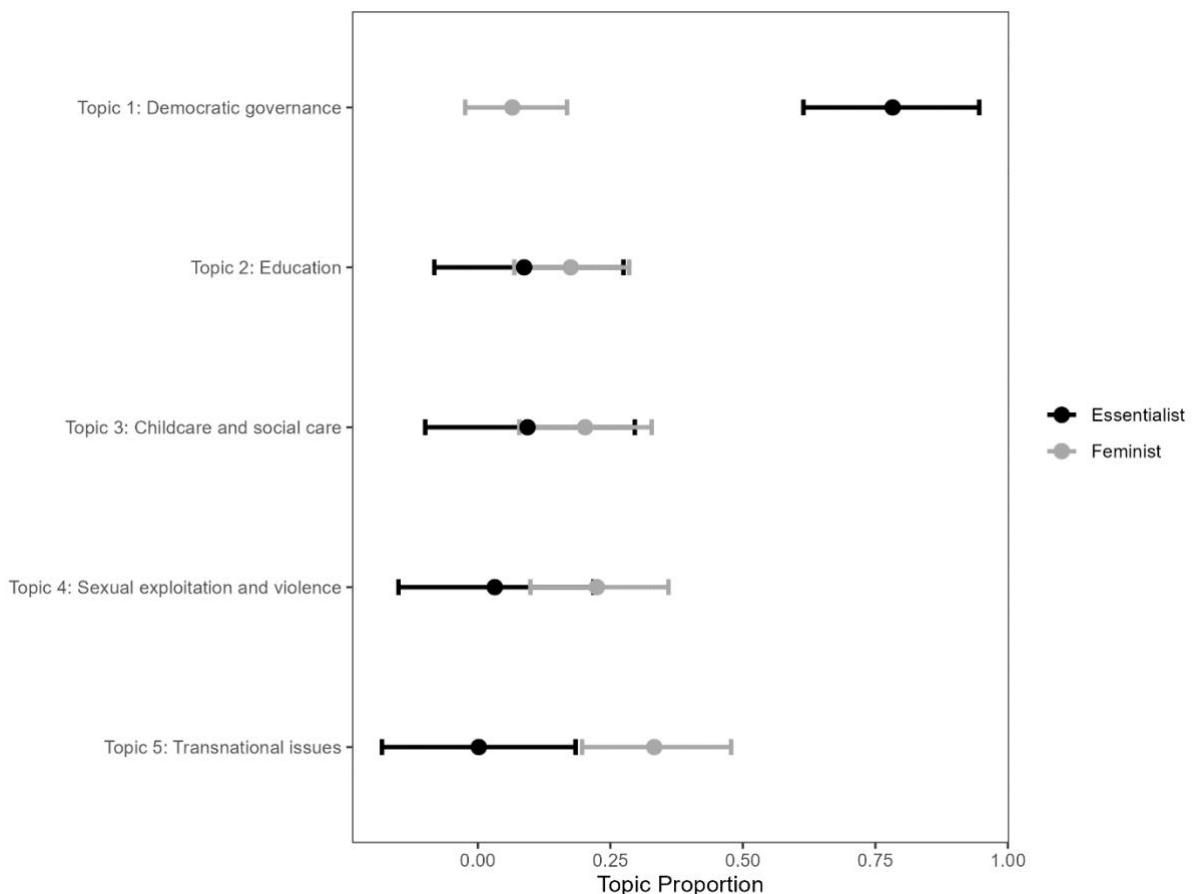
Three of the topics that were identified in the original STM show no statistically significant difference across *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*' manifestos. Two of these – 'Topic 2: Education' and 'Topic 3: Childcare and social care' – were expected results. Figure 4.6 demonstrates support for my analysis in the previous sections that social policy, particularly in areas that have greater impact on women such as social care, are a shared issue concern across women's parties.

However, it is interesting that 'Topic 4: Sexual exploitation' does not have a statistically significantly different topic prevalence across party type. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses suggested that sexual violence (and gender-based violence more broadly) were specific concerns of *feminist parties*. However, this is not supported through the results in Figure 4.6. One potential explanation for this is that terms included in 'Topic 4' (see Table 4.4) are not exclusively linked to sexual exploitation. For example, terms such as 'articl', 'propos', 'european' and 'european parliament' may not contribute greatly to this topic. Thus, while the semantic coherence was high enough that I labelled the topic as 'Sexual exploitation', the lower exclusivity of these terms may have resulted in a lack of significant difference in prevalence across the party types.

Two topics do show a statistically significant difference in prevalence across party type. The first is 'Topic 1: Democratic governance' which is more prevalent among *essentialist women's party* manifestos ($p<0.001$). This supports the results of the frequency analysis, keyness analysis, and thematic analysis. Democratic governance relating to political stability, democratic legitimacy, and statebuilding is a topic distinct to *essentialist women's parties*' manifestos.

This supports previous research which has linked the emergent paths of *essentialist women's parties* to issue platforms focused securing women's fundamental democratic rights (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Ishiyama, 2003). While past research has largely focused on *essentialist women's parties* that formed in post-communist Eastern Europe (Ishiyama, 2003), my results find this to be true also of *essentialist women's parties* from outside Eastern Europe and from beyond the year 2000 (Bulgaria, Croatia, and Northern Ireland). However, as discussed above, I argue that this difference in discourse does not necessarily represent a difference in ideological focus or issue concern between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*.

Figure 4.6 Mean topic proportions in *essentialist women's party* and *feminist party* manifestos, with 95% confidence intervals



The second topic that is statistically significantly different in its prevalence across party type is ‘Topic 5: Transnational issues’. This topic has a statistically significantly larger prevalence among *feminist party* manifestos ($p<0.01$). This topic includes terms relating to foreign policy and security, asylum, and the environment. In my initial exploration of this topic through KWIC searches of terms such ‘environ’ and ‘asylum’, I suggested that these issue areas may be specific to *feminist parties*. The results in Figure 4.6 support that finding.

Additionally, through the thematic analysis, I found that rather than ‘transnational issues’, there is a particular concern in *feminist party* manifestos with *human security*. Human security is understood as the orientation of security away from states and towards the safeguarding of individuals from global threats including military conflict and environmental degradation (Alkire, 2003). Feminist actors have long engaged with the concept of human security (Peou, 2014) and have advocated a focus on the intersectional impacts of transnational threats on marginalised groups such as women, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ people (Hudson, 2005).

In general, *feminist parties*' discussion of foreign policy was oriented around human security:

"Human security to the forefront of security policy. Shift the focus from armed defense of territories towards a broader concept of security, so that we can better prepare for crises and new societal threats." (FP, 2019)

"Armed conflict and wars bring high suffering to civilians, an estimated 90% of victims are not contenders." (IF, 2009)

"Use the UK's position in the Security Council to promote gendered analysis in conflict resolutions" (WEP, 2017)

More specifically, 'Topic 5' includes the term 'militari[ism]' as opposed to the 'military'. KWIC search of this term finds it to largely only be present manifestos from *feminist parties* in Nordic countries who link militarism with growing nationalism:

"We need a vision of security, freedom from militarism and nationalism" (FI, 2018a)

"The perspective on security should be changed in a direction where it is not defined by militarism or nationalism" FP (2019)

This connects in particular to the political context of several of the *feminist parties* in the Nordic countries, where feminist foreign policy is an established concept. For example, The Social-Democratic-Green government in Sweden launched the feminist foreign policy in 2014, which aimed to implement a 'systematic gender equality perspective throughout foreign policy' (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2019: 9). Although in 2022 the Minister for Foreign Affairs announced that the government would be abandoning this policy (The Guardian, 2022) indicating that the policy is not supported across Swedish politics.

Yet, while feminist foreign policy is an established concept in Nordic countries, I found that WEP also advocate a feminist foreign policy: "...work with other European *feminist parties* towards the EU adoption of a truly feminist foreign policy committed to peace and equality for all" (WEP, 2019). This indicates that the focus on human security extends beyond the Nordic and Scandinavian context and can be seen as a broader shared issue concern for *feminist parties*.

The human security topic is also inferred from the presence of terms such as 'asylum', relating to refugees as a human security crisis, and 'climate_change'. In the thematic analysis, I identified references to environmental issues in both *essentialist women's parties*' and *feminist parties*' manifestos:

"The Women's Coalition supports planning policies which reflect the need to protect the environment, while allowing people to live and work in rural areas."
NIWC (1998)

“Consistent and permanent actions for restoration, preservation, reproduction and improvement of environmental qualities” POBW (2013)

However, only *feminist parties* explicitly link the environment to human security:

“Climate change is an issue of human security” FP (2019)

“We are affected by the development of cities and the distance from spaces of work and living, decisions about sustainable transport or the assessment of social factors that influence access to environmental goods and services, or roles and responsibilities that may be assigned differently to men and women.” (IF, 2009)

Thus, there is convincing evidence of human security being an issue concern that is exclusive to *feminist parties*. As further corroboration of this, ‘Topic 5’ also includes the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘lgbtqia’, reflecting the intersectional ideology of contemporary *feminist parties*.

However, let us consider an alternative explanation. I have interpreted ‘Topic 5’ to revolve around the substantive issue of human security. However, based on the inclusion of terms like ‘global’ and ‘europ’, it is possible that ‘Topic 5’ instead clusters transnational issues found in manifestos produced for European Parliament elections. Indeed, issues of asylum and foreign policy are salient on the EP issue agenda. As shown in the data and methods section of this Chapter, all of the EP manifestos in my dataset are produced by *feminist parties* (Table 4.1). Therefore, it is important to test whether election type is a confounding factor in the results I have observed in Figure 4.6. To test this possibility, I repeat the STM only on manifestos produced for national elections (a total of 25 manifestos).⁵¹

The results are presented in Table 4.6, which shows the topics and their most frequent and exclusive terms. Because I have applied a new topic model to a reduced corpus of manifestos, some new topics have emerged and the key words within some topics have changed. To avoid confusion with the topics that were produced from the full corpus model (presented in Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4), I label the topics in Table 4.6 using letters (‘Topic A’, ‘Topic B’ and so on) rather than numbers.

Even after removing the European Parliament (and municipal) election manifestos, a topic relating to transnational issues still emerges.

⁵¹ I repeat the STM on national manifestos to remove any influence of election type. I chose national manifestos over municipal manifestos as it was a larger and more well-balanced sample. An alternative option would be to run the STM with election type as a dummy covariate comparing EP manifestos to the municipal and national manifestos. I have chosen to run the STM on the smaller corpus as it also allows me to observe if any new topics emerge in the national manifestos and so provides more information than performing a test on the already observed topics.

Table 4.6 STM topics and their top 10 most frequent and exclusive terms in women's party manifestos for national elections

Topic A: Childcare and social care	Topic B: Democratic governance	Topic C: Sexual exploitation	Topic D: Fiscal policy	Topic E: Transnational issues
childcar	guarante	articl	chapter	welfar
across	parti	sexist	stimul	feminist
recognis	peac	prostitut	eu	emiss
parental_leav	social	propos	tourism	racism
disabled_women	labor	sexist_viol	bank	strengthen
gap	democrat	autonom	pension	knowledg
domestic_abus	freedom	public_author	profit	anti
carer	world	anim	amount	racist
billion	movement	elimin	criterion	focus
end	feder	advertis	court	want

Notes: The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps

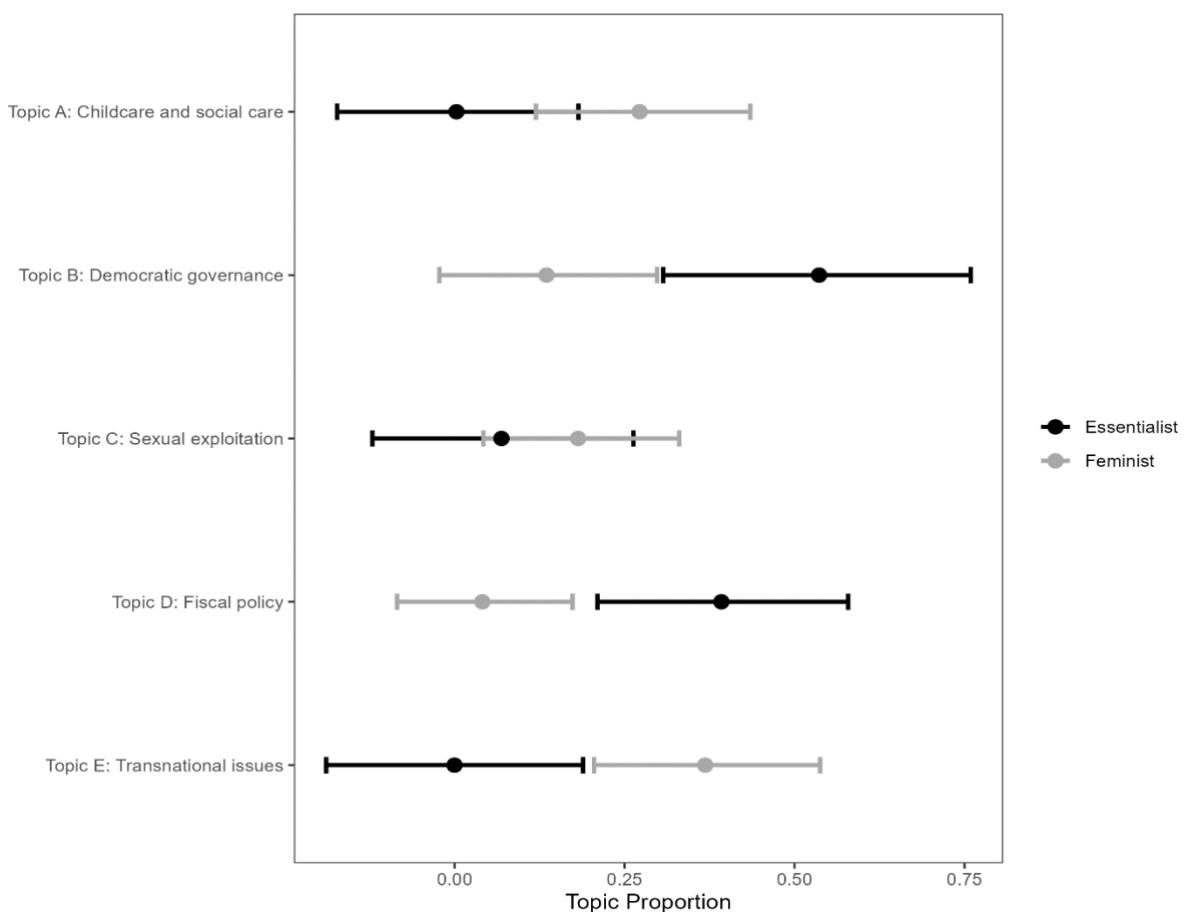
'Topic E: Transnational issues' contains similar terms to Topic 5 from the original model, including terms related to equality and minority rights ('anti', 'racism', 'racist') and environmental issues ('emiss'). Moreover, this topic still includes the term 'feminist'. The semantic coherence of this topic is admittedly lower, though this may be due to the lower number of documents in the national dataset.

Figure 4.7 presents the result of a regression analysis, estimating the effect of party type on the prevalence of the topics in the national manifestos with 90% confidence intervals.⁵² We can see that Topic E is statistically significantly more prevalent in *feminist party* manifestos ($p<0.1$). Thus, the endurance of this topic after the removal of the European Parliament election manifestos indicates first that transnational issues, particularly those relating to human security, are an exclusive issue concern of *feminist parties* and are emphasised in their manifestos across different election types.

Turning briefly to the other results from Table 4.6 and Figure 4.7, three of the topics identified in the full corpus of manifestos remain. First, 'Topic 1: Democratic Governance' from the original model remains as 'Topic B: Democratic governance' and now contains frequent and exclusive terms related to democratic legitimacy and state building, such as 'peac[e]', 'democrat', 'freedom', and 'feder[al]'.

⁵² I use wider confidence intervals in this regression due to the lower number of cases.

Figure 4.7 Mean topic proportions in national manifestos of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, with 90% confidence intervals



This topic remains statistically significant ($p<0.1$) when only considering national manifestos, providing further evidence that this is a topic predominantly emphasised by *essentialist women's parties*.

Second, the original model run on all manifestos identified 'Topic 3: Childcare and social care' which remains in the model run on national manifestos as 'Topic A'. It contains many of the same terms as well as new terms such as 'gap', which KWIC analysis indicates is predominantly referring to the gender pay gap. Within national manifestos, this topic is not statistically significantly different across party types. This adds further evidence that it is a shared issue concern across different types of women's party.

Third, 'Topic 4: Sexual exploitation' remains as 'Topic C'. However, the semantic coherence of this topic is somewhat lower in the corpus of only national manifestos. Terms such as 'sexist', 'sexist_viol[ence]' and 'prostitut' remain and indicate the overall topic content. Yet the topic

now includes terms such as ‘advertis’, relating to the representation of women in media. This topic again does not have a statistically significantly different prevalence across party type.

Finally, once municipal and EP manifestos are removed, the STM no longer produces a topic relating to education. This may be because ‘Topic 2’ in the STM on the full corpus also included terms relating to local-level governance such as ‘municip’ which are now excluded in the national manifesto corpus. Instead, ‘Topic D’ in the national manifesto corpus clusters terms such as ‘bank’, ‘profit’, ‘pension’ and ‘stimul’. Therefore, I have labelled this topic ‘Fiscal policy’. This topic is statistically significantly more prevalent in *essentialist women’s parties*’ manifestos ($p < .05$). In the frequency analysis of the full corpus of manifestos (Table 4.3) the term ‘econom’ is among the top 30 most relatively frequent terms in the full corpus.

Additionally, Figure 4.2 indicated that ‘econom’, ‘economi’, and more specific terms such as ‘pension’ are highly frequently mentioned in the full corpus. However, I observed a difference in the salience of this topic across time in Figure 4.3 which demonstrated that terms relating to economics featured with a higher relative frequency in the 1990-2000 manifestos. This was then demonstrated to be a difference across party type in the keyness analysis where terms such as ‘stimulus’ and ‘pension’ were identified as key words in *essentialist women’s parties*’ manifestos. The results in Figure 4.7 support these previous analyses.

Nevertheless, in the thematic analysis I found that all women’s parties call for redistribution of resources to the most vulnerable and economic policies to tackle poverty. Yet, there were differences in the specific policies proposed by parties and the extent to which these policies were emphasised. The manifestos of *feminist parties* called for the economic system to be restructured towards welfare economics and sustainable growth models that prioritise the wellbeing of the individual over financial gain. Put simply, the idea is that “well-being is prosperity” (FP, 2019). For example, WEP frame economics as a social justice issue: “we can breathe new life into our economy by challenging the myth that social justice and equality are somehow separate from our economy” (WEP, 2017). FP advocate an explicitly feminist economic model as one where the “economy is a tool used first and foremost to guarantee well-being and the chance to live a good life for everyone” (FP, 2019). These discussions were largely framed in abstract terms as a general goal for an equal society.

Essentialist women’s parties did not adopt the terminology of welfare economics, but they showed a similar issue focus in addressing poverty and economic inequality, prioritising the needs of the most vulnerable. For example, WOR’s manifesto states that “the market economy is not a goal, but a means of improving human life” (WOR, 1993). However, *essentialist*

women's parties presented *specific* policies for tackling economic inequality. For example, POBW (2013) proposed increasing the social welfare received by uninsured mothers and an increase in child benefit and for an annual adjustment of pensions in line with inflation. NIWC, the most blurred case of an *essentialist women's party* or *feminist party* demanded a “budgetary emphasis on equality and social welfare” where economic development is “pursued with the clear aim of eradicating poverty and inequality” (NIWC, 1998).

Differing economic baselines can explain some of the variation in specific policy proposals across parties. For example, parties forming in new democracies, such as 1990s Russia, show greater focus on stability and the fundamentals of a market economy. Whereas parties forming in industrialised advanced economies, such as the Nordic, countries argue for a restructuring of the economic system. However, I found that *feminist parties* generally discussed economics in more abstract terms, whereas *essentialist women's parties* propose a greater number of specific fiscal policies. This is also highlighted in the key words identified in the keyness analysis and topic models. This explains why ‘Topic D: Fiscal policy’ is significantly more prevalent in *essentialist women's parties*' manifestos, while economics more generally is an issue concern emphasised across women's parties.

Taking all of the results presented in this section together, my mixed-method text analysis shows good evidence of a difference in issue concern and ideological focus among *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. Specifically, keyness analysis and structural topic modelling supported with the thematic analysis indicates two exclusive issue concerns for *feminist parties* in human security and gender-based violence.

I also find that *essentialist women's parties* emphasise discourses around democratic values and governance. However, this does not relate to a specific policy area but highlights *essentialist parties*' broader framing of the importance of securing women's rights as part of the construction of a stable and fair political and economic system (Ishiyama, 2003). Furthermore, while fiscal policy is more prevalent in *essentialist women's parties*' manifestos, more nuanced investigation shows that the broader issue of economics is emphasised across the party family.

In sum, in the past two sections I have examined the shared issue concerns of the women's party family and established differences in issue focus and ideological approach between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. In the following section I take a further step towards situating these parties in the field of party politics research. Specifically, I use my findings to evaluate the extent to which women's parties, and the sub-types of *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, can be classified as niche parties.

4.5 Do *feminist parties* act as niche parties?

My discussion in Chapter 2 theorised that European *feminist parties* can be conceptualised as niche parties. Niche parties are defined as parties that mobilise around a narrow set of issues that are neglected by their mainstream competitors (Meguid, 2005; 2008; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). I argued that women's parties were too heterogenous a group to classify the entire party family as niche. Within women's parties, I argued that only *feminist parties* would qualify as niche parties because it was indicated in past research that their platforms focused on issues that had been largely neglected by mainstream parties. Alternatively, I theorised that *essentialist women's parties* would not meet the criteria of a niche party because their focus was on increasing the material needs of women within well-established policy areas such as economics. Thus, *essentialist women's parties* may promote a specific position on a traditional issue rather than mobilising around a new or neglected issue (see Bischof, 2017 for this argument explored in detail).

Overall, my analysis indeed suggests that due to the differences in issue concern among *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*, the party family as a whole cannot be defined as niche. This is not a problematic finding as I outlined in Chapter 2 that it is neither theoretically nor empirically useful to define entire party families as niche (see pp.23-24).

My results do indicate that *feminist parties* can be defined as niche parties. The issue concerns of *feminist parties* are predominantly found in the following areas: equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care. *Feminist parties* thus do emphasise some issues that are salient on the broader issue agenda, such as social policy, framed through a feminist lens. However, their issue platforms also highly emphasise issues that are not largely neglected by mainstream parties, such as gendered violence. *Feminist parties* therefore appear to meet the definitional criteria of a niche party based on relative issue emphasis (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2017).

On the other hand, the issue concerns of *essentialist women's parties* are predominantly in well-established issue domains such as economics and social policy. The issue areas that I found to be most emphasised by *essentialist women's parties* were the protection of women and minorities' rights and redistribution of economic and social resources towards the most vulnerable. Moreover, this was often framed around democratic legitimacy and political stability rather than appeals to gender equality. Therefore, *essentialist women's parties* do not fulfil the criteria of a niche party as they offer different perspectives on traditional issue areas rather than mobilising different issues (Bischof, 2017).

Therefore, my results suggest that only *feminist parties* act as niche parties in their representation of gender-based issues. This is significant as it means that we can investigate the issue competition and communication of *feminist parties* as strategic actors within the party system. Niche parties are often considered to prioritise policy-seeking goals over office-seeking goals (Bischof and Wagner, 2017: 391) and thus pursue issue communication strategies focused on increasing the salience of their owned issues (Abou-Chadi, 2016).

The analysis presented in this Chapter cannot fully address whether *feminist parties* pursue issue ownership in their manifestos. However, I find that *feminist parties* emphasise issues that are largely neglected by mainstream parties including gender-based violence and human security. These issue areas offer opportunities for *feminist parties* to act as issue entrepreneurs (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012), politicising neglected issues which may attract attention from voters, media and other parties (Hobolt and de Vries, 2015).

By politicising gender-based issues, *feminist parties* may exert a contagion effect over mainstream parties' platforms, encouraging them to increase their attention to gender-based issues (Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). It may also bring coalition opportunities if the issues become popular with voters (Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). Indeed, through the thematic analysis I found evidence of contemporary European *feminist parties* actively pursuing policy-seeking and coalition-seeking goals in their manifestos. For example, I found that *feminist parties* explicitly discuss the need for cooperation with other political parties and with civil society groups:⁵³

“Together we can make society more equal if we just put achieving equality as the most important goal in politics” (FP, 2019)

“We share... the need to join, bring together and strengthen our efforts, now dispersed and fragmented into a variety of projects and organizations.” (IF, 2009)

“WE work with other political parties, with businesses, public bodies, organisations and institutions all across the UK to achieve our goals” (WEP, 2017). ” (WEP, 2017)

As small/niche parties, *feminist parties* will be aware that electoral coalition is the most likely path to political representation and to influencing the policy agenda. Indeed, *feminist parties* in Finland and Sweden have in the past formed left wing coalitions with other small parties such

⁵³ This theme was also present in *essentialist women's party* manifestos; however, I find that *essentialist women's parties* frame the need for cooperation within the broader message of political stability: “We welcome the challenge of working with politicians from across the political spectrum to build a society that will respect people's rights to be different and to hold different aspirations.” (NIWC, 1998)

as Green parties. Thus, as discussed in Chapter 2 (pp.17-18), *feminist parties* may strategically adopt a non-partisan approach to increase their coalition potential and thereby secure representation for their issues (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020). This offers further indication of *feminist parties* adopting strategic policy-seeking communication in line with past research on other niche parties (Bischof and Wagner, 2017).

In the following section, I summarise the main findings presented in this Chapter and situate them in the broader research on women's parties and niche parties. This establishes the foundations for my investigation of *feminist parties*' issue communication in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.6 Discussion and conclusion

This empirical Chapter set out to answer two research questions, the first is:

RQ1: What are the shared issue concerns of the women's party family?

Through word frequency analysis, structural topic modelling, and thematic analysis, I have identified two shared issue concerns across the women's party family: (i) equal rights for women and minoritised groups and (ii) social policy. First, I identified a shared concern across parties in the protection of women's rights and the rights of minority groups, particularly vulnerable women. While *essentialist women's parties* treated minoritised groups as distinct, *feminist parties* promoted an intersectional approach to policymaking. Yet, both groups were particularly concerned with women that face increased marginalisation, such as single mothers. Furthermore, women's parties focused not only on gender equality, but framed policies around achieving equality for all people, reflecting a broader concern with social justice.

Second, my analysis identified a shared issue concern across women's parties in social policy, particularly areas such as childcare, social care, and education that have a disproportionate impact on women. Word frequency analysis and structural topic modelling found this issue area to be salient across the full corpus of women's party manifestos and to be consistently salient across the thirty-year time period. The keyness analysis demonstrated some difference in specific policy focus within these issue areas, with *feminist parties* more focused on education and care whereas *essentialist women's parties* advocate for increases in social security and welfare benefits. In part, these differences in policy focus are explained by differences in welfare systems and baseline provision within specific country-contexts. Yet analysis indicates that the broader issue domain of social policy was salient across the women's party family.

Therefore, the analysis presented in this Chapter offers some of the first empirical evidence of the shared issue concerns and ideology of the women's party family. My findings support the definition of the women's party ideology offered by Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 13) as focusing on 'gender equality' and a 'pro-women perspective on social justice'. However, I offer evidence which counters the definition of a women's party as any party that aims to represent women (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020). In Chapter 2 (p.17), I argued against these definitions because they allow parties with anti-feminist or anti-gender equality platforms to be conceived as a women's parties (Shin, 2020). In this Chapter I present the results of the largest and most comprehensive analysis of women's party manifestos to date. The platforms of the women's parties in my sample all adopt a pro-women perspective on social justice and support gender equality. This empirical evidence suggests that a supportive approach to gender equality may be more than a commonality among women's parties and perhaps even a defining characteristic of a women's party.

Having examined shared issue concerns across the party family, the second question I addressed in my analysis was:

RQ2: Do *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* constitute distinct types of women's parties?

Through my mixed-method analysis I found an empirical difference in issue concern and issue framing among *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. First, while all women's parties shared a focus on increasing equality and increasing provision of social policy, there were distinct differences in the ways that *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* framed these issues. *Essentialist women's parties* predominantly focused on the practical interests and material needs of women within their gendered socialised roles as homemakers and carers but without challenging this sexual division of labour. For example, *essentialist women's parties* emphasise the provision of services such as childcare, healthcare and education and the redistribution of income towards vulnerable groups. Alternatively, within the same issue areas, *feminist parties* 'aim to transform the social relations that underpin women's subordination' (Shin, 2020: 82). For example, they tackle gendered norms in school curricula, and the unequal burden of care placed on women as primary carers for children.

My findings therefore offer the first empirical substantiation of the differentiation in approach to women's substantive representation between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties*. Drawing from literature on women's movements (Alvarez, 1990; Molyneux, 1988) scholars have developed frameworks that distinguish between ideologically *essentialist*

women's parties' which focus on providing for women's 'practical needs' and *feminist parties*' which advocate women's 'strategic interests' (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). My results on the differences in issue framing by *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* offers empirical evidence of this difference across women's parties. This is a significant contribution in better conceptualising the party family and presenting two sub-types of women's party with distinct approaches that can be investigated in future research.

I also extend on past frameworks by identifying several issue concerns that are specific to *feminist parties*. The first is *gendered violence*. Relative frequency analyses and keyness analysis demonstrated that this topic featured with a high relative frequency in *feminist party* manifestos but not in *essentialist women's party* manifestos. These results were supported through in-depth qualitative evidence from the thematic analysis. Yet it must be acknowledged that the STM regression analyses did not find this topic to be significantly more prevalent within *feminist parties*' manifestos. However, I argue that this is because the exclusivity of terms within the 'Sexual exploitation' topic was relatively low.

Nevertheless, the evidence from the other analyses shows strong indication that sexual violence and domestic violence were issue concerns emphasised almost exclusively by *feminist parties*. This is in line with past literature which has defined these issues as feminist concerns because they are rooted in the structural subordination of women as a result of male violence (see overviews in: Bjørnholt, 2021; Edwards, 1987). This issue concern thus further supports the ideological profile of *feminist parties* as aimed at tackling patriarchal structures and narratives (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Shin, 2020).

The second issue area that I found to be distinct to *feminist parties* is *human security*, comprising specific issues such as foreign policy, the environment, and asylum. The broader topic of 'Transnational issues' was found to be significantly more prevalent within *feminist party* manifestos in the STM covariate regression. Moreover, the topic prevalence remained statistically significant when the STM was performed on a corpus including only national manifestos. Through the thematic analysis I demonstrated that *feminist parties* heavily emphasised each component issue of this topic and commonly linked these issues to the broader theme of human security.

Human security also fits the profile of a feminist issue concern because it challenges masculinised norms and structures and re-orientates the focus of security policy towards individuals who suffer most from these policies, that being women and intersecting marginalised communities. While human security has entered mainstream Nordic politics

through the implementation of a feminist foreign policy (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2018), it is by no means an established or fully accepted norm. Moreover, this topic was salient in the platforms of *feminist parties* throughout Europe and therefore I contend that this is a distinct issue concern for *feminist parties*, beyond those in the Nordic countries.

Thus, my findings on the differences in issue concern and issue framing by *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* presents robust evidence of a differentiation between these two types of women's parties. While some of the difference may be accounted for by differences in parties' emergent contexts (Cowell-Meyers, 2016), my evidence suggests that the ways in which different women's parties approach the representation of women and gender-based issues is rooted more deeply in a difference in ideological outlook. *Essentialist women's parties* from both the 1990s and 2000s and from Eastern and Western European countries focused their platforms on securing and improving women's material needs through the redistribution of resources. Alternatively, *feminist parties* focused on specific issues of structural inequality and framed other issues within a broader narrative of challenging patriarchal structures and norms.

Finally, having analysed the issue concerns in women's parties' platforms, in the last section of this Chapter, I situated women's parties within the field of comparative party politics. Specifically, I argued that *feminist parties* can be conceptualised as niche parties because they mobilise around a narrow set of issues that are mostly neglected by their mainstream competitors (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). Alternatively, *essentialist women's parties* cannot be defined as niche parties because their issue focus is predominantly in traditional issue areas such as economics and social policy. They therefore cannot be said to be mobilising relatively different issues to mainstream parties (Bischof, 2017).

Specifically, my analysis demonstrates that the issue concerns that *feminist parties* emphasise in their manifestos are *equality for women and minoritised groups*, *gendered violence*, *human security* (including foreign policy and the environment), and *care*. By conceptualising *feminist parties* as niche parties, we can investigate their communication of these issue concerns as strategic actors within the party system. For example, using thematic analysis I suggested that *feminist parties* pursue policy-seeking strategies in their manifestos by making appeals to cooperate with other parties and emphasising their non-partisan approach.

In the next two Chapters of this thesis, I investigate the issue communication of *feminist parties* as niche parties mobilising platforms of gender-based issues. Building on my findings in this Chapter, I expect *feminist parties* to pursue an issue ownership strategy in their communication, seeking to increase the salience of their core issues. My analysis indicated that *feminist parties*

pursue this approach in their manifestos, however, party manifestos are just one form of party communication and past research has consistently demonstrated that manifestos are largely paid little attention by the electorate (Harmel, 2018). *Feminist parties* must therefore rely on other communication mediums such as traditional news media and social media to communicate their issue platforms to voters and to other parties.

Thus, in the following two empirical chapters, I assess the extent to which the issue concerns of three European *feminist parties* in Finland, Sweden and the UK are effectively communicated through print news media and social media. I assess both the strategies of parties in communicating their issue concerns and the potential difficulties they face as small/niche parties mobilising gender-based issues.

Chapter 5. Newspaper coverage of feminist parties and their candidates

In the previous Chapter I investigated the issues emphasised in European women's parties' manifestos 1990-2020. In doing so, I established the existence of a shared ideology underlying the women's party family that is centred on equal rights for women and minoritised groups, as well as social justice through social policy provision. However, I also offered empirical evidence of a differentiation in issue concern between *essentialist women's parties*, who focus on securing women's material status, and *feminist parties*, whose platforms extend this to challenge patriarchal norms and structures.

I also provided evidence that while many women's parties are small parties, only *feminist parties* can also be conceptualised as niche parties. *Feminist parties* meet the definition of a niche party as mobilising around neglected issues (Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). From the analysis in Chapter 4, I found contemporary European *feminist parties* to mobilise around issues that have relatively low salience on the issue agenda, including gendered violence and human security. Moreover, I demonstrated that contemporary European *feminist parties* pursue policy-seeking as well as electoral-seeking goals in their manifestos through appeals to cooperation and coalition with mainstream parties.

From this point onwards I focus only on *feminist parties*. While I found *essentialist women's parties* to be an ideologically distinct type of women's party, they are also somewhat limited in their emergence and competition. The lifespan of essentialist women's parties is often relatively short, even just one election cycle. Whereas there are several examples of long-running *feminist parties* that are consistently competitive and are actively pursuing policy-seeking as well as office-seeking goals. Moreover, many contemporary *feminist parties* produce similar issue platforms to pursue these goals. They therefore offer a clear and interesting case for an examination of the issue communication of small/niche parties that would not apply as well to *essentialist women's parties*.

To attract voters and to achieve their policy-seeking goals, *feminist parties* require accurate and effective communication of their issue priorities. Hence, in the next two empirical Chapters I investigate the issue communication of three contemporary European *feminist parties*: Finland's Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party (FP)), Sweden's Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative (FI)) and the UK's Women's Equality Party (WEP). I focus on these parties as they are three of the most visible and electorally successful *feminist parties* currently operating in Europe. I investigate their issue communication across two second-order election campaign

periods in which they have historically been successful, the 2019 European Parliament election and a municipal campaign within each country (see Section 3.2.1, pp.74-78, for a more detailed rationale for my choice of these three parties).

In this Chapter I investigate the issue coverage collectively received by these parties in traditional news media across the two election campaign periods. The purpose of this investigation is to evaluate the extent to which the parties' issue concerns are effectively communicated via their news coverage. As I outlined in Chapter 2, a large proportion of the electorate gain their political information from traditional news media. It is therefore very important for parties that their issue concerns are accurately and effectively communicated by media actors. For niche parties, this accurate issue coverage is all the more important as they are mobilising around issues that are not as well established on the policy agenda and are less likely than mainstream parties to have pre-existing and stable issue ownership associations among voters and the newsroom alike. The media therefore play an important role in communicating small/niche parties' platforms but also constructing and reinforcing their image for the electorate.

However, in Chapter 2 I argued that *feminist parties* may face difficulty in receiving accurate and effective issue coverage, based on both their status as small/niche parties and as actors that mobilise around gender-based issues. My general expectation is that the gendered issue stereotypes that have been found in past research to be applied to women political actors in news media will also be applied to *feminist parties*. This will therefore impede their ability to accurately communicate the range of issue concerns I identified in their manifestos in the previous Chapter.⁵⁴

In the following section I develop specific hypotheses about the issue coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates. I then review the data and methods used to conduct my analyses and provide further detail on the statistical models that I used to test my hypotheses. Following this, I present my results and a discussion of how my findings relate to existing research on the media coverage of small/niche parties and of women political actors.

⁵⁴ In my analysis I make comparison between the issue mentions in news coverage of FP, FI and WEP and the issue priorities that I identified in the larger sample of *feminist parties'* manifestos in the previous Chapter. While this is not a direct comparison of parties' issue communication and new coverage, the platforms of FP, FI and WEP are very reflective of the analysis in Chapter 4. These parties' manifestos comprised 18 of the 32 *feminist party* manifestos that I analysed. The findings therefore represent their issue concerns well. In addition, in Appendix H I present further analyses of the manifestos published by these parties for the EP and municipal elections under focus in Chapters 5 and 6. This further demonstrates that these parties' issue concerns support those identified in Chapter 4.

5.1 Expectations and hypotheses

In Chapter 2 I demonstrated that it is well established that small/niche parties receive less media coverage than mainstream parties (Deacon et al., 2019; Denemark et al., 2007; Van Aelst et al., 2008). However, the content of their media coverage is relatively unexplored. Past research on mainstream parties has found that media coverage is often linked to parties' manifestos (Merz, 2017) and research specifically on small parties has found that they are primarily covered on their owned issues (Schwarzbözl et al., 2020). However, others have found that small/niche parties struggle to gain media coverage on issues that are not already salient on the issue agenda (Meyer et al., 2020).

Small and niche parties' lack of agenda-setting power limits the amount and type of media coverage that they receive. In this vein, Hughes (2016) offers an interesting contribution to these debates through the concept of agenda dissonance. He argues that because small parties are not powerful enough to affect the issue agenda (Meyer et al., 2020), media actors instead rely on stereotyped heuristics about their owned issues when writing articles. This leads to a dissonance between parties' actual communication and their issue coverage in news media. In his analysis, Hughes (2016) finds that media coverage of European green parties over-emphasises environmental issues, which green parties are heavily associated with, despite this not featuring as heavily in the press releases of parties themselves.

I expect that as small/niche parties, *feminist parties* will also be victim to a similar agenda dissonance. Like green parties, *feminist parties* may be subject to a misalignment between their perceived owned issues and the issues that they actually campaign on at any specific election. Specifically, I expect that the dissonance in *feminist parties*' issue coverage will be motivated by stereotypes about women political actor's issue concerns and competencies.

Past research on the media coverage of party candidates has shown that women are often associated with stereotypically feminine issues, such as education, healthcare, and women's rights (Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Ross et al., 2013; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). This has been extended to the party level where it is shown that parties with more women candidates and women in more visible positions also receive a higher level of coverage on compassion-based issues (Greene and Lühiste, 2018).

The *feminist parties* in my sample were formed by women, primarily run women candidates and (for the elections under investigation at least) have women in leadership positions. Moreover, the parties are likely to have associative issue ownership over issues relating to

women, given their association with women's movements (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020).

My first hypothesis thus combines literature on the misrepresentation of small parties' issue platforms with evidence of the gendered mediation of women political actors. I expect that these mechanisms combined will result in *feminist parties* and candidates being associated with stereotypically feminine issue areas in their news coverage.

H1: Newspaper coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates is more likely to focus on stereotypically feminine issues than stereotypically masculine issues.

While I expect that media coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates will mention stereotypically feminine issues to a greater extent, it may be possible that this will occur because *feminist parties* themselves emphasise gender-based issues. A noted limitation in past research on gendered issue stereotyping in media coverage of women political candidates is that research designs often do not account for the communication of candidates themselves. Without knowledge of what issues candidates emphasise in their communication, it is not possible to delineate whether a higher proportion of mentions of gender-based issues in news coverage is a result of media bias or simply reflects gender differences in candidate's campaign communication (Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008: 382).

The few studies that have included a measure of political actor's own communication still identify a continued overrepresentation of gender-based issues in news coverage relative to actor's own emphasis at the candidate level (Kahn, 1994) and at the party level (Greene and Lühiste, 2018). This supports the agenda-dissonance theory in relation to gender-based issues and indicates that a similar dissonance will be observed in media coverage of *feminist parties*.

In Chapter 4 my analysis of the full sample of *feminist party* manifestos demonstrated that these parties' issue priorities included both stereotypically feminine issue areas, such as childcare and gendered violence, but also stereotypically masculine issues, such as foreign policy (see Appendix H for further evidence of these issue priorities in FI, FP and WEP manifestos). Therefore, I expect that in pursuit of their policy-seeking and electoral-seeking goals, *feminist parties* will emphasise the full range of their issue priorities in news coverage. This may be through the quotes they supply to journalists or via interviews and self-authored articles.

However, I expect that journalists will instigate an agenda dissonance by relating *feminist parties* to stereotypically feminine issue areas. In particular, I expect that journalists will emphasise those stereotypically feminine issues that are linked with the feminist movement,

such as reproductive rights, as these are the issues for which *feminist parties* have an associative issue ownership. Previous evidence of this has been found in studies on media coverage of women's movements. Scholars find that media coverage of women's movements over-emphasises issues stereotypically associated with second-wave feminism such as reproductive rights and equal pay, relative to organisations' own communication on these issues (Barakso and Schaffner, 2006; Bronstein, 2005; Schreiber, 2010).

To test this expectation, my second hypothesis distinguishes between the actor mentioning the issue within a news item. I expect that *feminist party* actors will emphasise *both* stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine issues whereas I expect that journalists will overrepresent stereotypically feminine issue areas.

H2: Journalists are more likely than *feminist party* leaders, candidates, and members to mention stereotypically feminine issues.

Furthermore, I expect the reliance on gendered stereotypes to be exacerbated where the *amount* of coverage afforded to *feminist parties* is limited. This brings together theories of media logic with those of gendered mediation. Previous research on small parties has demonstrated that media logic and journalistic norms mean that small parties receive a limited amount of coverage (Deacon et al., 2019; Van Spanje and Azrout, 2022) and that, as a result, the coverage is reliant on stereotype-based cues (Hughes, 2016). Thus, I expect that news items that mention fewer issues in relation to *feminist parties* will be more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues, as the limited space will lead journalists to rely more heavily on stereotyped cues than to truly reflect the issues that *feminist parties* emphasise. Accordingly, news items with more issue mentions, such as profile pieces on *feminist parties*, are likely to have more issue mentions. This will mean that a wider range of issues are mentioned and therefore that they will be less reliant on shorthand cues of parties' issue concerns.

Again, I expect the pattern of issue mentions to differ depending on who mentions the issue. I expect that *feminist party* actors will emphasise their core campaign messages, those being a mix of stereotypically feminine and masculine issue areas, regardless of the depth of the coverage. Whereas journalists are expected to be more likely to emphasise stereotypically feminine issue areas in news items where the coverage of *feminist parties* is less detailed.

H3: The fewer issues that are mentioned per news item, the more likely that those issues are stereotypically feminine.

H4: In particular, journalists are more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues where the number of issues per news item is small.

While I expect the media coverage of *feminist parties* to be largely influenced by the news values of journalists, in Chapter 2 (pp.34-35) I acknowledged *feminist parties* do have the ability to influence their media coverage to some extent. Past research on small/niche party communication has recognised that these parties are not simply ‘pawns of the media’ (Spoon, 2011: 110). Small and niche parties can be proactive in attempting to control the content of their coverage, for example by writing their own news articles and letters to the editor. In these articles parties may want to emphasise their core issues to increase their salience and even to challenge a perceived misrepresentation of their issue concerns. For example, past research has found that self-authored articles from green parties were strongly policy-oriented (Spoon, 2011: 135).

Therefore, my final hypothesis on the issue coverage of *feminist parties* is focused on the issues emphasised by *feminist party* leaders, candidates, and members in articles that they have written themselves. I expect *feminist party* actors to emphasise the issues that I identified as priorities in the sample of party manifestos in the previous Chapter. This includes both stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, and non-gendered issue areas. Alternatively, I expect that journalists will emphasise stereotypically feminine issues in articles that they have authored:

H5: Articles written by *feminist party* leaders, candidates, or members are less likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues compared to articles written by journalists.

5.2 Data and measurement

The data used in this Chapter is from a content analysis of 1,213 news items mentioning either a *feminist party* or candidate throughout the campaign for the 2019 European Parliament election and a municipal election in each country’s capital (see Section 3.2.2, pp.78-81, for a detailed overview of the collection of this data). The news items were coded using an original code scheme of issue mentions comprising a range of gender-based and non-gender-based issues (see Table 5.1). I developed the code scheme from the analysis of European women’s party manifestos 1990-2020 in Chapter 4. It was supplemented with a review of the manifestos produced by FI, FP and WEP for the 2019 European Parliament election and for the respective municipal elections (see Section 3.2.4, pp.84-91, for an overview of the content analysis code scheme).

The unit of analysis is the unique issue mention and a total of 1,124 issues mentions were coded from 1,213 news items. In the next section I present descriptive analysis of the extent of issue coverage received by my sample of *feminist parties* during these elections and investigate the breadth and variety of issue mentions in their news coverage.

My main investigation compares issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors. As explained in Chapter 3 (pp.90-91), my content analysis code scheme included a measure to capture the actor that mentioned each issue within a news item (see full code scheme in Appendix C). Coders could identify an issue as being mentioned by one of nine actors:

- Journalist⁵⁵
- *Feminist Party* candidate
- *Feminist Party* leader
- *Feminist party* member (e.g., spokesperson or general party member)
- Other party candidate
- Other party leader
- Other party spokesperson/other member
- Member of public
- Other e.g., celebrity/public figure, expert

For the analysis, issues mentioned by other party actors, members of the public, and public figures are discarded, leaving a total of 1056 issue mentions. I remove issue mentions from other actors as my hypotheses concern only comparison between issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors. The issue mentions by other actors comprised only 6% (n = 68) of all issue mentions, so their removal does not substantially alter the data, nor does it offer enough data for separate analysis. Finally, the three categories of *feminist party* actors were combined to construct a binary variable comparing issue mentions by journalists against all *feminist party* actors.

In the results section, I present descriptive analyses comparing issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in the full dataset and within each election campaign. In addition, H2-H5 are investigated using multinomial logistic regression models, implemented with the *nnet* package in R, which test journalist and *feminist party* likelihood of mentioning gender-

⁵⁵ The journalist category includes individual journalists as well as instances where the news item was written by an editorial team or news agency e.g., 'TT'

stereotypical issues. I use multinomial logistic regression, as the dependent variables are nominal categories with no inherent order.

I use two models to test my hypotheses. First, I employ a model where the dependent variable is the mention of a stereotypically feminine or stereotypically masculine issue in comparison to mention of a neutral issue. This follows the framework of previous research on both voter evaluation and media representation of women political actors' issue concerns which have used binary categories of stereotypically feminine and masculine issues (Atkeson and Krebs, 2008; Banwart and Robertson, 2003; Dan and Iorgoveanu, 2013; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Meeks, 2012).

However, I extend on these studies by including a neutral category of issues. Not all issues can be straightforwardly categorised as either stereotypically masculine or stereotypically feminine. Past research has circumvented this by testing only a few evidently gender-stereotypical issues, yet this does not capture the full extent of party and candidates' issue coverage. Thus, to avoid this limitation, I follow the lead of Jalalzai (2006) in utilising a neutral category of issues. The sorting of issues into the three categories is presented in Table 5.1.⁵⁶ A full discussion of how the issues were assigned to each category is provided in Chapter 3 (pp.87-89).

In multinomial logistic regression, one category of the dependent variable must be used as the reference group. The coefficients produced by the model therefore represent the probability of being in one of the other categories of the dependent variable in comparison to being in the reference group. In these models, I have chosen the neutral issue category as the reference category. Thus, the model tests the likelihood of either a *feminist party* actor or journalist mentioning either a stereotypically feminine or stereotypically masculine issue compared to their likelihood of mentioning a neutral issue.

I explore the differences in issue mentions by actor in greater detail by using a multinomial logistic regression model where the dependent variable is a range of specific issue areas. One of the expectations that I outlined in Chapter 2 and in the hypotheses above is that stereotypically feminine issue areas will be over-emphasised in *feminist parties'* news coverage, relative to *feminist parties'* own communication on gender-based issues. In particular, I expect that journalists will over-emphasise the issues that are stereotypically associated with the feminist movement, such as equal pay and reproductive rights.

⁵⁶ Issue mentions coded as 'Other' are not included in the regression models where the dependent variable is mention of a stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, or neutral issue.

Table 5.1 Classification of issues into gender-stereotypical categories

Stereotypically feminine	Neutral	Stereotypically masculine
Abortion/reproductive rights	Culture and media	Economics
Childcare/parental leave	Democratic values/anti-extremism	Foreign policy/security
Environment	Employment/labour	Immigration
Education	European Union	Law and order
Equal pay	Housing/infrastructure	Transport
Gender equality		
Healthcare		
Human rights		
Refugees		
Sexual violence		
Social care		
Minoritised groups		
Violence against women		
Welfare		
Women's descriptive representation		

Notes: See Table 3.7 for an overview of gender-stereotypical issue categorisation in past literature

Thus, I use a multinomial model where the dependent variable is distinct issue areas to investigate which issues receive greater emphasis by journalists and *feminist party* actors. In these models the dependent variable is a nominal variable comprising 15 issue areas. These areas are collapsed from the more comprehensive code scheme of 26 issue categories to address sparseness in the dataset where some specific issues are only mentioned very few times. Table 5.2 outlines the issue areas and the specific issue codes they contain.

As mentioned above, in multinomial models, one category is used as a reference group. In models with multiple categories in the dependent variable, the selection of a reference category can be based on theoretical factors or practical factors, such as choosing the category with the most values (Johfre and Freese, 2021). I have chosen 'equal rights' as the reference category because it satisfies both theoretical and practical considerations.

First, mentions of 'equal rights' are highly frequent across both groups of the independent variable, making it a useful comparison category. Second, the area includes mentions of the individual issues of 'gender equality', 'minoritised groups', 'equal pay', and 'women's descriptive representation'. This category therefore offers a strong comparison point to test how journalists and *feminist party* actors discuss specific issue areas, as opposed to a general reference to *feminist parties*' stereotypical association with gender equality and minority rights.

Table 5.2 Issue areas and associated issue categories

Issue area (multinomial model)	Issue category (full code scheme)
Abortion	Abortion/reproductive rights
Culture	Culture and media
Democratic values	Democratic values and anti-extremism
Economics	Economics
Employment and labour	Employment/labour
Environment	Environment
Equal rights	Equal pay / Gender equality/ Minoritised groups/ Women's descriptive representation
European Union	European Union
Gendered violence	Sexual violence / Violence against women
Human rights/refugees	Human rights / Refugees
Immigration	Immigration
Infrastructure	Housing and infrastructure / Transport
Security	Foreign policy/security / Law and order
Social policy	Childcare/parental leave / Education / Healthcare / Social care / Welfare
Other	Other

Independent Variables

To test my expectations, my primary independent variable is a dichotomous coding of whether a *feminist party* actor or journalist mentions an issue. The construction of this dummy variable is outlined above. To test H5, the actor mentioning the individual issue is substituted for the author of the news article, coded in the same way.

H3 and H4 also investigate whether the number of issues mentioned per news item affects the likelihood that the issue mention will be gender stereotypical. To test this, I include a predictor variable measuring the number of issues mentioned in relation to a *feminist party* or candidate within a news item. This is calculated as a scale variable, measured as 1/number of *feminist party* or candidate issue mentions per news item. This weighting creates a scale from most issue mentions to fewest, which allows me to test whether gender-stereotypical issues are more likely to be mentioned as the number of issue mentions per news item decreases. For example, an

issue that is mentioned in a news item with a total of four unique issue mentions has the value 0.25, compared to an issue that is mentioned as the only issue in a news item that would have a score of 1.

Control Variables

I also include a number of control variables in the multinomial models. I include party/country fixed effects using dummy variables where FI is the reference category. I control for the election campaign period using a dummy variable where the reference category is the municipal election. Finally, I control for the political orientation of the newspaper, under the expectation that left-leaning newspapers will be more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues. I classified newspapers as either left- or right-leaning using past research focused on Swedish, Finnish, and UK news coverage (Andersson, 2013; De Cock et al., 2019; Garz and Rickardsson, 2023; Isotalus and Almonkari, 2014; Lyytimäki, 2011; Nord and Strömbäck, 2006) and the Eurotopics database (www.eurotopics.net) (see Table 3.4 in Chapter 3).

In the next section I present my analysis of the issue coverage of FI, FP and WEP and their candidates throughout the 2019 EP election and individual municipal elections. I begin with an overview of the extent of issue coverage received by the parties before conducting the analysis to address my hypotheses. In each case I begin with descriptive statistics before presenting the explanatory models.

5.3 The extent of *feminist parties*' news coverage

I begin with an initial descriptive examination of the extent of newspaper coverage received by the *feminist parties* in my sample. Table 5.3 provides descriptive statistics on the number of news items collected that mention each party or party candidate, the number of those news items that mention a political issue, and the number of issue mentions within the full dataset and each election campaign period. First, there is interesting variation in the number of news items mentioning the parties and candidates, with the Swedish FI mentioned in 840 news items, compared to 262 for the UK WEP and 111 for the Finnish FP. I expect that some of this variation is accounted for in the relative electoral success of FI compared to the other parties. In both the European Parliament and municipal election from which I collect data, FI had an incumbent candidate (three incumbents for the municipal election). As discussed in the literature review, media logic dictates that incumbent candidates receive more coverage than challengers (Kahn, 1993), so this could explain some of the variation.

Table 5.3 Summary of feminist party issue coverage

Party	Number of news items			Number of news items that include issue mention			Total number of issue mentions		
	European Parliament	Municipal	Total	European Parliament	Municipal	Total	European Parliament	Municipal	Total
FI	511	329	840	176 (34.44%)	128 (38.9%)	304 (36.19%)	395	313	708
FP	69	42	111	17 (24.64%)	23 (54.76%)	40 (36.04%)	50	69	119
WEP	123	139	262	74 (60.16%)	72 (51.8%)	146 (55.73%)	123	188	311
Total	703	510	1213	267 (38%)	223 (43.73%)	490 (40.4%)	568	570	1138

Notes: The total number of issue mentions is higher than the number of news items because news items can mention multiple issues

Turning now to the content of news items, of the 1,213 news items coded, only 40.4% (490) mention a political issue in reference to a *feminist party*. In the code scheme, if a *feminist party* or candidate was mentioned in a news item but no issue was mentioned, I coded in what capacity the actor was mentioned. For news items that did not mention a political issue, *feminist parties* were typically included on party or candidate electoral lists or in election polling or results. In the majority of their news coverage, they were therefore not covered with any meaningful content.

Without data on the total mentions and issue coverage of other parties in the same election campaigns, it is difficult to make an objective judgement as to whether *feminist parties* receive limited news coverage in comparison to other parties. However, this data would indicate that where *feminist parties* are mentioned by journalists, they are largely not linked to a political issue. This also supports literature from the US context that has found that women political actors receive limited issue coverage (Bystrom et al., 2001; Fridkin and Kenney, 2014; Kahn and Goldenberg, 1991), though my results cannot determine whether the lack of attention is the result of media logic or gender bias.

Comparing across parties, FI and FP received similar levels of issue coverage (36%), while for WEP issue coverage was greater with 55% of news items mentioning a political issue. There is variation in coverage across all three parties in the different election campaigns. FI received similar levels of issue coverage across both election campaigns. FP received over twice as much coverage mentioning a political issue in the municipal campaign (54.76%) compared to the EP campaign (24.64%). This variation may potentially be explained by the fact that the Helsinki Municipal Council election was the first that FP contested after they emerged in 2017. Therefore, they may have attracted media attention as a result of the novelty factor as a new party. Finally, WEP was the only party to receive a greater share of issue coverage in the European Parliament campaign (60.16%) compared to the municipal campaign (51.8%).

As well as a difference in the share of news items mentioning a political issue, the average number of issues mentioned per news item is varied across each party at 2.3 for FI, 3 for FP, and 2.1 for WEP. Thus, while receiving the lowest amount of coverage overall, FP are discussed, on average, in relation to more issues per news item than either FI or WEP. Differences in the share of issue coverage between parties can partly be explained by difference in electoral system, party system, and media system. For example, a possible reason that WEP received a greater share of issue coverage in the EP campaign may be due differences in electoral system and party system. All countries use proportional representation in the European Parliament elections and Sweden and Finland both use party list proportional representation to elect

municipal representatives. Alternatively, the London Mayoral and Assembly elections use the Supplementary Voting system to elect a mayor, where voters express a first and second choice preference of candidate and candidates must receive over 50% of the vote to be elected. The Assembly uses the Additional Member System where voters first choose an individual candidate in their constituency and then a party list. Both systems include a majoritarian component. Past research has suggested that small parties receive more news coverage in proportional systems as they have a greater coalition potential (Hopmann et al., 2012), offering a potential explanation for WEP's lower coverage in the municipal campaign.

The extent of issue coverage received by *feminist parties* shows no clear patterns across parties. However, it is clear that the amount of issue coverage received is relatively low. On average *feminist parties* received 38% issue coverage in the EP campaign and 43.73% in the municipal campaign. These findings support literature which finds that media coverage in elections is largely afforded to the major players in the game (Hopmann et al., 2012). Even in regional and local elections where small/niche parties are expected to be more viable and thereby receive more coverage, the attention and issue coverage received by *feminist parties* was overall low.

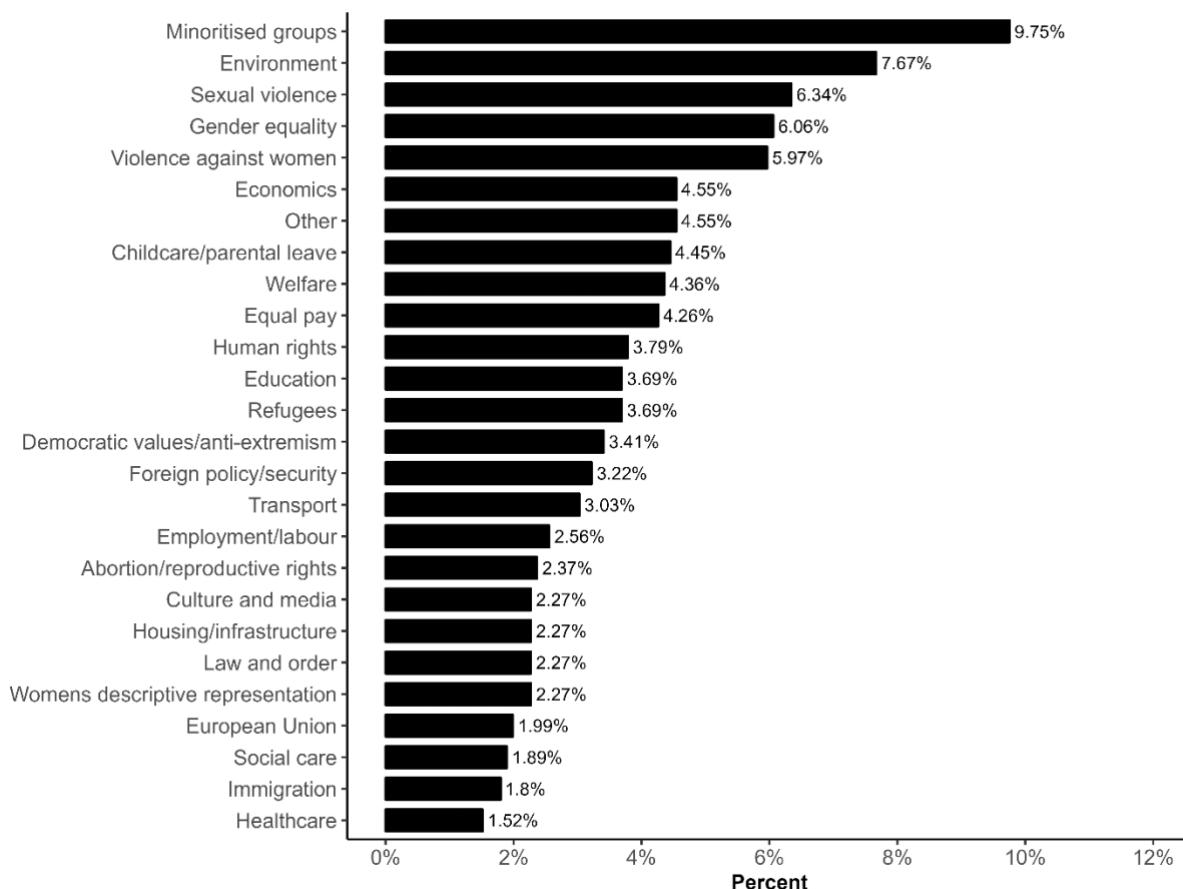
In the following section I explore the content of the issue coverage that FI, FP, and WEP and their candidates received. While the dataset of news items mentioning a political issue is relatively small, the unit of analysis for the content analysis was the individual issue mention, producing a larger volume of data (see Hayes and Lawless, 2015 for a similar approach). From the 490 news items that contained an issue, a total of 1,138 issue mentions were counted, and are fairly evenly split across the European Parliament (38%) and municipal elections (43.73%). This presents a large enough sample for descriptive and explanatory analysis. However, within-election findings will only be discussed in reference to the descriptive findings, given the lower number of news items within each group. Furthermore, I do not include party-level comparisons in the main analysis, but they can be found in Appendix I.

5.4 Feminist parties' issue coverage

I now examine the issue coverage received by Feministiskt Initiativ (FI), Feministinen Puolue (FP) and the Women's Equality Party (WEP) in the full dataset and within each election campaign period.

Figure 5.1 displays the proportion of issue mentions in a full dataset of news items that discuss a political issue in relation to *feminist parties*.

Figure 5.1 Ranked frequency of issue mentions in newspaper coverage of *feminist parties*



Notes: News items mentioning feminist parties or candidates (n = 1056)

The most commonly mentioned issues concerning *feminist parties* were ‘minoritised groups’, the ‘environment’, ‘sexual violence’, ‘gender equality’, and ‘violence against women’. These make up 35.9% of all issue mentions related to *feminist parties*. These issue mentions map fairly closely to the issues that I found to be emphasised in the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos (and in FI, FP and WEP’s election-specific manifestos in Appendix H). In Chapter 4 the mixed method text analysis identified *equality for women* and *minoritised groups*, *gendered violence*, *human security*, and *care* as the core issue concerns of *feminist parties*. Each of these topics is featured with a fairly high frequency in the issue coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates.

Interestingly, ‘minoritised groups’, ‘environment’, and ‘sexual violence’ received more attention than ‘gender equality’. The ‘gender equality’ category encompasses general references to the need for gender equality or women’s rights. Although this category received a relatively high volume of mentions, it appears that it is more common for a *feminist party* to be mentioned

in relation to a specific policy concern rather than a general reference to their desire for gender equality.

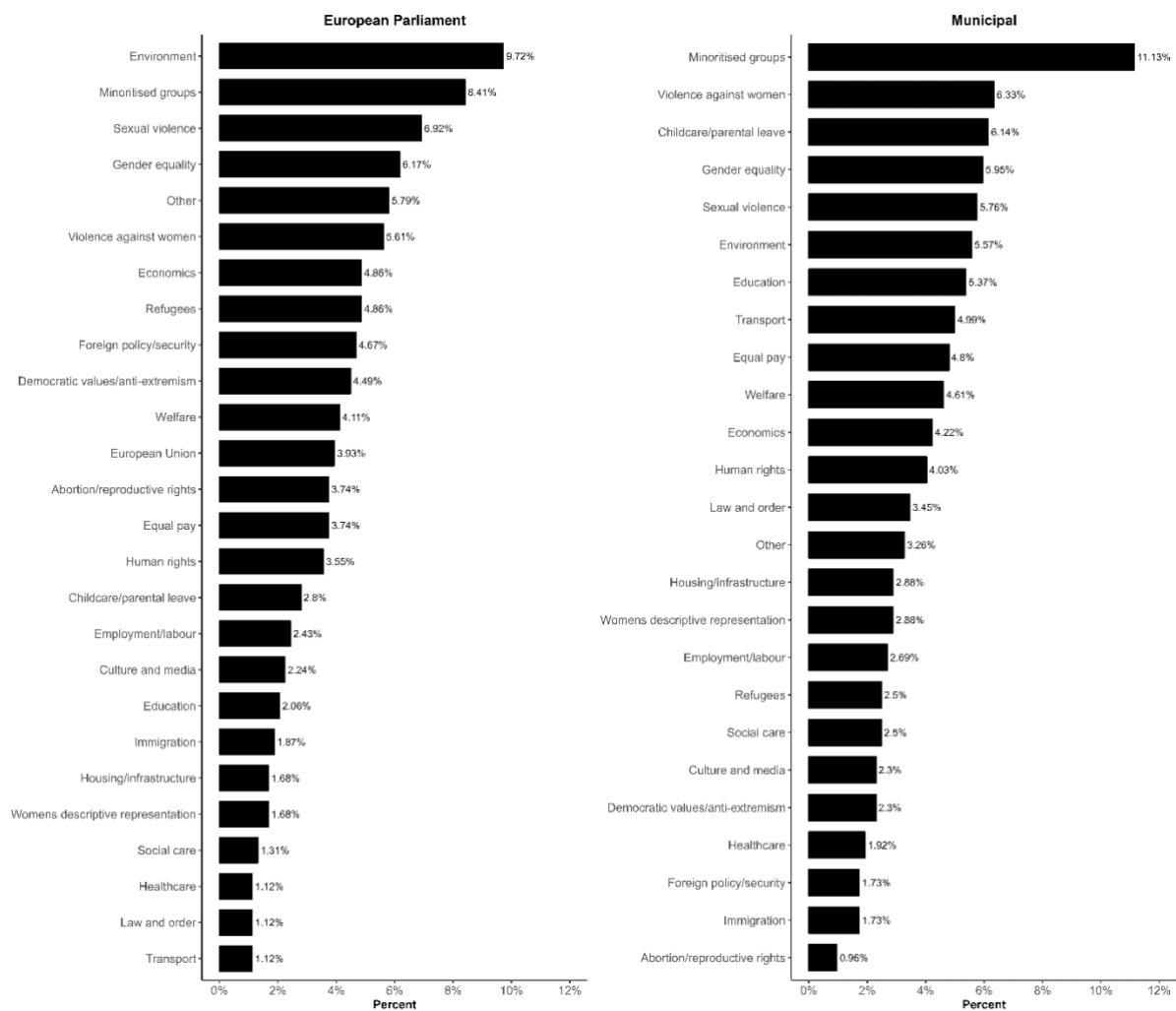
While the issues most emphasised in news coverage of *feminist parties* map well against the issues emphasised in their manifestos, stereotypically feminine issues comprise 75% of the total issue coverage, with ‘economics’ being the only stereotypically masculine issue area to appear in the top 50% of issues mentioned. In Chapter 4 I identified that *feminist parties* discussed several key stereotypically masculine or neutral issue areas in their election manifestos including foreign policy, economics and democratic values. These appear less emphasised in their news media coverage. Moreover, issues that are salient on the issue agenda and news agenda, such as ‘immigration’, have a low number of mentions in relation to *feminist parties*.

Descriptive evidence thus lends indicative support H1, as the majority of issue mentions in *feminist party* news coverage are stereotypically feminine. Although the most frequently mentioned issues such as ‘gender equality’, ‘minoritised groups’, ‘sexual violence’, and the ‘environment’ are among the top issue priorities of *feminist parties* as identified in the analysis of party manifestos. This offers support to past research which has found a linkage between party manifestos and party issue coverage (Merz, 2017). However, the relatively high mention of *feminist parties*’ stereotypically feminine issue concerns relative to their stereotypically masculine priorities indicates some evidence of a gendered bias in news coverage.

Within election campaign periods there is greater variation in issue mentions. Figure 5.2 displays the most prevalent issue mentions in the news coverage of my sample of *feminist parties* in the European Parliament campaign in the left panel and country-specific municipal election campaigns in the right panel. Across election types, issues such as ‘minoritised groups’, ‘gender equality’ and ‘sexual violence’ and ‘violence against women’ remain highly frequent. These reflect the core principles of intersectional *feminist parties* focused on tackling structural inequalities. It suggests that news coverage of *feminist parties* across electoral contexts predominantly mentions their core issue concerns but in particular emphasises *feminist parties*’ concern with equality for marginalised groups rather than other specific issue concerns or policy positions.

Beyond the most relatively frequently mentioned issues, there is greater variation and issue mentions broadly reflect election-specific issue priorities. For example, within the municipal campaign period there is a higher proportion of issue mentions of ‘economics’, ‘transport’, ‘law and order’, and ‘infrastructure’ (see WEP, 2016; FI, 2018b; FP, 2017).

Figure 5.2 Relative frequency of issue mentions in news items from European Parliament and municipal campaign periods



Notes: European Parliament (n = 535); Municipal (n = 531)

Whereas in the news items from the European Parliament election campaign, there is an increased proportion of transnational issues such as the ‘environment’, ‘refugees’, and ‘foreign policy/security’. Thus, news coverage broadly appears to follow the issue agendas of the local and regional elections.

Increasingly, the European Parliament elections are seen as competition over values-based issues (Galpin and Trenz, 2019; Han and Finke, 2022), and this is reflected in the relative frequency of mentions of ‘environment’ and also ‘democratic values/anti-extremism’, which received proportionally half as many issue mentions during municipal election campaign periods.

This is an interesting finding as anti-extremism is a distinct issue priority for FP and FI across election contexts and both parties explicitly advertise themselves as alternatives to right-wing

extremist parties. For example, as seen in FI's electoral slogan "Out with the racists, in with the feminists!" (FI, 2014; McGing, 2014).⁵⁷ However, this issue is only really mentioned in reference to *feminist parties* during news coverage from the EP campaign and even then, it makes up only 4% of all issue mentions. This offers some early support for the agenda dissonance between *feminist parties*' communication and their issue coverage. *Feminist parties* may receive coverage on their manifesto priority issues but beyond this have less of an ability to impact the broader media agenda.

5.5 Comparing issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors

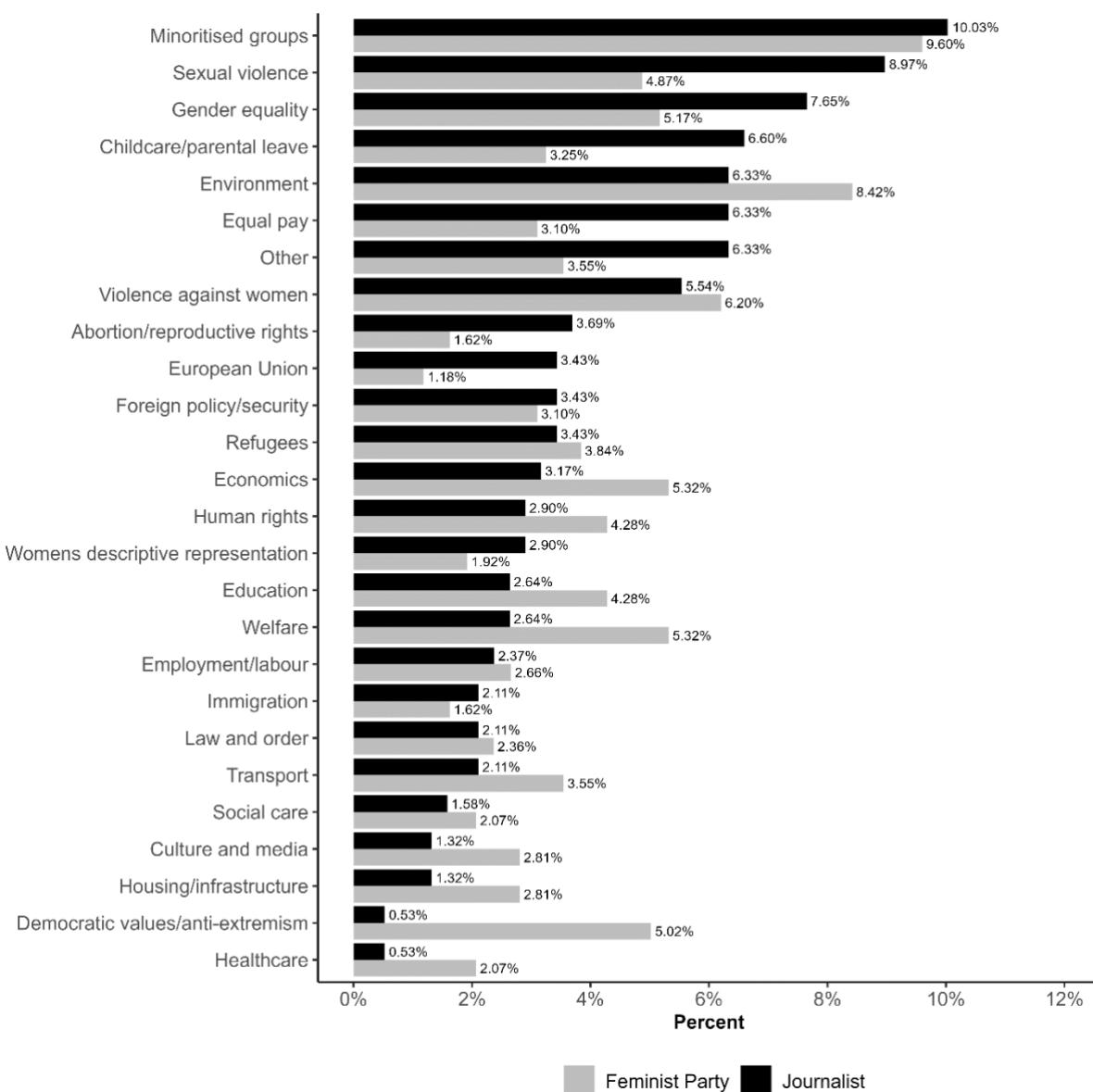
The analysis of the full dataset indicates that, overall, news coverage generally reflects *feminist parties*' issue priorities, but with a particular emphasis on stereotypically feminine issue areas. In this section I investigate whether there is variation in the issues that journalists mention compared to leaders and candidates of *feminist parties* themselves. As several of the top issue priorities of *feminist parties* are stereotypically feminine (for example, gendered violence, environment, social care), I expect both *feminist parties* and journalists to emphasise these issues. However, I expect that journalists are more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention these and other stereotypically feminine issues in their coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates (H2).

Initial descriptive evidence supporting this hypothesis is presented in Figure 5.3, where across both actors, the stereotypically feminine issue areas that are prioritised by *feminist parties* in their manifestos were those most mentioned in news items. Particularly, the 'environment', 'minoritised groups' and 'gender equality' were mentioned with the greatest frequency by both journalists and *feminist parties*. Beyond these, Figure 5.3 shows that journalists mentioned gender-based issues including 'equal pay' and 'sexual violence' to a greater extent than *feminist party* actors.

The gap between journalist and *feminist party* issue mentions is widest for issues related to women's maternal and caring roles including 'abortion' and 'childcare', both of which were mentioned proportionally twice as much by journalists as by *feminist parties*. My analysis of party manifestos indicated that *feminist parties* do emphasise issues such as childcare, often linking this to the unequal burden of care placed on women as a result of socialisation.

⁵⁷ WEP engage with anti-extremism to a lesser extent although they have spoken out against the platform afforded to far-right parties (Reid, 2018).

Figure 5.3 Relative frequency of issue mentions by journalist and *feminist party* actors



Notes: Journalist (n = 379), Feminist Party (n = 677)

However, I found no strong emphasis of issues such as reproductive rights in *feminist party* manifestos. Neither was it heavily emphasised in their news coverage, with abortion the 24th most frequently mentioned issue by *feminist party* actors. This offers some indicative empirical evidence that while *feminist parties*' election manifestos and their own issue mentions in news coverage emphasised their priority issues, journalists continually related these parties to stereotypically feminine issue areas. In particular, as previously found in media coverage of women's movements, there is indication of *feminist parties* being covered on issues associated with the second-wave feminist movement including reproductive rights and equal pay (Bronstein, 2005).

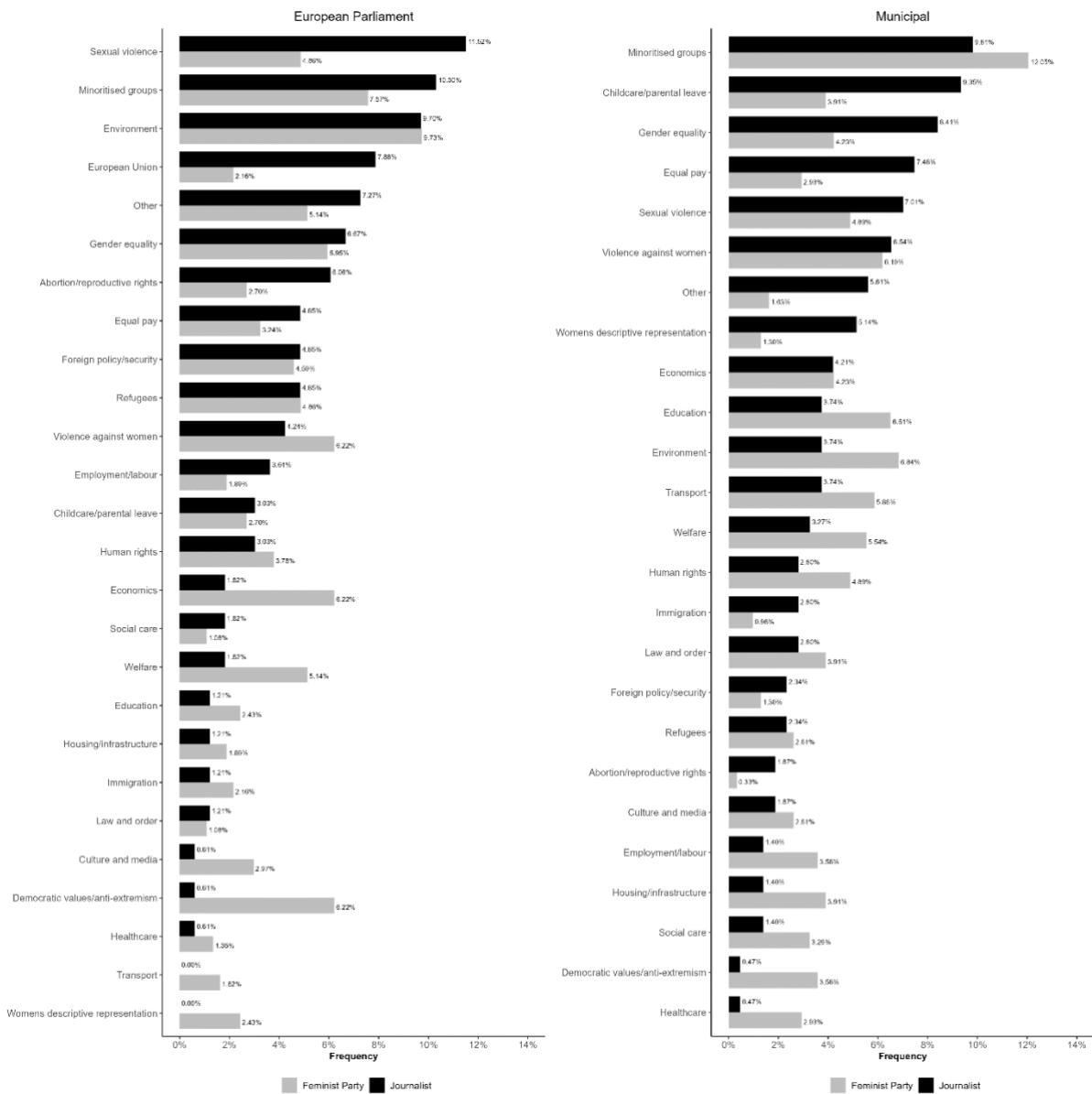
Figure 5.3 also demonstrates that journalists mentioned stereotypically masculine or non-gendered issues to a lesser extent than *feminist party* actors. For example, ‘economics’, ‘transport’ and ‘housing/infrastructure’. The clearest example of this is that ‘democratic values/anti-extremism’ accounts for fewer than 1% of issue mentions by journalists, but this represents 5% of issue mentions from *feminist parties*. As previously mentioned, anti-extremism and anti-far right politics is a core priority for many European *feminist parties*, so the lack of representation on this issue from journalists indicates a dissonance between the issue priorities communicated by *feminist parties* in their manifestos and news media and the issues mentioned by journalists in news coverage.

The descriptive analysis is unable to explain whether this dissonance is a result of gendered stereotypes or a dissonance between *feminist parties*’ policy priorities and the broader issue agenda. However anti-extremism was a highly salient issue in the 2019 EP elections as populist and far right parties made gains across Europe (Mudde, 2019). Therefore, journalists not mentioning this issue in relation to *feminist parties*, despite its salience and *feminist parties*’ own emphasis of it may indicate a gender bias.

My descriptive analysis thus offers initial support for H2, as I show evidence that beyond the stereotypically feminine issue areas that I found to be emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4, there remains a dissonance between the issues mentioned by journalists and *feminist parties*. Specifically, journalists mention stereotypically feminine issues to a greater extent than *feminist parties* and mention fewer stereotypically masculine or neutral issues.

The difference in gendered issue mentions from journalists and *feminist party* actors is more nuanced within election-specific coverage. The left panel of Figure 5.4 shows that in newspaper news items from the 2019 European Parliament campaign, journalists mentioned ‘abortion’ and ‘sexual violence’ proportionally twice as often as *feminist parties*. On the other hand, *feminist parties* mentioned stereotypically masculine and neutral issues such as ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ and ‘economics’ to greater extent than journalists. However, *feminist parties* also mentioned some stereotypically feminine issue areas such as ‘culture and welfare to a greater extent than journalists.

Figure 5.4 Relative frequency of issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in European Parliament and municipal election campaigns



Notes: European Parliament: Journalist ($n = 165$), Feminist Party ($n = 370$); Municipal: Journalist ($n = 214$), Feminist Party ($n = 307$).

At the municipal level, the gendered difference in issue mentions is more pronounced with journalists mentioning stereotypically feminine issue areas such as ‘childcare’, ‘equal pay’, ‘gender equality’, and ‘women’s descriptive representation’ relatively more than *feminist parties*. Alternatively, ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, ‘education’, ‘environment’, and ‘housing/infrastructure’ make up a higher percentage of *feminist parties* mentions. Thus, within and across European Parliament and municipal campaigns, I find indicative descriptive evidence to support my hypothesis, as journalistic coverage of *feminist parties* seems more closely tied to gender stereotypes and general references to gender equality and women’s rights.

Whereas across both election campaigns *feminist parties* continued to emphasise a broader range of both stereotypically feminine, masculine, and non-gendered issue areas.

Moving now to the explanatory analysis, Table 5.4 presents the results of a multinomial logistic regression testing the effect of actor on the likelihood of mentioning a gender-stereotypical issue in comparison to a neutral issue (see Table 5.1 for an overview of the issue categories). As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the model includes controls for country, election type, and the political leaning of the newspaper.

Table 5.4 demonstrates support for H2 as, when all control variables are held constant, journalists are statistically significantly more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention a stereotypically feminine issue ($p < 0.05$). However, there is no statistically significant difference in journalist and *feminist party* actor's likelihood to mention stereotypically masculine issues in comparison to neutral issues. Coefficients from multinomial logistic models are difficult to substantively interpret, therefore in Figure 5.5 I present the predicted probability of journalists and *feminist party* actors mentioning a neutral, stereotypically masculine, or stereotypically feminine issue.

As I expected, both *feminist party* actors and journalists mention stereotypically feminine issues with a high relative frequency, with both probabilities above 70%. Yet journalists are 7% more likely to mention a stereotypically feminine issue than a *feminist party* actor and the slope is steeper for journalists than for *feminist parties* when comparing the difference in likelihood of mentioning a neutral and a stereotypically feminine issue.

Turning briefly to the control variables, both stereotypically feminine issues ($p < 0.05$) and stereotypically masculine issues ($p < 0.05$) are less likely to be mentioned than neutral issues in news coverage from the European Parliament election campaign. This may be explained by the 'European Union' and 'democratic value and anti-extremism' issue categories, which are coded as neutral. The 'European Union' category is not mentioned in any news items from the municipal campaigns (see Figure 5.2) and therefore may skew the mentions of neutral issues toward the European Parliament campaign. Lastly, WEP news items are more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas, whereas FP news items are more likely to mention stereotypically masculine issue areas in comparison to FI.

Table 5.4 Likelihood of gender-stereotypical issue mention by actor, multinomial logistic regression

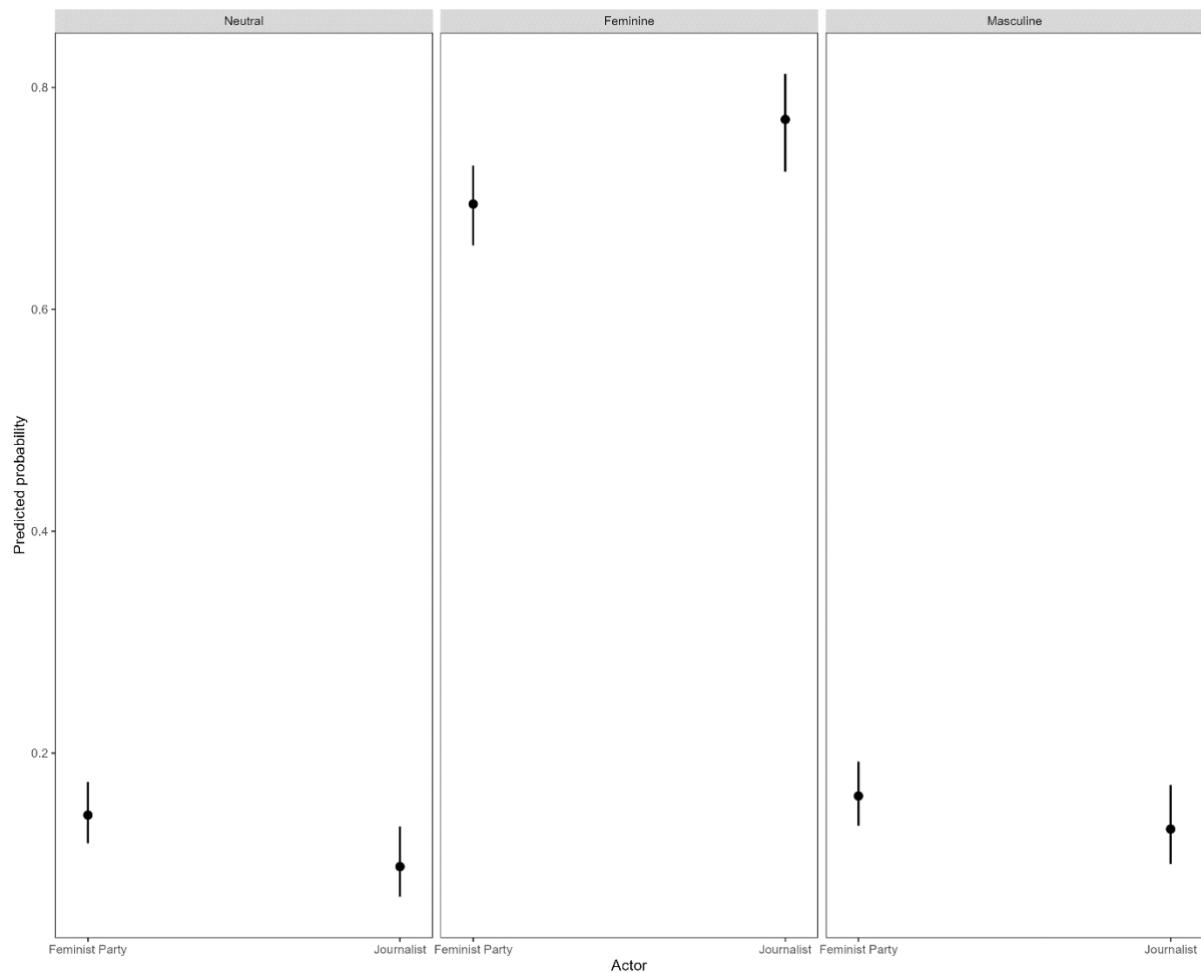
DV: Stereotypically gendered issue mention (Baseline = neutral)	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine
Journalist	0.45* (0.18)	0.10 (0.23)
European Parliament	-0.53* (0.17)	-0.58* (0.22)
Newspaper (Left)	0.25 (0.23)	-0.35 (0.32)
WEP	0.46+ (0.23)	0.02 (0.32)
FP	0.35 (0.32)	0.81+ (0.39)
Constant	1.02** (0.15)	-0.04 (0.19)
AIC	1803.16	
Deviance	1574.466	
N	1056	

**p<.01.; *p<.05; +p<.1; Standard error in parentheses.

Overall, the predicted probability plots support the expectation I outlined earlier in this Chapter, that *both feminist party* actors and journalists would mention stereotypically feminine issues to a high proportion but that journalists would be likely to over-emphasise stereotypically feminine issues. However, I also observed in the descriptive analysis that the *types* of stereotypically feminine issues mentioned by journalists were different to those mentioned by *feminist party* actors. For example, journalists mentioned traditional women's issues such as abortion more than *feminist parties* and, particularly in municipal elections, were more likely to mention gender equality than *feminist party* actors.

The simplistic three-way coding of the issue areas to stereotypically masculine, stereotypically feminine, or neutral issue categories obscures this variation in the specific issues that are mentioned. While it is an improvement on past research that has relied on binary coding of issue areas, greater nuance can be achieved by using more complex multivariate models. This may provide more insight into the mechanisms influencing the greater emphasis of stereotypically feminine issue areas by journalists.

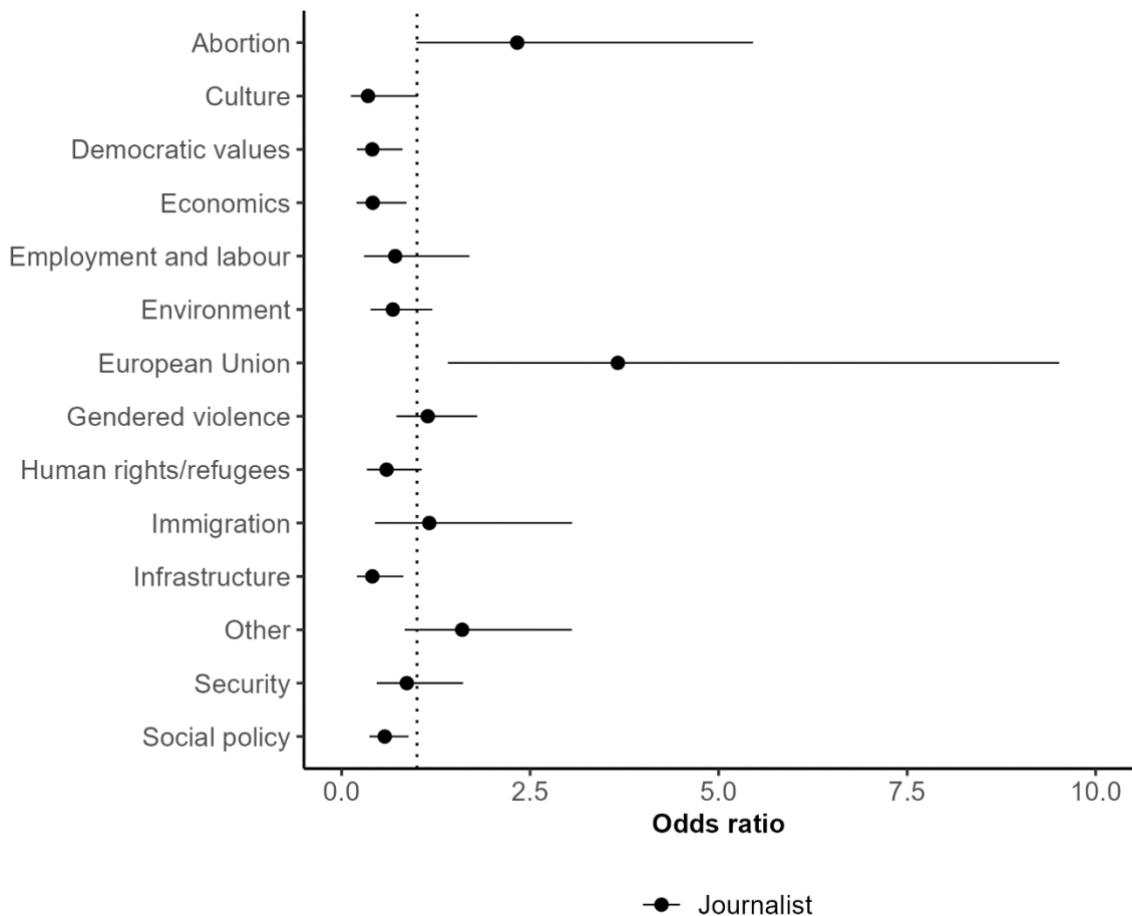
Figure 5.5 Predicted probability of journalists and *feminist party* actors mentioning gender-stereotypical issue areas, with 95% confidence intervals



Therefore, to investigate the gendered issue coverage in more detail, I fitted a multinomial logit model to test the effect of actor on mention of specific issue areas. As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the original set of issues was consolidated into broader *issue area* categories to address sparsity in the dataset (Table 5.2). I also explained earlier that the issue area of ‘equal rights’ is used as a reference category, following both theoretical and practical logic. Thus, the model coefficients represent the logged odds likelihood of journalists compared to *feminist party* actors to mention specific issue areas relative to the likelihood that they will mention ‘equal rights’. Control variables include country, election type and newspaper orientation.

The full results for the multinomial model with issue areas as the dependent variable can be found in Appendix L. For a more intuitive interpretation of the substantive difference across issue mentions, Figure 5.6 plots the odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 5.6 Odds ratios of journalists mentioning issue areas, with 95% confidence intervals



If the coefficient is above 1 it can be interpreted that journalists are statistically significantly more likely than *feminist parties* to mention issue x in comparison to the likelihood of mentioning ‘equal rights’.

The first interesting observation from Figure 5.6 is that the issues that show no statistical difference in mention between journalists and *feminist party* actors are those that I identified as priorities in the analysis of the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4. In particular, the structural topic models (Section 4.4.3, pp.129-137) identified latent topics such as gendered violence and transnational issues including environmentalism to be a common and distinctive set of priorities for *feminist parties* compared to *essentialist women’s parties*. Figure 5.6 shows no statistically significant difference in mentions of the ‘environment’ or ‘gendered violence’ issue areas from journalists and *feminist party* actors. The explanatory results therefore suggest that the issue concerns in *feminist parties’* manifestos are somewhat accurately reflected by journalists in their news coverage. This supports past research which has argued that parties’ news coverage primarily reflects their manifesto issues (Merz, 2017).

Beyond priority issues however, Figure 5.6 demonstrates that journalists are significantly less likely than *feminist party* actors to mention a number of issue areas, both gender-stereotypical and neutral, relative to ‘equal rights’. The strongest effects are across the neutral and stereotypically masculine issues. In particular, ‘democratic values’ has a 96% lower probability of being mentioned by a journalist than a *feminist party* actor, compared to ‘equal rights’ ($p < .001$).⁵⁸ As discussed above, democratic values and anti-extremism is an issue area mentioned with a relatively high proportion by *feminist party* actors and has been noted as a key theme of Nordic *feminist parties’* politics (McGing, 2014). This shows some of the strongest evidence of a dissonance in *feminist parties’* communication and journalist’s media coverage.

Journalists are also 82% less likely to mention either ‘economics’ or ‘infrastructure’ ($p < .001$). Therefore, while the three-way coded model found no evidence that journalists were less likely to mention a stereotypically masculine issue in comparison to a neutral issue, when examining specific issues there is evidence that journalists are more likely to mention the baseline feminine issue of ‘equal rights’ rather than specific policy areas.

Figure 5.6 also indicates differences in issue mention of stereotypically feminine issue areas. I find evidence that relative to ‘equal rights’, journalists are 75% less likely than *feminist party* actors to mention ‘social policy’ ($p < .01$) and 83% less likely to mention policies relating to ‘culture’ ($p < .01$). The descriptive statistics in Figure 5.3 indicated that ‘childcare/parental leave’ was mentioned with a high proportion by journalists. However, the broader category of ‘social policy’ also includes mentions of ‘education’, ‘healthcare’, and ‘social care’. Combining these issues together, journalists have a lower likelihood of mentioning ‘social policy’ compared to their likelihood of mentioning ‘equal rights’.

The only two issue areas that journalists are *more* likely than *feminist party* actors to mention, in comparison to ‘equal rights’ are ‘abortion’ ($p < .1$) and ‘European Union’ ($p < .01$). The ‘European Union’ category includes mentions of European Union institutions and processes and mentions of Brexit. Figure 5.3 shows that in the full dataset journalists mentioned this category proportionally three times more than *feminist party* actors. However, Figure 5.4 clarifies that mentions of this issue were restricted to the European Parliament campaign with the issue receiving no mentions from any actor in news items collected from the municipal campaign periods. The low mentions of this issue in the full dataset and the uneven distribution may account for the large confidence bands around the coefficient.

⁵⁸ Probability is calculated as ((odds ratio)-1) *100

Turning to ‘abortion’, the descriptive analysis in Figure 5.3 shows that ‘abortion’ was mentioned proportionally twice as much by journalists as *feminist party* actors and in Figure 5.4 I showed that this was particularly the case during the European Parliament campaign where abortion was the 7th most frequently mentioned issue by journalists, compared to the 16th for *feminist party* actors. I reviewed the news items that mention ‘abortion’ and found that a large share of these issue mentions are from Swedish newspapers covering a story about Christian Democrat MEP and Riksdag member Lars Adaktusson, who it had been revealed had consistently voted against abortion legislation throughout his four-year term in the European Parliament. For example, in the article “KD leader voted against abortion 22 times” (Sinclair, 2019) the voting record of other sitting parties including FI on abortion legislation is listed.

Therefore, the coverage of *feminist parties* on abortion is not directly focused on the parties and their policies but rather links them to a news issue. This analysis therefore supports past research which indicates that small parties receive increased coverage when an issue over which they have ownership over becomes salient on the news agenda (Meyer et al., 2020). However, it arguably also indicates evidence of a gendered mediation effect, as *feminist parties* are connected to the abortion issue based on stereotyped perceptions of women’s issues, rather than accurate understanding of parties’ own issue platforms where abortion was not found to be heavily emphasised. This echoes findings of Barakso and Schaffner (2006) and Bronstein (2005) who found that women’s organisations in the US were commonly linked to abortion in news coverage despite this not featuring to a large extent in their own communication.

The multinomial model using issue areas as the dependent variable thus support and extend the results of the models using a more simplistic gender-stereotype coding. First it supports the earlier analysis by showing that journalists are more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas such as ‘abortion’ and ‘equal rights’. However, it extends on the more simplistic model by showing that journalists are more likely to mention the issue of ‘equal rights’ than to mention almost any other more specific policy area.

Thus, in line with the argument that I set out in Chapter 2, as small parties with relatively little power and ability to influence the media agenda, *feminist parties*’ media coverage reflects stereotyped heuristics of their issue ownership. In this case, *feminist parties* are related to traditional women’s issues such as equal rights and reproductive rights. This suggests that media logic and gendered stereotypes work in conjunction to emphasise specific aspects of *feminist parties*’ platforms, as parties are linked to gender-stereotypical issues over which they have associative ownership. This may be disadvantageous to *feminist parties* who want to

communicate their comprehensive issue platform and instead are largely framed by journalists as single-issue parties focused on equal rights.

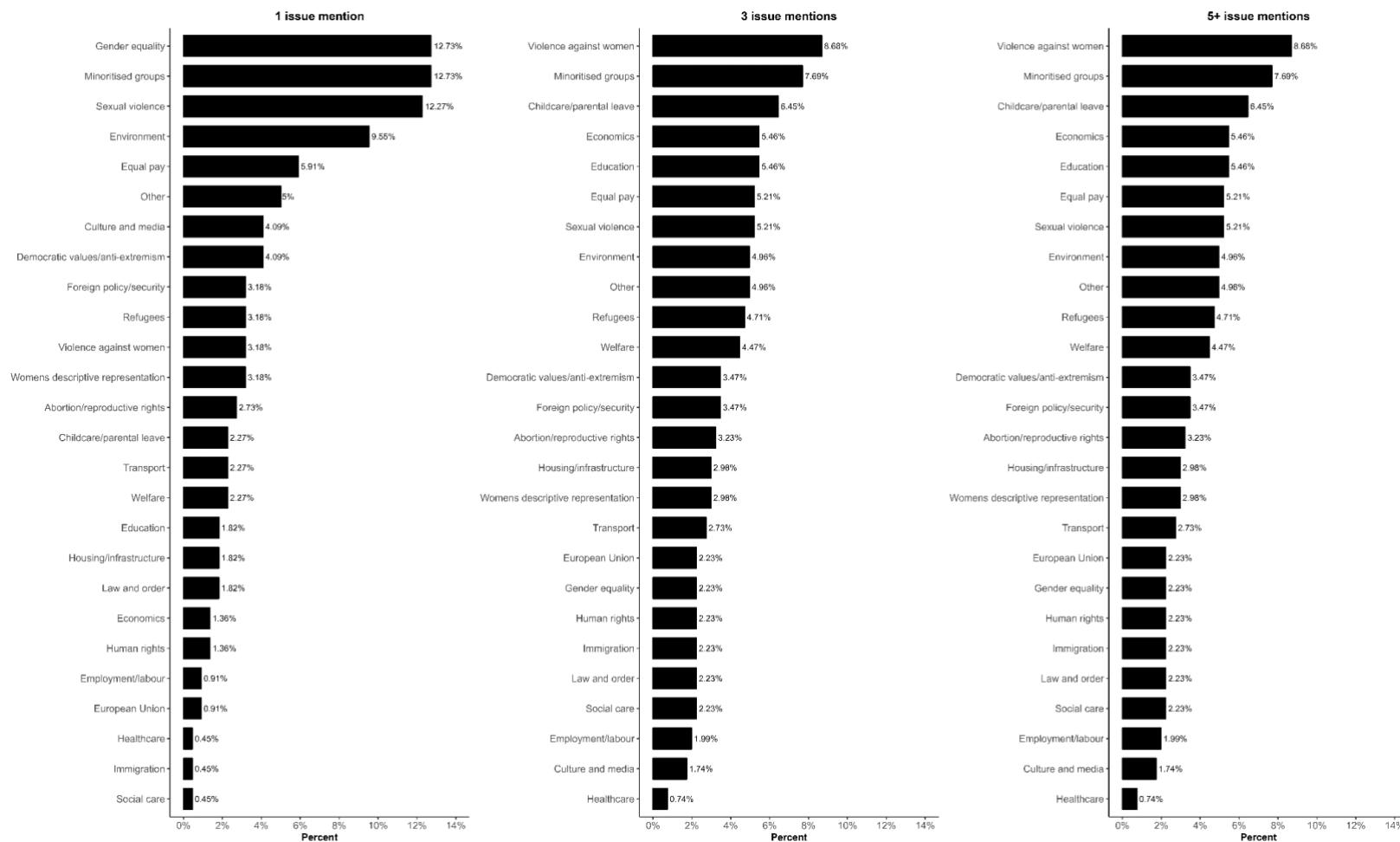
Before moving to my next hypotheses, I will briefly review the control variables (full results in Appendix L). Country had no statistically significant relationship with the likelihood of journalists mentioning specific issue areas. Meanwhile, election type and the political orientation of the newspaper had mixed significance across the issue categories. Mentions of 'infrastructure' were significantly more likely in news coverage from the municipal campaigns. This maps against the different issue agendas to be expected in local versus European elections. Left-leaning newspapers were significantly more likely to mention 'infrastructure', 'human rights' and 'other' issue areas ($p < .05$) compared to right-leaning newspapers. This gives a slight indication that left-leaning newspapers mention a broader variety of issues than right leaning newspapers (particularly given the significant likelihood to mention 'other' issues), but no obvious pattern emerges from these results.

5.6 Bringing the extent and type of coverage together

Through descriptive analysis I have demonstrated that *feminist parties* receive limited issue coverage which is predominantly focused on stereotypically feminine issues. Explanatory models have shown that while journalists and *feminist party* actors both emphasise the core priorities of *feminist parties*' election manifestos, journalists are more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention other stereotypically feminine issue areas in news coverage. I now bring in a measure of the extent of issue coverage received by *feminist parties*. My expectation is that news items with fewer issue mentions in relation to *feminist parties* are more likely to include stereotypically feminine issue mentions. I expect that journalists, in particular, are more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues where limited coverage is afforded to *feminist parties*. This combines theories of media logic and gendered mediation, in suggesting that where *feminist parties* receive limited coverage, news values will lead journalists be more reliant on stereotyped heuristics about the party, those being stereotypically feminine (Hughes, 2016).

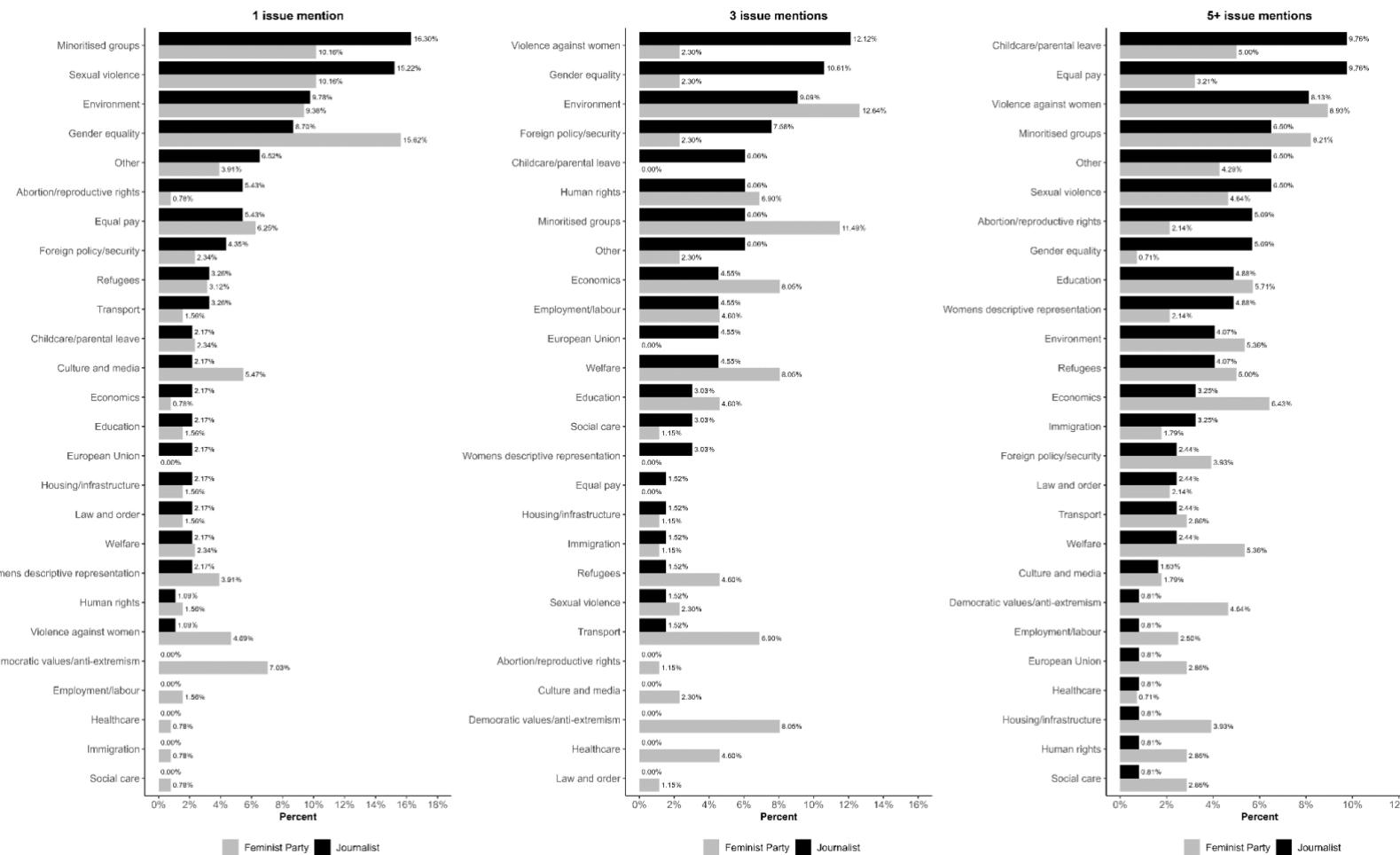
I first consider the descriptive evidence. Figure 5.7 presents the proportion of issue mentions in a news items with one, three and five-or- more issue mentions and Figure 5.8 on the following page disaggregates these mentions by journalist and *feminist party* actor.

Figure 5.7 Relative frequency of issue mentions in news items mentioning one, three, and five-or-more issues



Notes: One issue (n = 220); Three issues (n = 153); Five-or-more issues (n = 403)

Figure 5.8 Relative frequency of issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in news items mentioning one, three and five-or-more issues



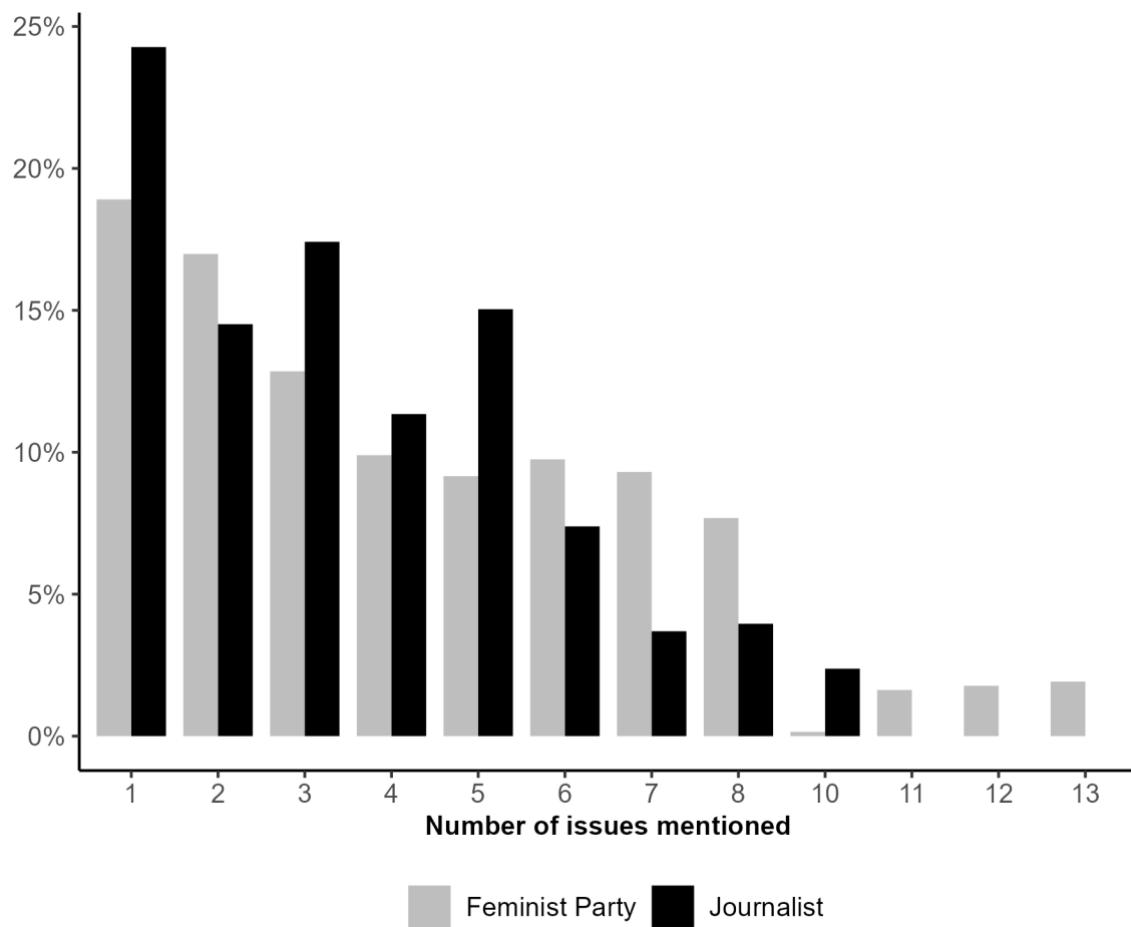
Notes: One issue: Journalist (n = 92), Feminist Party (n = 128); Three issues: Journalist (n = 66), Feminist Party (n = 87); Five-or-more issues: Journalist (n = 123), Feminist Party (n = 280).

Figure 5.7 demonstrates that as the number of issues mentioned in a news item increases, the issues mentioned with the highest proportion remained relatively consistent and include ‘gender equality’ and ‘minoritised groups’, the ‘environment’, and gendered violence (‘sexual violence’ and ‘violence against women’). These map against the issue priorities that I identified in the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4 and in FI, FP and WEP manifestos in Appendix H. It thus adds further evidence that media coverage of *feminist parties* is broadly reflective of the core concerns presented in their election platforms (Merz, 2017).

However, in news items with fewer issue mentions there is less variation in which issues were mentioned. In news items mentioning just one issue, ‘gender equality’, ‘minoritised groups’ and ‘sexual violence’ account for 37% of all issue mentions. In comparison, the top three issues mentioned in news items containing five-or-more issue mentions- ‘violence against women’, ‘minoritised groups’, and ‘childcare and parental leave’- account for 22% of all issue mentions. Perhaps most significantly, ‘gender equality’ was the most frequently mentioned issue in news items mentioning one issue compared to the 19th in news items mentioning five-or-more issues. This offers initial support for H3 as it indicates that where issue coverage of *feminist parties* is limited, they are more commonly related to issues of women’s rights and gender equality. This may result in a framing of *feminist parties* as single-issue parties focused on gender equality rather than parties that mobilise specific gender-based issues and apply a feminist lens to a broader range of issues.

In part, the increased variation in the types of issues mentioned in news items with more in-depth coverage can be explained by differences in the focus of the news items and the actors mentioning the issues. Metadata from the content analysis indicates that news items where only one issue was mentioned in relation to a *feminist party* were often focused on multiple parties, election events, or a news event, limiting the depth of the coverage received by the *feminist party* (Appendix J). In comparison, news items with more issue coverage of *feminist parties* were more likely to engage with the parties’ issue concerns in greater depth and include mentions from *feminist party* actors themselves, for example as part of an interview or letter to the editor. This is supported in Figure 5.9 which compares the number of issues mentioned per news item by either a journalist or *feminist party* actor. *Feminist parties* account for the higher proportion of issue mentions per news item, particularly at the top end of the scale where the news items including over 10 issues are either news items authored by *feminist party* actors or in-depth interviews with *feminist party* leaders or candidates.

Figure 5.9 Number of issue mentions per news item by *feminist party* actors and journalists



Notes: Feminist Party ($n = 677$), Journalist ($n = 379$)

For example, the one article in the dataset containing 13 issue mentions is a commentary piece by FI European Parliament candidate Soraya Post titled: ‘A life free of violence is the goal—why the EU needs more feminism’ (Post, 2019). The article sets out the party’s platform for the upcoming election.

There is therefore a correlation between the extent of issue coverage within a news item and the likelihood that *feminist parties* are mentioning the issues. This in part explains why a wider variety of issues are mentioned in news items with five-or-more mentions. However, even where the number of issue mentions is lower, *feminist parties* still mention a wider range of issues. The disaggregated issue mentions in Figure 5.8 show that in news items with only one issue mention, the three most mentioned issues from journalists make up 41.3% of all their issue mentions (‘minoritised groups’, ‘sexual violence’, and the ‘environment’). In comparison, for *feminist parties* this figure is 35.9% (‘sexual violence’, ‘gender equality’, and ‘minoritised groups’).

Variation does increase for all actors as the number of issues mentioned per news item increases. For example, in the news items mentioning five-or-more issues, the top three issues ('equal pay', 'childcare and parental leave', and 'violence against women') account for 27.7% of all journalist issue mentions and 23.6% ('violence against women', 'minoritised groups', and 'economics') of *feminist party* issue mentions. However, while journalists show increased variation in the range of issues mentioned in news items with more issue mentions, the descriptive evidence indicates that they still mentioned stereotypically feminine issues. Figure 5.8 shows that in news items mentioning five-or-more issue mentions, journalists mentioned 'gender equality' relatively seven times as often as *feminist party* actors (0.71% and 5.69%). 'Abortion', 'childcare', and 'equal pay' also count for a greater proportion of mentions by journalists than by *feminist party* actors. Thus, where coverage of *feminist parties* is more detailed, journalists still mention stereotypical feminine issue areas to a greater degree than *feminist party* actors.

Moreover, journalists mentioned stereotypically masculine and neutral issues less. For example, *feminist party* actors mentioned 'democratic values and anti-extremism' fairly consistently across all levels of coverage. It accounts for 7% of mentions in news items with one issue, 8% of mentions in news items with three issues and 4% of mentions in news items with five-or-more issues. In comparison, there are no mentions of this issue from journalists in news items containing one or three issues and it accounts for less than 1% of journalist issue mentions in news items containing five-or-more issues.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the issue of 'democratic values and anti-extremism', which includes reference to extremist and far right groups, was highly salient during the European Parliament election and within Sweden and Finland throughout the 2010s (see Widfeldt, 2018). Both FI and FP position themselves as a counterforce to right wing nationalism, yet journalists did not reflect this communication in their coverage of *feminist parties*, demonstrating a clear dissonance between party communication and media coverage, even where the issue was salient on the policy and media agenda. My analysis cannot answer the question of whether this dissonance is the result of gender bias in coverage of *feminist parties* but demonstrates supporting evidence to previous research that small/niche parties struggle to receive coverage on the issues that they campaign on when those issues do not align with cues about party issue ownership (Hughes, 2016).

Let us turn now to the explanatory analysis. In Table 5.5 I test H3 and H4 using multinomial logistic regression models where the dependent variable is the three-part coding of stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, and neutral issue mentions. First, I test the

impact of the number of issue mentions per news item on the likelihood that an issue mention will be gender stereotypic (Model 1). As my expectation is that issue mentions are more likely to be stereotypically feminine where the number of issues mentioned per news item is lower, this variable is scaled so that a higher value represents fewer issues mentioned (see Table 5.5 notes). To test H4, journalists in particular are more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues where issue mentions are lower, Model 2 adds an interaction term for journalist and fewer issue mentions per news item. This adds two new variables to the model presented in Table 5.4. I present these models separately here in Table 5.5 for ease of reading alongside the discussion on the next few pages.

The results from Model 1 in Table 5.5 show that there is no significant effect of a lower number of issue mentions per news item and the likelihood that the issue mentions will be gender stereotyped, as compared to neutral. However, both the coefficient for stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine issue mentions are in the expected direction. Thus, as the number of issue mentions per news item reduces, it is more likely that they will be stereotypically feminine and less likely that they will be stereotypically masculine as compared to neutral. Nevertheless, the lack of a significant effect means that I do not find statistical support for H3.

This is an interesting finding as the descriptive statistics had indicated that news items with fewer issue mentions included a higher proportion of stereotypically feminine issue mentions. However, in the discussion of Figure 5.7, I observed that across different levels of coverage there was consistent emphasis of the issues that were found to be prioritised in *feminist party* manifestos. These include equal rights, gendered violence, and environmentalism, all of which are coded as stereotypically feminine. Therefore, while descriptive evidence indicated that a wider variety of both stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, and neutral issues were mentioned as coverage increased within a news item, the consistent emphasis of stereotypically feminine manifesto priority issues across all levels coverage may have meant that no significant effect emerged.

Model 1 does however show that even when the number of issue mentions per news item is controlled for, journalists are statistically significantly more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention a stereotypically feminine issues in news coverage, compared to likelihood of mentioning a neutral issue.

Table 5.5 Likelihood of gender-stereotypical issue mention by actor and extent of issue coverage, multinomial logistic regression

DV: Stereotypically gendered issue mention (Baseline = neutral)	Model 1		Model 2	
	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine
Journalist	0.47* (0.22)	0.21 (0.27)	0.41+ (0.36)	-0.23 (0.45)
Issue mentions per news item	0.44 (0.31)	-0.38 (0.42)	0.41 (0.37)	-0.78 (0.51)
Journalist*Issue mention per news item	-	-	0.13 (0.68)	1.12 (0.88)
WEP	-0.33 (0.27)	-0.51 (0.35)	-0.32 (0.27)	-0.48 (0.35)
FP	0.38 (0.42)	0.87+ (0.48)	0.38 (0.42)	0.90+ (0.48)
European Parliament	-0.46* (0.20)	-0.52* (0.25)	-0.46* (0.20)	-0.51* (0.25)
Newspaper (Left)	0.26 (0.27)	-0.40 (0.35)	0.27 (0.27)	-0.40 (0.35)
Constant	1.60** (0.21)	0.67** (0.25)	1.61** (0.22)	0.79** (0.27)
Deviance	1566.468		1570.805	
AIC	1594.468		1602.805	
N	1056		1056	

**p<.01; *p<.05; +p<.1 Standard error in parentheses. Issue mention per news item scale calculated as 1/the number of issues mentioned per news item.

Thus, there is more robust evidence in support of my expectation of an overrepresentation of stereotypically feminine issue mentions from journalists in *feminist party* news coverage.

In Model 2 I find no support for H4, as the interaction coefficient is non-significant (although the coefficient is in the expected direction). A possible explanation for this finding is the proportion of issue mentions by different actors across different levels of coverage. As shown in Figure 5.9, the number of issue mentions by journalists is heavily skewed toward the lower end of the scale, with *feminist parties* having double the number of issue mentions in the five-or-more category. This means that there are limited observations of issue mentions by journalists in news items with greater issue coverage and this imbalance may impede the power of the model.

Therefore, in Appendix K I replicate the model with issue mention per news item recoded as a dummy, representing either three or fewer or four or more issue mentions to better balance the data across the two groups. However, dummying the number of issue mentions per news item has no effect on the model and both the dummy variable and the interaction term still do not reach the threshold for significance.

An alternative explanation, which supports what was found in the descriptive analysis, is that journalists continue to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas in relation to *feminist parties*, regardless of the extent of the coverage. Figure 5.8 showed that even in news items with five-or-more issue mentions, journalists mentioned stereotypically feminine issue areas to a greater extent than *feminist parties*, including mentioning ‘gender equality’ proportionally seven times as much. Moreover, in Model 1 of Table 5.5 the actor coefficient was statistically significant, indicating that journalists consistently overemphasise stereotypically feminine issue concerns in comparison to *feminist party* actors when the extent of issue coverage is held constant. Therefore, I may not find support for my expectation in H4 because journalists are not *less likely* to mention a stereotypically feminine issue as the extent of issue coverage *increases*.

A complimentary explanation for why I did not find support for H4 draws from media logic. Issue mentions from *feminist party* actors in news items with fewer issue mentions may ultimately be under the control of journalists and editors. For example, journalists may select a quote from a *feminist party* to be used in a news item, therefore controlling what issue is mentioned. Alternatively, news items with more issue mentions are likely to be interviews with *feminist party* candidates or leaders or to be news items written by *feminist party* actors themselves. Therefore, it is possible that I did not find a significant effect for the interaction term as issue mentions from *feminist party* actors in news items with fewer issue mentions are in some cases also being directed by journalists.

In support of this explanation, in conducting the content analysis, I observed that a significant proportion of issue mentions from *feminist party* actors were standalone quotes supplied in articles about other topics. For example, several UK newspapers reached out to WEP representatives for a quote on a news story about criticism of a new model of iPhone that would be too big for women’s hands:

“*Women complain that new iPhones are too big to hold*” The Times (2018)

“*Bigger iPhones are not better, say women*” The Daily Telegraph (2018)

“*Apple is criticised for making new iPhones ‘too big for women’s hands’*” The Mirror (2018)

“*SEXIST SMARTPHONE. Apple slammed by feminists who say iPhones are now TOO big for women*” The Sun (2018)

WEP played no role in the initial news story, but UK newspapers featured quotes by then WEP leader Sophie Walker as a representative of the ‘feminists’ and ‘women’ who are the subject of the story. This supports existing research which has found that women politicians are more likely to be used as quotes in news stories relating to gendered issues (Ross and Carter, 2011; Sjøvaag and Pederson, 2019).

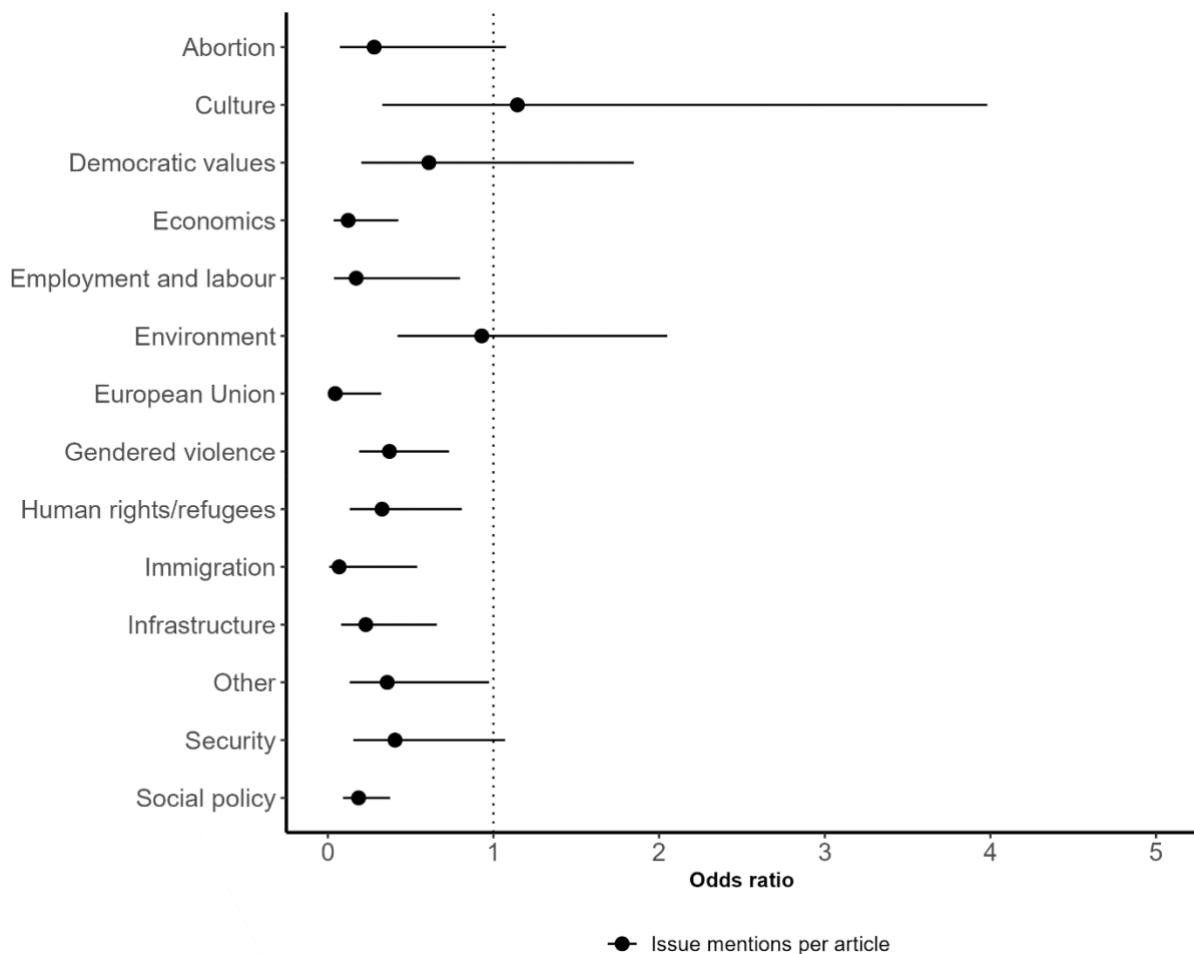
Overall, while the regression presented in Table 5.5 has produced some interesting results, combining issues into broad categories of either stereotypically masculine, stereotypically feminine, or neutral is obscuring the nuance that I observed in the descriptive analysis. Therefore, to investigate the variation in extent and type of coverage across specific issues, I add issue mention per news item as a predictor in the multinomial model where the dependent variable is specific issue areas.⁵⁹

The full table of results can be found in Appendix L but for more intuitive interpretation, Figure 5.10 plots the odds ratio of specific issue areas being mentioned in news coverage of *feminist parties* and their candidates as the number of issues mentioned per news item decreases. ‘Equal rights’ has a statistically significantly higher probability of being mentioned than ‘economics’, ‘employment and labour’, ‘European Union’, ‘gendered violence’, ‘human rights/refugees’, ‘immigration’, ‘infrastructure’, ‘other’ issues, and ‘social policy’. Thus, it shows that as the number of issue mentions per news item decreases, it is more likely that the issue mentioned will be ‘equal rights’ than to be almost any other issue, whether masculine or feminine.

This is a wide range of issue areas including both stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine issues. The fact that the likelihood of mentioning ‘equal rights’ is so prominent where the extent of *feminist parties*’ issue coverage is lower offers some good evidence that a media logic is at play in *feminist parties*’ news coverage. As outlined in Chapter 2, the theory of agenda dissonance argues that due to a lack of agenda-setting power, the media coverage of small parties will rely on stereotyped heuristics about their owned issues (Hughes, 2016).

⁵⁹ Turning briefly to the control variables from Table 5.5, the only significant effect in Model 1 is for election type. It is statistically significantly less likely that both a stereotypically masculine and stereotypically feminine issue will be mentioned in a news item published during the EP election campaign than during a municipal campaign. As discussed above in reference to Table 5.4, this is likely because the issue category of ‘European Union’ is overwhelmingly mentioned in the EP news items and is coded as neutral.

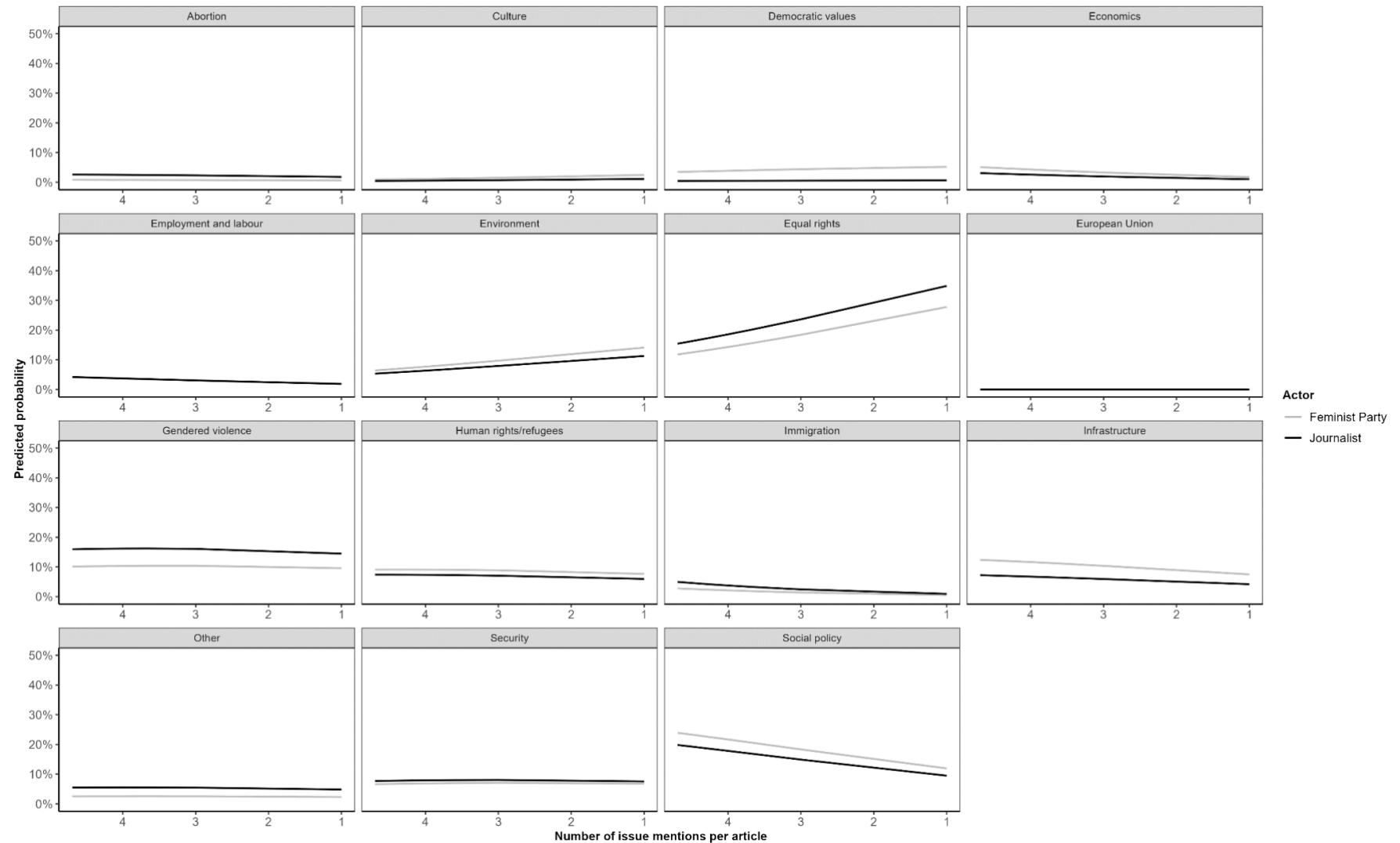
Figure 5.10 Odds ratios of issue area mention as the number of issue mentions per news item decreases, with 95% confidence intervals



The relative emphasis of the issue area of ‘equal rights’ indicates that where issue coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates is lower, it is more likely to mention the most generic issue associated with *feminist parties*- women’s and minority rights- than more specific policy areas.

To compare whether it is journalists that instigate this overemphasis, Figure 5.11 compares the predicted probability of journalists and *feminist party* actors mentioning specific issue areas as the number of issue mentions per news item decreases. It first shows that journalists do have a higher probability than *feminist party* actors of mentioning ‘equal rights’. Although the probability of mentioning ‘equal rights’ increases for both actors as the number of issues mentioned in a news item decreases. Journalists are also more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention ‘gendered violence’. On the other hand, *feminist party* actors have a higher probability of mentioning ‘democratic values’, ‘infrastructure’ and ‘social policy’.

Figure 5.11 Predicted probabilities of journalists and *feminist party* actors mentioning issue areas as the number of issue mentions per news item decreases



However, the general trend from Figure 5.11 is that the probability of mentioning specific policy areas decreases alongside the number of issue mentions per news item, whereas both actors have a higher probability of mentioning equal rights. This does not indicate that journalists are solely responsible for the over-emphasis of this issue. Although, as discussed previously, issue mentions from *feminist parties* in news items with fewer issue mentions may, for example, be single quotes that are selected by journalists.

5.7 Issue mentions in *feminist party* authored news items

Finally in this Chapter, I investigate the agency of the three *feminist parties* themselves in their news coverage. As outlined in the beginning of this Chapter, I recognise that small/niche parties can influence their own news coverage, for example by publishing opinion pieces or letters to the editor in newspapers. Of the 490 news items in the dataset that mentioned a political issue in relation to a *feminist party*, 78 (16%) were opinion pieces published by *feminist parties*. This suggests that *feminist parties* do utilise this communication strategy.

As niche parties pursuing electoral and policy-seeking goals, I expect that *feminist parties* will use this self-authored news coverage to publicise their issue platform and perhaps to challenge perceived misrepresentative news coverage. As shown in Chapter 4, the issue priorities of *feminist parties* are a mix of stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, and non-gendered issue areas. Thus, I expect *feminist parties* to communicate this mix of priorities in their issue coverage. However, as I expect that journalists will emphasise stereotypically feminine issues in news items that they have authored, my final expectation is that news items authored by *feminist party* actors are less likely to emphasise stereotypically feminine issues in comparison to news items authored by journalists (H5).

In Table 5.6 I repeat the multinomial model testing mention of a gender-stereotypical issue. However, I now substitute the profession of the actor that mentioned the issue for the profession of the *author* of the news item. This in essence tests media coverage by journalists against media coverage in which *feminist parties* had greater control over the message, such as in-depth interviews or opinion pieces.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Profile pieces and interviews with party leaders and candidates are coded as being authored by the *feminist party* as much of the text in the article is ‘authored’ by them.

Table 5.6 Likelihood of gender-stereotypical issue mention by author and extent of issue coverage, multinomial logistic regression

DV: Stereotypically gendered issue mention (Baseline = neutral)	Full sample				Author & Issue Mention			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine
Feminist Party	-0.22 (0.24)	0.14 (0.30)	-0.20 (0.24)	0.12 (0.31)	-0.39 (0.29)	0.06 (0.37)	-0.44 (0.31)	-0.01 (0.39)
Issue mentions per news item	- -	- (0.04)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.05 (0.05)	- -	- -	0.03 (0.06)	0.04 (0.07)
WEP	-0.34 (0.27)	-0.50 (0.36)	-0.38 (0.28)	-0.44 (0.37)	-0.43 (0.38)	-0.66 (0.50)	-0.41 (0.38)	-0.64 (0.51)
FP	0.33 (0.44)	0.98+ (0.51)	0.31 (0.44)	1.02+ (0.51)	0.85 (0.80)	1.39 (0.90)	0.87 (0.80)	1.40 (0.90)
European Parliament	-0.48+ (0.21)	-0.57+ (0.27)	-0.50+ (0.22)	-0.57+ (0.27)	-0.53 (0.29)	-0.61 (0.36)	-0.53 (0.29)	-0.61 (0.36)
Newspaper (Left)	0.24 (0.27)	-0.33 (0.36)	0.28 (0.28)	-0.39 (0.37)	0.05 (0.37)	-0.39 (0.49)	0.03 (0.38)	-0.42 (0.49)
Constant	2.04** (0.22)	0.50 (0.27)	2.18** (0.27)	0.29 (0.34)	2.40** (0.25)	0.68 (0.37)	.2.32** (0.34)	0.56 (0.43)
Deviance	1297.297		1289.213		773.246		773.0164	
AIC	1321.297		1317.213		797.246		801.0164	
N	863		863		534		534	

**p<.01; *p<.05; +p<.1. Standard error in parentheses. Issue mention per news item scale calculated as 1/the number of issues mentioned per news item.

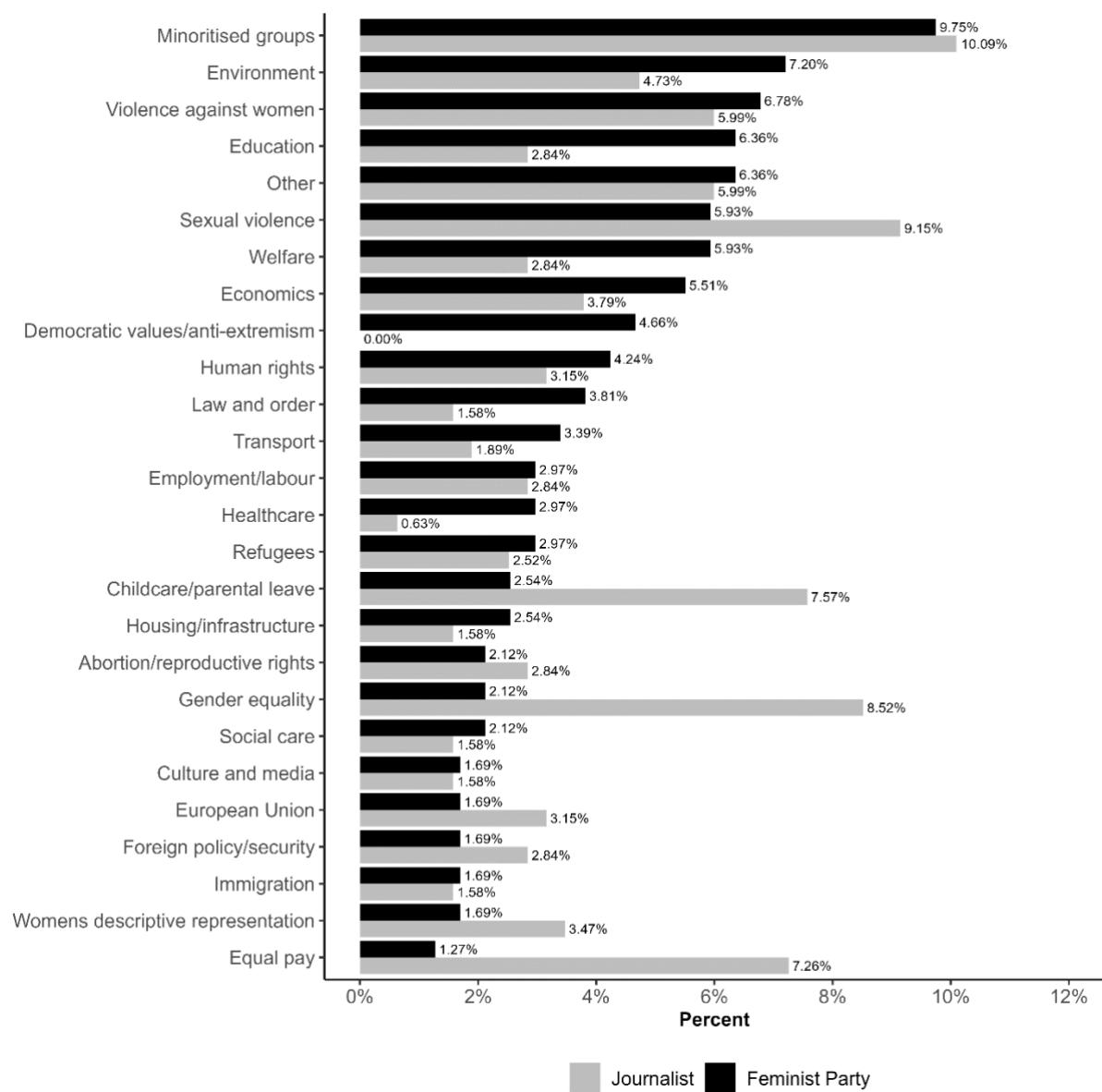
In Models 1 and 2 I test my expectations on the full dataset. Model 1 tests the effect of author on gender-stereotypical issue mention and Model 2 adds a predictor for the number of issues mentioned per news item. In Models 3 and 4 I repeat the regression on a smaller sample of news items, combining author profession and the profession of the actor that mentioned the issue. Thus, comparing news items written by *feminist parties* and including mentions by *feminist parties* against news items written by journalists, containing issue mentions from journalists. This test addresses the concern that I outlined in the previous section that journalists may still be retaining the control of the narrative of *feminist party* actor's issue mentions in some news coverage, particularly in news items featuring single quotes from *feminist party* actors. Hence this smaller dataset offers a test of gendered issue coverage that takes into account this media logic.

To summarise the results, none of the coefficients for authorship are significant in any model. Yet they are all in the expected direction. Thus, *feminist party* actors are less likely than journalists to mention stereotypically feminine issues in their authored articles in comparison to neutral issues. They are also more likely to mention stereotypically masculine issues than to mention neutral issues. However, because the coefficients are not statistically significant, H5 is not supported.

In Models 2 and 4 I add the predictor for number of issue mentions per news item. The coefficients are again non-significant, but the direction demonstrates that when the number of issue mentions per news item decreases, it is less likely that an issue mention will be stereotypically feminine and more likely that it will be stereotypically masculine than neutral. This is counter to what was observed in the previous models testing only the actor that mentions the issue. Moreover, when controlling for the number of issues mentioned per news item, the author predictor remains in the expected direction.

The lack of significant effects may be because these regressions are run on fewer cases, Models 1 and 2 on 863 cases and Models 3 and 4 on 534 cases. Moreover, the data is slightly imbalanced. Of the 534 issue mentions in this smaller dataset, only 75 are stereotypically masculine whereas 379 are stereotypically feminine. This may impede the power of the model to produce robust effects. Due to the lower number of cases in these samples, I am also unable to repeat the multinomial models to examine differences in the specific issue areas mentioned by *feminist party* actors and journalists in their authored articles. However descriptive evidence in Figure 5.12 explores the relationship in more detail.

Figure 5.12 Relative frequency of issue mentions in news items where authorship and actor mentioning the issue align



In Figure 5.12 the issue mentions are ranked by relative frequency of mention by *feminist party* actors. In articles written by *feminist party* actors and featuring issue mentions by *feminist party* actors, the five most emphasised issues include ‘minoritised groups’, the ‘environment’, gendered violence (‘violence against women’ and ‘sexual violence’) and ‘education’. These issues are all coded as stereotypically feminine, but they are also reflective of the issues that I found to be emphasised in the wider sample of *feminist parties*’ manifestos in Chapter 4. Thus, *feminist party* actors emphasise their core issues in their self-authored news coverage.

Journalists also mentioned these issues with a comparatively high frequency. This may explain why the explanatory models found no statistical difference in issue mentions between the two types of authors, as both emphasised those stereotypically feminine issue areas that are the core priorities of *feminist parties*. Nevertheless, Figure 5.12 also demonstrates that journalists mentioned other stereotypically feminine issues to a much larger extent than *feminist parties*, such as ‘equal pay’ and ‘childcare/parental leave’.

Issues such as ‘equal pay’ are expected to have strong associative ownership with *feminist parties*. However, this was not an issue that I identified to be emphasised by *feminist parties* in their manifestos, nor was it emphasised by *feminist parties* in their news media coverage (‘equal pay’ is the least mentioned issue in *feminist party* authored articles). Perhaps most strikingly, journalists mentioned ‘gender equality’ proportionally five times more than *feminist parties* did in their self-authored coverage. This paints perhaps the clearest picture of the dissonance between *feminist parties*’ own communication in news media and the coverage they receive at the hands of journalists.

In similar vein, Figure 5.12 also shows that journalists mentioned certain stereotypically masculine and neutral issue areas to a lesser extent, which conversely were emphasised by *feminist parties*. As in the earlier analysis, ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ is the clearest example. It accounts for 4.7% of *feminist party* issue mentions in *feminist* authored articles but is not mentioned once by journalists in journalist-authored items.

Taking the explanatory and descriptive analysis on authorship together, I find mixed evidence in line with my expectation that *feminist party* actors would emphasise stereotypically feminine issues to a lesser extent than journalists in their self-authored coverage. One the one hand, the explanatory models find no support for my hypotheses. However, when looking in more detail using descriptive analysis, the picture appears more complex.

It appears that both *feminist party* actors and journalists emphasise the core priority issues of *feminist parties*’ election platforms (equality for minoritised groups, gendered violence, and human security particularly the environment) many of which are stereotypically feminine. However, there is a clear dissonance between issue mentions beyond this. *Feminist parties* mentioned a broad range of issues in their self-authored media coverage, including both stereotypically masculine and feminine issue areas, as I expected. On the other hand, journalists mentioned a narrower range of issues and mentioned a greater proportion of stereotypically feminine issue areas and, above all, link *feminist parties* to the issue of gender equality.

5.8 Discussion and Conclusions

My aim in this Chapter was to investigate the extent to which the issue concerns of three European *feminist parties* were accurately and effectively communicated via traditional news media across two second-order election campaigns. My general expectation was that mechanisms of media logic and gendered mediation would result in an agenda dissonance in *feminist parties*' issue coverage, motivated by stereotypes about women political actor's issue concerns and competencies. Thus, I examined the extent to which *feminist parties*' issue coverage emphasised stereotypically feminine issues, which actors were responsible for this emphasis, and whether amount of issue coverage had a mediating effect on the extent of gender stereotyping.

Descriptive statistics demonstrated that newspaper coverage of *feminist parties* is more focused on stereotypically feminine issue areas than stereotypically masculine issues areas (H1). Issues including equal rights, the environment, and gendered violence are mentioned with the highest frequency in the full data set and across each election campaign. However, it must be reflected that these issues are also those that *feminist parties* emphasised in their electoral platforms. This supports Merz' (2017) finding that media coverage is linked to parties' issue emphases in their election platforms and extends his findings by examining a case of small/niche parties. This at first proves optimistic for *feminist parties* in accurately and effectively communicating their issue concerns through traditional news media.

However, looking beyond these highly emphasised issues, other stereotypically feminine issue areas that were not priorities for these *feminist parties* also received a high volume of mentions. In comparison, stereotypically masculine issues such as foreign policy and non-gender stereotyped issues, such as democratic values, were mentioned to a lesser degree. Yet, these issues were also found to be emphasised in the wider sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4. Therefore, the relative emphasis of stereotypically feminine issues showed early indication of a gendered bias in *feminist party* and candidate's media coverage.

I also found support for H2 using descriptive and statistical analysis. First, descriptive analysis indicated that *feminist parties*' issue priorities were those most commonly mentioned by both *feminist party* actors and journalists. However, beyond this there was consistent descriptive and explanatory evidence that journalists are more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas compared to neutral issues ($p < .05$). This finding therefore supports past literature that has found women candidates to receive greater coverage on stereotypically feminine issues than men candidates (Kahn and Goldberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Meeks, 2012).

While I do not compare *feminist parties*' issue coverage against other parties or candidates, by testing the actor that mentions the issue I offer a measure of the over-emphasis of certain issues by journalists relative to *feminist parties*' own communication. I therefore also offer support to the past research which has identified a gendered bias in media coverage relative to actor's own communication on gender-based issues (Greene and Lühiste, 2018; Kahn, 1994).

Moreover, I extend previous analyses by using multinomial models where the dependent variable is likelihood of mentioning specific issue areas. This adds greater nuance to the findings which would have been obscured by relying solely on the broader categories of stereotypical feminine and masculine issue areas. In the first instance, these models find support for H2, as the results show that journalists were more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention specific stereotypically feminine issue areas such as 'abortion and reproductive rights' and 'equal rights' compared to other issue areas. However, these more nuanced results also invite an alternative reading. No statistically significant difference in issue mention was identified across the manifesto priority issues of *feminist parties* such as gendered violence, the environment or security. This adds further weight that media coverage of *feminist parties* reflects their core issue concerns (Merz, 2017; Schwarzbözl et al., 2020).

But the explanatory models also show evidence in support of an agenda dissonance (Hughes, 2016) in *feminist parties*' media coverage. Beyond their priority issues, journalists were more likely to mention the topic of 'equal rights' in comparison to almost any other issue areas (barring 'abortion' and 'European Union'). While equal rights are of course a priority of *feminist parties*, my analysis in Chapter 4 highlighted that *feminist parties*' manifestos emphasised specific policy areas such as human security and gendered violence framed through the lens of social justice and equality for all. In the descriptive analysis of the newspaper coverage, I demonstrated that *feminist parties* continue to emphasise this range of issue areas.

Simultaneously, journalistic coverage continually emphasised the more general category of 'equal rights' instead of these specific policy areas. My findings indicate that journalists rely on easily accessible heuristics of *feminist parties*' issue concerns, the most obvious being their focus on women's rights and gender equality. While *feminist parties* continue to emphasise a range of issues in media coverage, their status as small/niche parties may limit their ability to impact the issue agenda and counteract this misrepresentation.

Additionally, my findings offer particular support to past research on the misrepresentation of feminist organisations and women's movements in news media. My findings closely echo those of Barakso and Schaffner (2006) who found that while feminist organisation's platforms

emphasised a range of issues, their news coverage overrepresented a focus on abortion. Moreover, they found that ‘gender equality’ accounted for a third of all issue mentions in relation to feminist organisations in their analysis over a 40-year period. My analysis finds very similar results and supports Bronstein’s (2005) finding that the more contemporary feminist actors are still routinely associated with the issues of second-wave feminism, including reproductive rights and equal pay.

Thus, my results suggest that media logic and gendered biases work in conjunction in the representation of *feminist parties*’ issue concerns. In further support of the role of media logic, I found evidence that the agenda dissonance was exacerbated where the extent of issue coverage of *feminist parties* in a news item was lower. In the first instance, I found no statistical support for H3 that fewer issue mentions per news item leads to increased gender-stereotypical coverage (Table 5.5). However, when investigating mention of specific issue areas, I found that ‘equal rights’ was again more likely to be mentioned than almost any other issue area. This supports the media logic argument that in news items with less in-depth coverage, the coverage is more reliant on easily accessible stereotyped heuristics of *feminist parties*’ issue concerns.

However, I do not find support for H4 as the interaction term in Table 5.5 did not meet the threshold for significance. Thus, journalists are no more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas in news items with fewer issue mentions. I suggest that the lack of interaction effect may be a result of the types of news items within in the dataset. In news items with fewer issue mentions, individual issue mentions are more likely to come from a journalist (Figure 5.9). Moreover, the issue mentions from *feminist party* actors in news items with fewer issue mentions, are often quotes from *feminist party* actors selected by journalists. These mentions therefore still represent the news values of the journalist. This corroborates findings in previous research (see for example Ross and Carter, 2011: 1158) which show that journalists are more likely to use women as sources in news stories regarding stereotypical women’s issues such as women’s representation, peace, and education.

Thus, while the multinomial models using a simplistic coding of stereotypically feminine, stereotypically masculine, and neutral issue areas found no significant results, using more nuanced multivariate analyses I observe that media logic and gendered biases consistently play a role in *feminist parties*’ media coverage. In particular, *feminist parties* may struggle to have their platform effectively communicated via news media as they are framed as single-issue parties focused on gender equality.

I found mixed evidence that *feminist parties* fight against this misrepresentation in their self-authored news coverage. My expectation had been that *feminist parties* would be less likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues in their self-authored news coverage in comparison to news items written by journalists. However, none of the coefficients in Table 5.6 were significant, meaning I found no support for H5. Nevertheless, the descriptive analysis indicated that journalists did mention specific stereotypically feminine issue areas to a greater extent than *feminist party* actors. In particular, I found a continued over-emphasis of the issues of 'gender equality' and 'equal pay'. This supports the previous findings that journalists over-emphasise issues that are shortcut cues about feminist politics more so than they associate *feminist parties* with feminised stereotypes of women candidates.

Looking forward to the contributions of this analysis. One of the key takeaways from my results is the importance of future work taking a more nuanced approach to measuring gendered coverage of women political actors. Simplistic coding of stereotypically feminine and masculine issue areas obscures important variation in the specific issues that are being mentioned in relation to women political actors. This is particularly important in cases where those actors are themselves communicating on gender-based issue areas. By taking a deeper look using more comprehensive code schemes and multinomial analyses, we can more closely observe what specific issues are mentioned in relation to women politicians and better interrogate the possible gender biases that underpin them.

Using this approach, the analysis in this Chapter has found that the ability of *feminist parties* to communicate their issue platforms accurately and effectively via traditional news media is mixed. On the one hand, my descriptive and statistical analyses offered promising evidence that the top issue priorities of *feminist parties* are those most emphasised in their news coverage. However, I also found consistent evidence of a dissonance between *feminist parties'* manifestos, their own communication in news media and the issue coverage that they receive from journalists. My findings throughout the Chapter have shown that *feminist parties* are continually framed in relation to stereotyped heuristics of generic feminist issue concerns. This framing impedes *feminist parties'* ability to increase the salience of their core issues and reinforce perceptions of ownership over these issues in voters' minds. Similarly, this lack of agenda-setting power may also limit their ability to enact policy-seeking goals on other mainstream parties.

Thus, as *feminist parties* attempt to convey their platform to the electorate and other parties, they must navigate the challenges of gender stereotyping in issue coverage and misrepresentation as small/niche parties with limited agenda-setting power. In the next Chapter

I investigate how *feminist parties* may use social media as a platform to communicate their issue platform free from media control.

Chapter 6. Feminist parties' issue communication on social media

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the issue concerns of European women's parties and to investigate the strategic issue communication of European *feminist parties* across election manifestos, news media, and social media.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that *feminist parties* operate as niche parties, mobilising around a narrow set of neglected gender-based issues including *equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care*. In line with past literature on niche party strategy and communication (Adams et al., 2006; Meguid, 2005; 2008; Lynch et al., 2012; Meyer and Wagner, 2013), I expect that *feminist parties* will pursue issue ownership strategies in their party communication, in an attempt to increase the salience of their core issues.

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated that the three *feminist parties* in my sample *do* emphasise these core issue concerns in traditional news media. Optimistically for these parties, journalists also emphasised parties' issue priorities in news coverage. However, I also found evidence that journalists commonly related *feminist parties* to stereotypically feminine issue areas such as reproductive rights. In particular, *feminist parties'* news coverage relied on heuristics based on stereotypes of the traditional issue concerns of women's organisations and the feminist movement. Overall, I observed a dissonance between *feminist parties'* own issue communication and the issues that they were linked to by journalists. Consequently, I concluded that *feminist parties'* ability to coherently broadcast their issue platform via traditional news media is mixed.

In the face of this somewhat limited and misrepresentative news coverage, I expect that *feminist parties* will utilise social media as a platform to communicate their issue platforms accurately and effectively, free from the control of media gatekeepers. Therefore, in this Chapter I investigate the issue communication of Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party (FP)), Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative (FI)) and the Women's Equality Party (WEP) and their candidates on Twitter during the 2019 European Parliament election campaign and three municipal election campaigns.

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the extent to which tweets from party and candidate accounts of the three parties in my sample emphasise those priority issues of *feminist parties* that I identified in Chapter 4 (*equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care*). In the following section I develop a set of hypotheses about the issue communication of *feminist parties* and their candidates on social media. My general expectation is that party accounts will heavily emphasise *feminist parties'* priority issues, in line

with an issue ownership strategy. On the other hand, I expect that candidates will be less likely to mention these priority issues, facing pressure to personalise their electoral campaigns in an increasingly candidate-centred electoral environment. In particular, I expect that candidates who have a lower chance of being elected will be those least likely to emphasise the parties' priority issues in their social media communication.

After outlining my hypotheses, I review the data and methods used to conduct my analyses and provide specific detail on the statistical models that I have used. I then present my results and a discussion of how my findings relate to existing research on candidate individualisation and small/niche parties' issue communication on social media.

6.1 Expectations and hypotheses

In Chapter 2 I outlined several of the opportunities and advantages of social media campaigning for small/niche parties. These include its low-cost nature, the autonomy to exercise full control over the content of the communication, and the ability to engage directly with both the party's core supporters and a broader audience of voters, party members, and media actors (Engesser et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2019; Galais and Cardenal, 2017; Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013). Additionally, the issue agenda on social media is more diversified, meaning there is greater opportunity for policy-seeking small/niche parties to influence said agenda (Gilardi et al., 2022). Accordingly, empirical research offers substantial evidence of the widespread adoption of social media campaigning by small/niche parties (Ahmed et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019; Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013; Strandberg, 2013).

Only a small amount of research has considered the content of small/niche parties' social media communication. But these studies offer evidence that small/niche parties use social media to emphasise their owned issues (Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al., 2022; Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021). While no study has focused exclusively on *feminist parties*, research from the Swedish context has highlighted the active engagement of Feministiskt Initiativ on Twitter (Larsson and Moe, 2011). Together this research suggests that *feminist parties* will emphasise their issue priorities in their online communication.

However, while extant research has indicated that small/niche parties pursue issue ownership strategies on social media, none of the existing studies empirically compare issue mentions in parties' social media campaigns against their manifesto material. At the broader level, cross-media studies have examined linkages between party manifestos and news coverage (Merz, 2017; Schwarzbözl et al., 2020) or party press releases and social media (Ennser-Jedenastik,

Haselmayer et al., 2022) but still few empirical studies compare issue mentions in party manifestos to social media data. A notable exception is Berger and Jäger (2023) who focus on candidate's communication of parties' core manifesto issues during the 2017 German federal election campaign. However, to my knowledge, no cross-media study focuses specifically on small/niche parties' communication in manifestos and social media.

In the first instance, more research on the linkage between party manifestos and social media is needed. Unlike press releases, which can be reactive to certain events, manifestos represent the party's centrally decided policy positions for the campaign (Eder et al., 2017; Klingemann et al., 2006: xvi). Crucially, manifestos represent a party's contract with voters (Ray, 2007) about what policies they would enact in government, leading Eder et al. (2017) to claim that manifestos have 'supremacy' over other forms of party communication. As most voters do not read party manifestos (Harmel, 2018) and instead gain their political knowledge from traditional media and social media platforms such as Twitter, it is important to investigate whether parties accurately communicate their manifesto issues online.

It is specifically important to investigate the linkage between small/niche parties' manifestos and their online communication as social media is a significant communication medium for these parties (Skovsgaard and van Dalen, 2013). Small/niche parties such as *feminist parties*, campaign on issues that are not established on the issue agenda and, as I demonstrated in the previous Chapter, often receive limited and misrepresentative news coverage. If social media is the primary site where voters will learn about these parties' platforms, it is important that they are cohesively communicated.

Therefore, the first aim of this Chapter is to investigate what issues *feminist parties* and their candidates emphasise in their social media communication and to assess the extent to which these align with the issues that I identified as priority issues for *feminist parties* in the analysis of party election manifestos in Chapter 4 (*equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care*). Based on the discussion of small/niche party issue communication strategy presented in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.5, pp.27-31), and evidence from studies of small/niche parties' social media campaigns, I expect *feminist parties* to pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media communication. Thus, my first hypothesis is:

H6: *Feminist party* and candidate tweets are more likely to mention issues prioritised in *feminist parties' manifestos* compared to other political issues.

In the rest of the Chapter, I focus on differences in issue communication between the parties and their candidates and between different types of candidates on Twitter. In Chapter 2, I

outlined that an increasingly candidate-centered electoral environment (Takens et al., 2015; Ross et al., 2023; Van Aelst et al., 2012) incentivises candidates to develop personalised or individualised campaigns to advertise themselves to voters (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008: 980). A body of research has investigated the benefits of campaign individualisation for candidates (Beckman, 2006; Kruikemeier, 2013; Meeks, 2017; Vos, 2016; Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). These benefits include increased visibility and an ability to advertise their expertise in specialised policy areas, both to voters and party audiences (Beckman, 2006; Vos, 2016). The unmediated nature of social media, where candidates largely have autonomy over their communication, presents a highly favourable setting for candidates to construct personalised campaigns (Ceron, 2017; Karlson and Enjolras, 2016).

However, in order to pursue the benefits of visibility and policy specialisation, these individualised campaigns may result in candidates emphasising different issues to those within the party platform. This may be disadvantageous for policy-seeking small/niche parties such as *feminist parties*, for whom it is important to broadcast a clear and coherent set of issue concerns. In Chapter 2, I noted that the majority of research on candidate individualisation has focused on larger parties. Yet I expect that the same benefits of campaign individualisation will appeal to candidates of small/niche parties such as *feminist parties*. In particular, in Chapter 2 I argued that because feminism is a broad ideology, it offers particular scope for candidates to emphasise different issues and take different positions on issues (see p.47, for this argument in more detail). In Chapter 4, I provided evidence to substantiate the definition of the women's party family ideology as focused on gender equality and a pro-women perspective on social justice (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 12). Under this broad umbrella, candidates enjoy the flexibility to focus on different gender-based issues in their campaigns.

Therefore, combining evidence of the opportunities of candidate individualisation outlined in past literature with my findings on the scope provided by *feminist parties*' ideology, I expect that:

H7: Tweets from *feminist party* candidate accounts are less likely to mention *feminist party* priority issues than tweets from *feminist party* accounts.

However, I expect that the extent of candidate divergence from the party platform will be moderated by intra-party dynamics. In particular, I investigate what effect a *feminist party* candidate's viability has on their issue communication. In Chapter 2, I reviewed extant research on mainstream parties, which has argued that candidates with higher electoral viability are more likely to diverge from the party's platform than less viable candidates. The argument suggested

is that more viable candidates are supposedly guided by office-seeking motivations and thus are likely to be more responsive to public opinion than those lower within the party (Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer, et al., 2022). Alternatively, it is argued that less viable candidates will emphasise the party platform, first because they are more policy-oriented, and second to signal their loyalty to party leadership (Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer, et al., 2022).

In Chapter 2 I argued that the reverse may be expected for candidates of small/niche parties. My argument relies on two mechanisms: small/niche parties' strategies and party/candidate resources. Beginning with strategy, as I outlined in detail throughout Chapter 2, a primary goal of small/niche parties is gaining visibility and increasing the salience of their owned issues. The most visible candidates of small/niche parties are also the most viable candidates and are also very often the party leader. For example, in my sample, FP's leader Katju Aro was the lead candidate in both the 2019 EP election and 2017 Helsinki City Council election (where she won a seat).

These candidates have the highest chance of access to traditional media through interviews or participation in televised debates. They therefore face incentives to communicate the party's core message, acting as the *de facto* mouthpiece of the party. By consistently and repeatedly communicating the party's aims and priorities, they can increase the visibility of the party and its issues and reinforce the party's issue ownership perceptions (Tresch and Fedderson, 2019; Walgrave et al., 2009). Indeed, evidence shows that small party leaders emphasise the parties' owned issues during televised debates (Allen et al., 2017). Applying this same logic to social media, more viable candidates have more strategic incentive to communicate on the party platform.

The second mechanism is party/candidate resources. As I argued in Chapter 2, running election campaigns on social media, while more accessible than other communication mediums, still requires time, money and resources (Kreiss et al., 2018; Nulty et al., 2016). Indeed, one of the key arguments of the normalisation thesis (first outlined by Margolis and Resnick, 2000) applied to social media is that larger parties with more resources are better able to take on the costs of running social media campaigns (Larsson and Moe, 2014). In reference to party websites, Southern (2015: 4) argues that small party candidates may not have the resources or skills to be able to develop sophisticated and high-quality campaign websites to rival mainstream parties.

We can apply this logic at the candidate level. Less viable candidates, at the lower end of the party list, may be less able to take on the costs of running a professional and sophisticated social

media campaign. For smaller parties, these candidates are unlikely to be full-time politicians and less likely to have had formal campaign training in comparison to the more viable candidates and party leaders.⁶¹ They therefore may lack the skills and resources to develop sophisticated communication campaigns. Moreover, as suggested by Southern (2015), these candidates may not see the utility in investing time and money in a campaign to compete against mainstream rivals.

Therefore, as less viable candidates are not realistic office holders and have little in the way of formal campaign training, I expect them to be less likely than viable candidates to communicate the parties' priority issues in their tweets:

H8: Tweets from more viable candidates of *feminist parties* are more likely to mention *feminist party* priority issues than tweets from less viable candidates.

In addition to candidate characteristics, structural factors such as party system and electoral system may affect party and candidate communication (Bräuninger et al., 2012; Proksch & Slapin, 2015; Skovsgaard and Van Dalen, 2013). As each of the elections in my sample use a PR system (or a partial-PR system in the London Mayoral and Assembly election), my final expectation relates to whether election type moderates party and candidate issue communication online.

Past research has found that mainstream parties tailor their issue emphases to different election campaigns (Braun and Schmitt, 2020; Spoon and Klüver, 2014). However, small/niche parties may not have the same incentives to do this. First, as classic issue owners, small/niche parties may be punished by their voters for modifying their issue appeal (Adams et al., 2006; Bergman and Flatt, 2020). Moreover, research has found that voters switch from mainstream parties to niche parties in second-order elections to signal that they attach importance to a neglected issue (Lindstam, 2019), a mechanism known as 'expressive tactical voting' (Franklin et al., 1994). Therefore, small/niche parties may benefit from retaining a close focus on a narrow set of core issues, rather than responding to the broader policy agenda. In doing so, small/niche parties can use the support received in second-order elections to increase the salience of their core issues and exert pressure on mainstream parties to accommodate their policies at the national level. Based on literature on small/niche party strategy and the increased vote for these parties in

⁶¹ Within my sample, each party's leader has previous experience in the political field. Gudrun Schyman (FI) had been leader of the Swedish Left Party between 1993-2003, Catherine Mayer (WEP) was a political journalist and author, and Katju Aro (FP) had previously been Chairwoman of Naisasialiitto Union (Women's Association Union), a feminist organisation.

second-order elections, I expect *feminist party* accounts to maintain cohesive issue ownership strategies in their social media communication:

H9: *Feminist party* accounts will not moderate their issue mentions in tweets across European Parliament and municipal election campaigns.

However, candidates may face different incentives to modify their issue communication, depending on the specific electoral context. The European Parliament elections are increasingly viewed as competition over issues outside of the economic cleavage, particularly values-based issues such as environmentalism (Han and Finke, 2022). In fact, Galpin and Trenz (2019) contend that gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights were central areas of values-based contestation during the 2019 European Parliament elections. This issue agenda aligns closely with the issue priorities of European *feminist parties* that I identified in Chapter 4. Therefore, to capitalise on these already salient issues, *feminist party* candidates may emphasise these issues in their Twitter communication during the EP campaign.

Alternatively, municipal elections have different issue agendas focused on local issues such as public transport and business investment (Craw, 2010; see also Bauer (2020) and Holman, (2016)). Therefore, individual candidates may reap less reward by communicating on the parties' priority manifesto issues in these elections. Additionally, candidates may pursue different strategies in municipal elections because these elections are where *feminist parties* have the highest chance of electoral success. Indeed, each of the three *feminist parties* included in my sample has been represented in some capacity at the local or municipal level, whereas none have had national representation and only Feministiskt Initiativ has been represented in the European Parliament.

Literature on political parties has argued that, as rational actors in pursuit of office-seeking goals, parties and candidates are responsive to voters' concerns (Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al., 2022; Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer, et al., 2022; Spoon and Klüver, 2014; Wagner and Meyer, 2014). Considering election-type, Spoon and Klüver (2014) find that mainstream parties are more responsive to public opinion in national as compared to EP elections because they pursue office-seeking goals more actively in these elections. Focusing on candidates, Ennser-Jedenastik Haselmayer, et al. (2022) argued that viable candidates of mainstream parties would be more responsive to public opinion in pursuit of office-seeking goals. Thus, while small/niche parties are primarily policy-seeking, if individual candidates prioritise office-seeking goals in municipal elections, this may encourage greater responsiveness to public opinion and thus a divergence from the party platform.

A further consideration to this argument draws from my expectations in relation to H8. Municipal candidates are those least likely to be professional politicians or to have received campaign and communication training. For example, in an observational study of WEP local party meetings, Evans and Kenny (2019: 866) noted a certain ‘degree of naiveté’ among members about elections and campaigning. Therefore, having lesser political experience and lower resources and training, municipal candidate’s issue campaigns may not be as strategically oriented around the party’s priority issues as those of EP candidates, who are likely closer to the central party organisation.

Taking these arguments together, *feminist party* candidates may emphasise the party’s priority issues during the EP campaign, but during the municipal campaign, where the opportunity for electoral office is greater, I expect to see increased divergence from the party platform in candidate tweets:

H10: *Feminist party* candidates are more likely to mention *feminist party* priority issues in their tweets for the European Parliament campaign than in municipal campaigns.

6.2 Data and measurement

The data used in this Chapter comes from a manual content analysis of 29,499 party and candidate tweets from Feministiskt Initiativ (FI), Feministinen Puolue (FP) and the Women’s Equality Party (WEP), sent during the year preceding the 2019 European Parliament campaign and a municipal campaign in each countries’ capital. Information on the collection of this data is provided in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.2, pp.92-95). Tweets were coded using an original code scheme of political issues that I developed from the analysis of European women’s party manifestos 1990-2020 in Chapter 4. The code scheme was supplemented with a review of the manifestos produced by FI, FP and WEP for the 2019 European Parliament election and for the respective municipal elections (Appendix H) and compared against the Euromanifesto Study code scheme (Carteny et al., 2023) (see Section 3.3.3, pp.95-97, for an overview of the content analysis code scheme).

A total of 14,481 issue mentions were captured from 29,499 tweets from 54 party and candidate accounts (11 party accounts and 43 candidate accounts). In the next section I present descriptive analysis of how many tweets contained a political issue and the variation across parties and election type. However, my primary aim in this Chapter is to examine the extent to which tweets from party accounts and candidate accounts emphasised the issues that are emphasised in *feminist parties’* manifestos. In Chapter 4 I outlined the priority issues of European *feminist*

parties to be *equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security* (comprising foreign policy, asylum, and environmental issues) and *care*.⁶² In the first half of this Chapter I provide descriptive analysis of the extent to which party and candidate accounts emphasised these issues (the unit of analysis here is the unique issue mention).

Then, to test my hypotheses I use multi-level binomial logit models, implemented with the *lme4* package in R. I use multi-level models because my data is hierarchical. Tweets are not independent but are nested within candidates who are in turn nested within parties. Multi-level models recognise the existence of hierarchies within data and cluster the variance within groups. Unfortunately, due to the low number of cases within my dataset (54), nesting at both the candidate and party level results in a singular fit (indicating that the model is overfitted). Past research has suggested that one approach to singularity is to remove the higher-level nesting variable from the analysis, in this case political party (Barr et al., 2013). Therefore, the models are nested only at the candidate level.

In the statistical models the unit of analysis is the individual tweet. My main dependent variable is a dummy of whether the tweet contains one of the *feminist party* priority issues as determined from the analysis of party manifestos in Chapter 4. Thus, a tweet is coded as 1 if it contains one of the following issues from the 26 categories of the code scheme: ‘gender equality’, ‘minoritised groups’, ‘foreign policy’, ‘environment’, ‘refugees’, ‘human rights’, ‘violence against women’, ‘sexual violence’, ‘childcare/parental leave’, ‘social care’. A tweet is coded as 0 if it does not contain any of these priority issues.

Independent variables

I have two primary independent variables of interest. To test H7, I use a dummy variable of whether the tweet is sent by a party account or candidate account. My dataset contains tweets from 11 party accounts and 43 candidate accounts. To test H8, I construct a dummy variable of candidate viability, where a viable candidate is any candidate that is the party leader, incumbent candidate, or list leader.

⁶² This analysis was performed on a broader sample of 32 *feminist party* manifestos, thus my analysis in this Chapter does not directly test the three *feminist parties*’ Twitter communication against their specific manifestos for these elections. However, manifestos from FI, FP, and WEP comprised over half of the sample used in Chapter 4 (18 of the 32 manifestos). Additionally, manifestos from FP and WEP were included in the subsample of manifestos used in the thematic analysis. To substantiate my findings from Chapter 4, in Appendix H I present the results of word frequency analyses applied to the manifestos of these three parties for the EP elections and municipal elections under study. I also provide a qualitative review of the key issues areas within each manifesto. This provides robust evidence that the *feminist party* issue priorities that I identified in Chapter 4 were indeed heavily emphasised by these parties.

I recognise that this is a somewhat limited measurement of candidate viability. Alternative options for modelling candidate viability used in previous research include grouping candidates as either ‘safe’, ‘doubtful’, or ‘unpromising’ based on survey-based predictions of the number of seats expected to be won by the national party (Stier et al., 2020). This method is not applicable to any of the *feminist parties* in my sample because they would all be deemed ‘unpromising’. My focus is an intra-party measure of viability, comparing those at the highest positions within the party against those at the lower end.⁶³ Therefore, this measure, though blunt, is the most applicable to the data at hand.

Of the candidate Twitter accounts in my dataset, each party had at least one viable candidate in each election campaign. For the EP election, viable candidates include Katju Aro (FP party leader), Soraya Post (FI incumbent), and Catherine Mayer (WEP party founder). For the municipal campaigns the more viable candidates are again Katju Aro (FP party leader), as well as Anna Rantala Bonnier and Sissela Nordling Blanco (FI incumbents on Stockholm City Council), and Sophie Walker (WEP party leader and Mayoral candidate). As a result, my data on candidate viability is unbalanced, with only six viable candidates in comparison to 37 non-viable candidates.

I ensure to recognise this limitation throughout my analysis and discussion. First, I present in-depth descriptive analysis of the 14,481 issue mentions in my dataset and provide comparison between viable and non-viable candidates. I support the quantitative analysis with qualitative examples from candidate tweets to offer nuanced evidence of differences in the content of viable and non-viable candidate’s communication. Second, I do not argue that my statistical models can confirm my hypotheses. Instead, I discuss the extent to which they provide face validity to my descriptive analysis. Finally, in my discussion, I explore how these findings may be developed in future research, which can collect more data from a larger sample of small/niche parties, which was beyond the scope of this thesis project.

Control variables

In both models I control for election type using a dummy variable of whether the tweet was sent in the European Parliament or municipal campaigns. Interpretation of the coefficients of this variable address H9 and H10. I also include a control for the total (log) number of tweets sent by an account. Controlling for this variable ensures that results are not skewed by

⁶³ Boyle et al. (2022) also recode candidate viability as a dummy variable comparing ‘safe’ against ‘doubtful’ and ‘unpromising’ candidates.

candidates who happen to tweet a great deal and therefore may mention a greater number of issues.

In the following section I present my analysis of the issue mentions in party and candidate tweets from FI, FP and WEP throughout the 2019 EP election and individual municipal elections. I begin by providing an overview of the number and variation in issue mentions in party and candidate tweets before presenting the analysis to address my hypotheses. I present all of the descriptive analysis first, followed by the explanatory models. I end this Chapter with a discussion of how my findings contribute to research on small/niche party communication on social media and research on intra-party communication dynamics.

6.3 Issue communication in *feminist parties'* tweets

I begin with a descriptive overview of the issue communication in *feminist party* and candidate tweets. Figure 6.1 provides an overview of the type of tweet (left pane) and the type of political tweet (right pane) sent by parties and candidates in the full dataset. That is all the tweets sent by main party accounts, municipal party accounts, and candidate accounts of Feministiskt Initiativ (FI), Feministinen Puolue (FP), and the Women's Equality Party (WEP) in the year preceding the 2019 European Parliament election and six months preceding a municipal election in each country's capital, a total of 29,499 tweets.

As is perhaps expected, the vast majority (91.6%) of tweets from party accounts included political content. In comparison 56% of candidate tweets contained political content but 43.6% were personal in nature.⁶⁴ When looking to the type of political tweet in the right pane of Figure 6.1, there is greater similarity between parties and candidates, with around two-thirds of party (64%) and candidate (62%) tweets mentioning a political issue, compared to one quarter (22% candidate and 28% party) being campaign messages. This evidence supports existing research which finds that smaller parties and candidates primarily focus on issues in their social media communication (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019).

⁶⁴ 'Other' tweets here are those that contained no identifiable content e.g., hyperlinks or emojis

Figure 6.2 Type of tweet and type of political tweet sent by party and candidate accounts

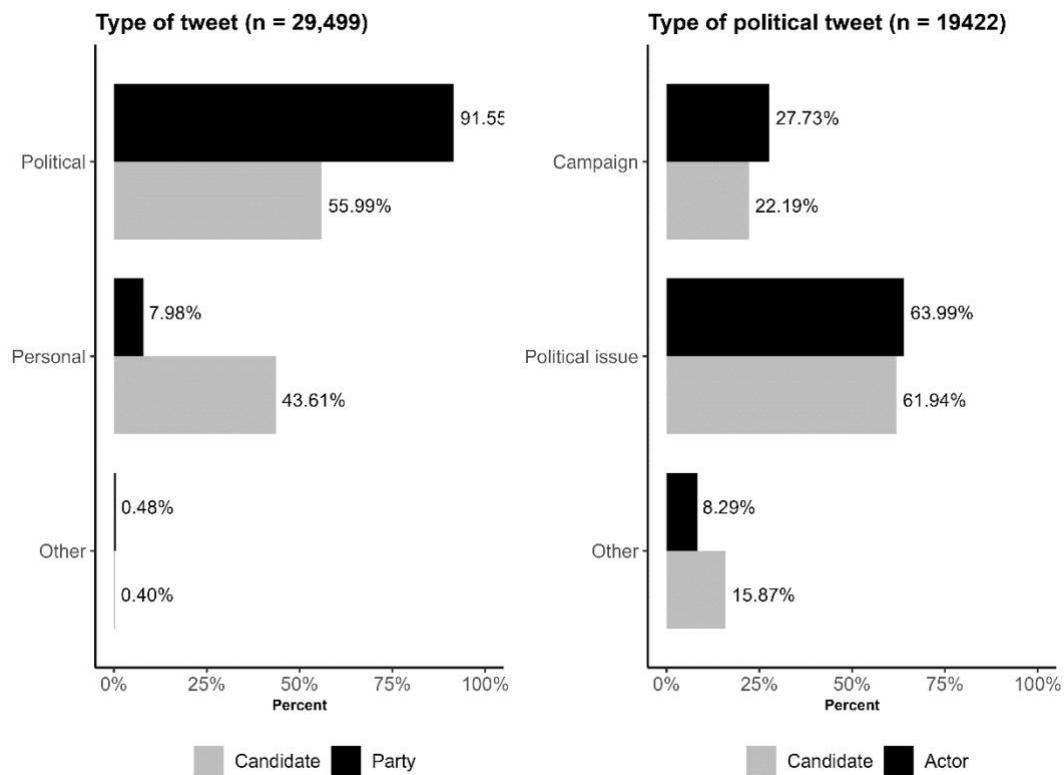


Figure 6.1 Type of tweet and type of political tweet sent by viable and non-viable candidate accounts

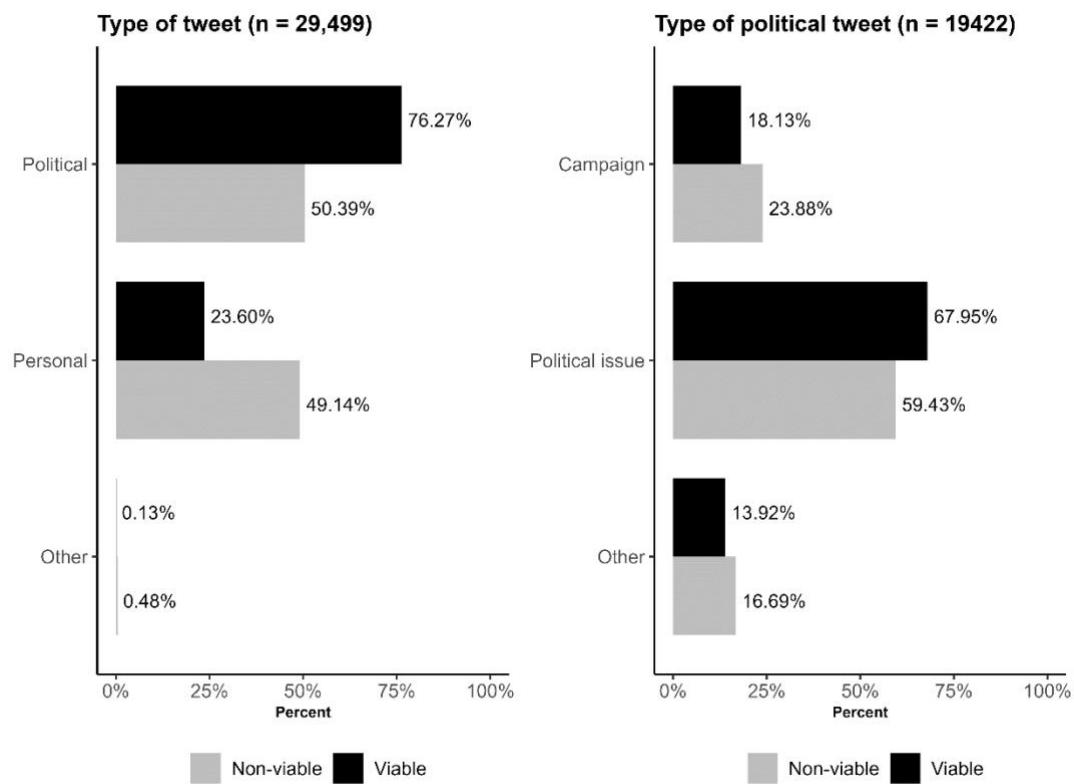


Figure 6.2 compares the type of tweet across candidate viability and the left pane shows that personal tweets account for 49% of tweets from non-viable candidates and moreover, that non-viable candidates send proportionally twice as many personal tweets as viable candidates (24%). Both viable and non-viable candidates send a high volume of tweets mentioning political issues, but viable candidates send proportionally more (68%) than non-viable candidates (59%), for whom nearly a quarter of tweets are campaign messages (24%).⁶⁵ Even before turning to the content of their communication, these descriptive statistics indicate early evidence in support of H8. Non-viable candidates more commonly use their Twitter communication in a personal way, whereas viable candidates tweet more political content and focus their communication more on political issues. This suggests that viable candidates use their Twitter in a more professionalised way than non-viable candidates.

Table 6.1 and 6.2 provide a summary of the tweets containing a political issue from party and candidate accounts and viable and non-viable candidates accounts. Tables 6.3 and 6.4 provide a summary of the number of issue mentions across party, candidate, and viable and non-viable candidate tweets. I repeat here that the unit of analysis in the descriptive analysis is the unique issue mention, whereas in the statistical models it is the individual tweet. A comparison of how the tweets were distributed across election type is provided in Table 3.8 in Chapter 3.

⁶⁵ ‘Other’ political tweets are those that include political content that was neither related to the campaign nor mentioned a political issues. For example, a negative tweet about another party would be coded as ‘Other’.

Table 6.1 Summary of political issue tweets from party and candidate accounts

Party						Candidate						Total issue tweets	
Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max		
FP	1	675	-	-	-	14	2404	171.71	378.69	1	1365	3079	
FI	2	1773	886.5	1171.68	58	1773	12	1587	102.1	207.81	2	590	3360
WEP	9	2340	212.73	643.74	1	1971	17	3404	200.24	211.52	4	546	5744
Total	12	4788				43	7395					12183	

Table 6.2 Summary of political issue tweets from viable and non-viable candidate accounts

Viable candidate						Non-viable candidate						Total issue tweets	
Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max		
FP	1	619	-	-	-	13	1785	137.31	370.68	1	1365	2404	
FI	3	723	241	304.44	30	590	9	864	81.27	167.51	2	580	1587
WEP	2	1049	524.5	6.36	520	529	15	2355	146.29	186.75	4	546	3404
Total	6	2391				37						7395	

Table 6.3 Summary of issue mentions in party and candidate tweets

Party						Candidate						Total issue mentions	
Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max		
FP	1	856	-	-	-	14	2751	183.4	411.42	1	1500	3607	
FI	2	2153	143.53	534.17	80	2073	12	1887	125.8	233.19	2	747	4040
WEP	9	2909	111.88	486.67	1	2489	17	3925	150.96	228.47	5	659	6834
Total	12	5918					43	8563				14481	

Table 6.4 Summary of issue mentions in viable and non-viable candidate tweets

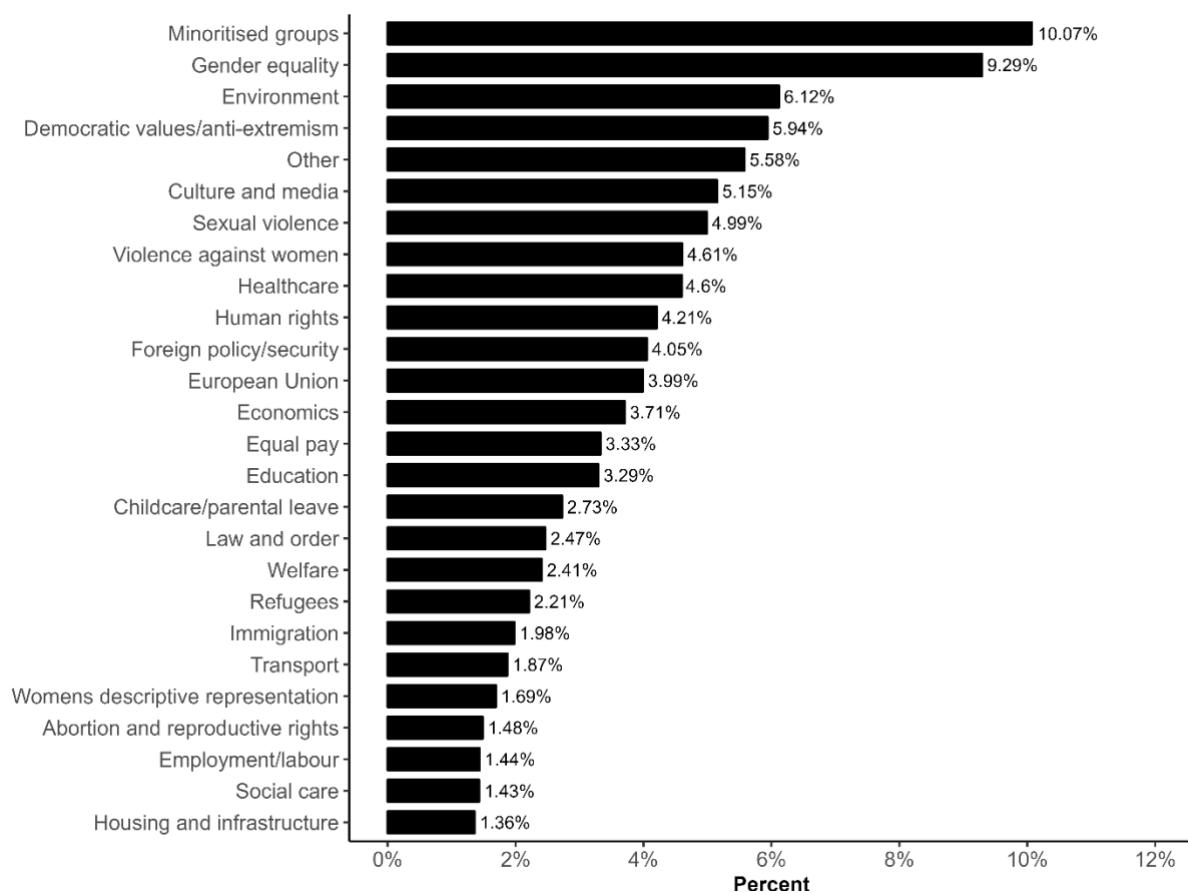
Viable candidate						Non-viable candidate						Total issue mentions	
Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Number of accounts	Count	Mean	SD	Min	Max		
FP	1	762	-	-	-	13	1989	132.6	380.78	1	1500	2751	
FI	3	894	59.6	192.47	34	747	9	993	66.2	160.57	2	632	1887
WEP	2	1241	47.73	168.97	582	659	15	2684	103.23	184.11	5	646	3925
Total	6	2897					37	5666				8563	

I now investigate *what* issues parties and candidates emphasise in their tweets. Figure 6.3 presents the 14,481 issue mentions in the full dataset ranked by relative frequency. It first demonstrates that manifesto priority issues *are* highly emphasised in *feminist party* and candidate Twitter communication. *Equality for women and minoritised groups* ('minoritised groups' and 'gender equality')⁶⁶, *gendered violence* ('violence against women' and 'sexual violence'), and *human security* ('environment', 'foreign policy', 'human rights' and 'refugees') feature among the most relatively frequently mentioned issues and making up 45.6% of all issue mentions. That is eight issues (from a total of 26) making up over two fifths of all issue mentions in the full dataset.

The only priority issues that did not receive much attention in social media campaigning is *care* ('childcare/parental leave' and 'social care') with only 4.1% combined mentions. One explanation for this could be that *care* is an issue more salient at the national/local level and therefore is unlikely to feature heavily in communication for the EP elections, reducing its frequency in the total dataset. An alternative explanation is that *feminist parties* and candidates may communicate less on these issues in their social media campaigns to avoid being framed as parties only relevant to women and associated with maternalistic/essentialist issues. A similar argument is suggested by Bürger, et al. (2020), who find that women politicians are likely to use Twitter to emphasise their issue concerns which do not feature heavily in their limited and often gender-stereotyped news coverage. In Chapter 5 (Figure 5.1) I found that 'childcare/parental leave' was the 7th most relatively frequently mentioned issue in *feminist parties*' news coverage (in fact it was the third most relatively frequently mentioned issue in municipal campaign coverage (Figure 5.2)). Thus, *feminist parties* may emphasise this issue less in their Twitter communication as it receives a fair amount of news coverage and might encourage perceptions of their associative ownership (Walgrave et al., 2012) over essentialist-traditionalist gender-based issues.

⁶⁶ Throughout this Chapter I will distinguish between the *feminist party* manifesto priority issue areas/domains which are presented in italics and the specific categories from the content analysis code scheme which are presented in single quotation marks.

Figure 6.3 Ranked frequency of issue mentions in *feminist party* and candidate tweets



Notes: Issue mentions in feminist party and candidate tweets (n = 14,481)

While manifesto priority issues are clearly emphasised in party and candidate tweets, additional issues that were frequently mentioned include ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, ‘culture and media’, and ‘other’ issues. In Chapter 4, I found emphasis of discourses relating to democracy in my sample of *feminist party* manifestos, but it did not emerge as a distinct issue priority for European *feminist parties*.⁶⁷ However, in Chapter 5 I found that the three parties, and particularly FI and FP, emphasised this issue in their newspaper coverage, whereas it received little attention from journalists. In news media, the three *feminist parties* in my sample positioned themselves as a counterforce to the growth of nationalist and extremist groups in both EP and municipal election campaigns.

⁶⁷ The word frequency analysis, structural topic models and thematic analysis identified discourses relating to democracy and participation in manifestos across the entire party family. The keyness analysis and covariate topic models suggested that these themes were far more prevalent in *essentialist women's parties*' manifestos. However, review of this topic with the findings of the thematic analysis suggested that it was specifically discourse around democratic *legitimacy* and political stability that was more prevalent in *essentialist women's parties*' platforms rather than the broader domain of democratic values.

This is mirrored in the social media data, with the majority of mentions of this issue category coming from FI and FP accounts (see Appendix Figure M.1 for party-level comparisons).⁶⁸ Issue mentions were coded in this category if they expressed an opinion on democratic values (e.g., rule of law), democratic institutions (e.g., legislatures, or electoral processes) or discussed extremist and/or nationalist groups and parties. In qualitative review I find that the majority of mentions from FI and FP focused on the latter of these. In support of my findings in Chapter 5, these parties specifically expressed distress at the presence, growth, and (tacit) acceptance of extremist groups in the political system. Accordingly, parties and candidates advertised themselves as the logical counterforce to nationalist politics.

“We, feminists, are mobilising because we see how nationalists & far-right movements are threatening our democracy, human rights & the rule of law. We are the leading resistance to these evil forces. #EuropeNeedsFeminism” Soraya Post, ‘FI (13/04/2019)

“Rising racism, nationalism and right-wing populism across Europe seriously undermines the feeling of security for many and has led to a negative human rights development in EU member states. #votepink” Katju Aro, FP (25/03/2019)

““We are a very clear counterpoint to nationalism and that becomes clear if you listen to us. The problem is that we end up in media shadow so not everyone gets to know it” @gudschy #Almedalen” Feminist Initiative Stockholm (03/07/2018)

Also frequently mentioned in the full dataset of tweets is ‘culture and media’. As seen in the above quote from FI leader Gudrun Schyman, *feminist parties* commonly mentioned this issue when challenging the lack of media representation that they are afforded. This is a factor that they have often attributed to their low electoral success (Svenberg, 2018). However, qualitative analysis also finds party-level differences wherein FI stressed cultural policy including funding for museums, libraries, and other cultural spaces, whereas the focus for WEP was predominantly the representation of women in news media and sports. This is also reflective of difference in the parties’ platforms as Equality in Media was one of WEP’s core manifesto pledges in the 2016 municipal elections (WEP, 2016) (see party level differences in Appendix Figure H1).

“The goal of @Feministerna cultural policy is that it should be at 1% of the state budget. In our politics, culture has been lifted into other policy areas such as health

⁶⁸ All party-level comparisons are presented in Appendix M. In the main text I focus on social media campaigns of *feminist parties* as a family of small/niche parties mobilising around a common platform. Moreover, observations within parties are too small to draw firm conclusions about candidate divergence and viability.

policy and school policy instead of the other way around. #Almedalen #KlartViKan”
Feminist Initiative Stockholm (01/07/2018)

“Today WE counted photos of people on business, politics & sports pages of 7 UK news outlets. Of 816 counted, just 87 were women #WhereAreWE” WEP Hackney (11/04/2016)

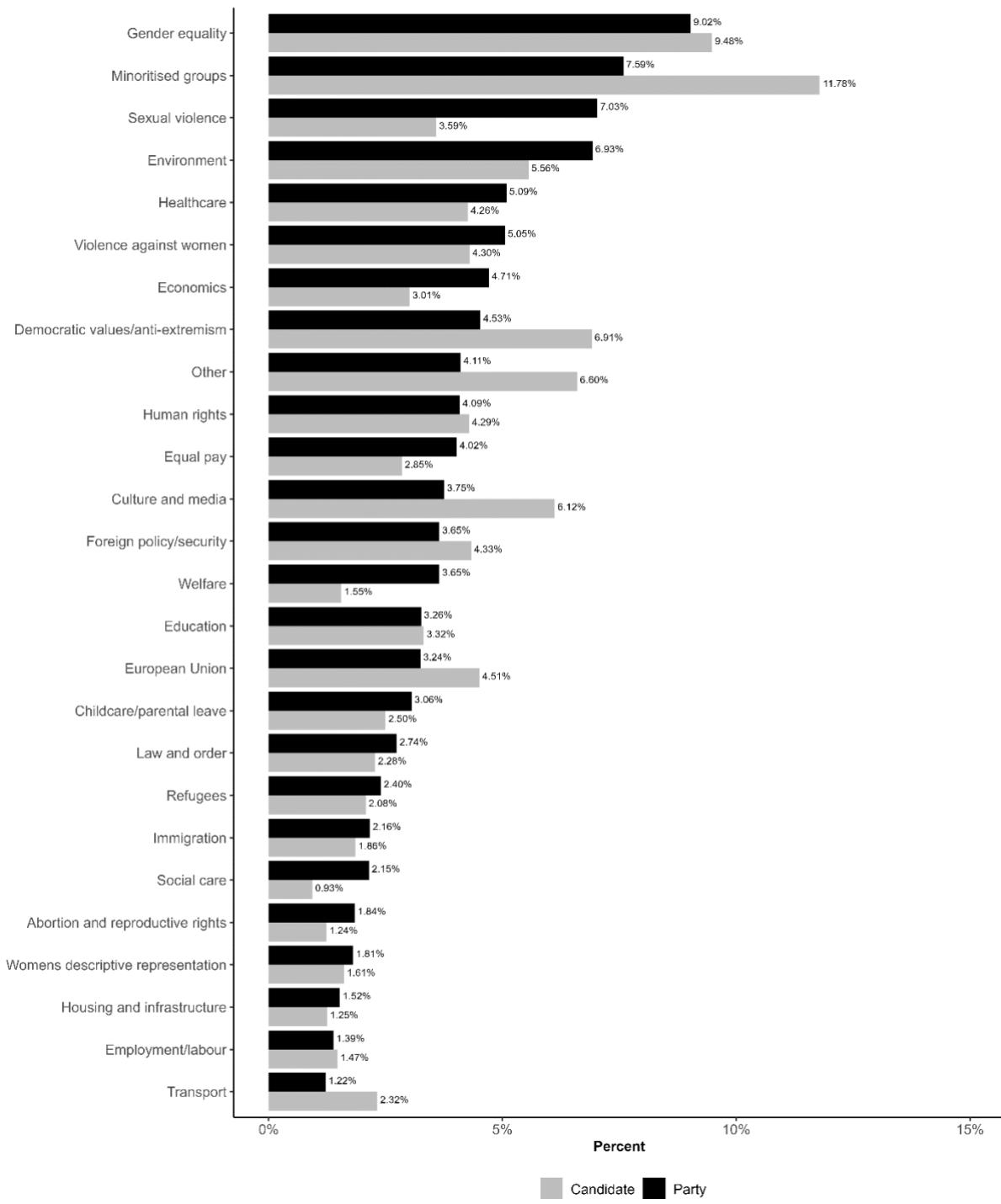
Overall, the issue mentions in the full dataset support H6. The issues that I found to be emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos are also those most emphasised in *feminist party* and candidate tweets. Other heavily mentioned issues reflect party-specific priorities and support the results from the newspaper analysis. This finding more broadly supports existing literature which argues, first, that small/niche parties emphasise issues in their social media communication (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019) and, secondly, that they focus communication on their *owned* issues (Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al., 2022; Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021). It suggests that *feminist parties* utilise social media to increase the salience of their priority issues.

6.4 Comparing issue mentions between party and candidate accounts

While the issue communication in the full dataset appears to reflect party manifesto priorities, I expect to see variation in issue mentions between party and candidate tweets. In Figure 6.4 I compare the relative frequency of issue mentions in party and candidate tweets in the full dataset, with categories on the y axis ordered by the proportion of mentions by party accounts.

This figure first demonstrates that the issues mentioned with highest relative frequency by party accounts are generally reflective of the issues that were emphasised in the broader sample of *feminist party* manifestos. ‘Minoritised groups’ and ‘gender equality’ account for 16.6% of all issue mentions, reflecting the intersectional feminist ideology central to the party family. ‘Environment’, ‘human rights’, ‘refugees’ and ‘foreign policy’ each also account for a fairly high proportion, meaning that the broader topic of *human security* makes up 17.1% of issue mentions. *Gendered violence* (‘sexual violence’ and ‘violence against women’) accounts for 12.1% of mentions. As in the full dataset, the only manifesto priority topic that was not mentioned with high proportion is *care* (‘childcare/parental leave’ and ‘social care’) which has only 5.2% mentions. As discussed above, the lower emphasis of these issues may reflect a strategic choice of *feminist parties* to distance themselves from the perception of being single-issue women’s parties oriented around practical women’s issues.

Figure 6.4 Relative frequency of issue mentions from *feminist party* and candidate accounts



Notes: Party accounts (n = 5918), Candidate accounts (n = 8563)

Overall, the issues that I identified as priorities of *feminist parties* in the manifesto analysis account for 51% of the issue mentions from the party accounts of the three *feminist parties* in my sample. On the one hand this may not appear that party accounts heavily emphasise manifesto priority issues, because approximately half of the issue mentions from party accounts come from just fewer than half of the possible issue categories (10 of 26 categories). However,

if the share of issue mentions were perfectly balanced across the data, each category would account for 3.85% of mentions from party accounts. Considered this way there is a clear emphasis from party accounts of specific issues, such as ‘gender equality’ (9%). Moreover, the breadth of categories in the code scheme is different. Whereas ‘economics’ comprises a very broad issue domain, arguably issue areas such as ‘violence against women’ are narrower. Looking at the higher-level issue domains, *equality for women and minoritised groups, human security, gendered violence and care* account for over half of all party issue mentions.

This alignment between party communication on social media and party manifestos is somewhat expected, as party accounts are usually run by central party actors or professional campaign managers, who aim to implement a cohesive communication strategy. Indeed, I find that a common use of the national and municipal party accounts was to tweet out the party manifesto pledge by pledge.

“Recital #40 For a feminist environmental policy that enables a future also for future generations <https://t.co/tRnht9fQBj> #movethedate <https://t.co/I6rc0QFMoT>” Feminist Initiative Stockholm, ‘FI (01/08/2018)

“Excerpt from our election manifesto initiative 29: We will reform the Act on Fertility Treatment so that in the future it will not allow self-employed women and female couples to be placed in an unequal position in the treatment and reimbursement practices of the public sector in fertility treatments performed with donated gametes.” Feminist Party, FP (11/04/2019)

“On violence against women: “WE will create a cross-party committee that puts real Londoners ahead of political gain” #womanifesto” WEP UK (06/04/2016)

Literature has long suggested that the general electorate do not take the time to read party manifestos (Harmel, 2018). The manifestos of small parties may be even less accessible because they are often only available online and thus must be actively sought out by voters. Additionally, as I demonstrated in Chapter 5, *feminist parties* appear to receive a limited amount of issue coverage in traditional news and there is evidence of an underrepresentation of their core issue concerns and an overrepresentation of stereotypically feminine issue concerns in their journalistic coverage. Based on this context, one of the functions of social media campaigning for *feminist party* accounts appears to be to publicise their campaign platform. Using Twitter has the added benefit of turning manifesto pledges into handy ‘soundbites’ that can be shared by voters and may attract attention of news organisations (Johnson, 2012: 55).

Beyond manifesto priority issues, the most frequently mentioned issues from parties’ accounts were ‘economics’ and ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, each of which was mentioned

just under 5%. I also found these two issues to be mentioned with a fairly high relative frequency by *feminist party* actors in the newspaper analysis (Figure 5.3). Descriptive analysis therefore offers support for H6 that in their social media communication, the three *feminist parties* in my sample primarily communicate on the issues emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos. In particular, they emphasise issues central to their feminist ideology and those issue domains that secure their niche in the party space such as *gendered violence* and *human security*.

I turn now to the candidate issue mentions. Before discussing the results, I first note that there is a large amount of variation in the number of political issue tweets sent by candidates (Table 6.1) and the total number of issue mentions within candidate tweets (Table 6.3).⁶⁹ For instance, the Finnish municipal candidate, Tero Hannula is responsible for 17.5% of the candidate issue mentions. Thus, the interpretation of the descriptive statistics has a limited generalisability beyond my three cases. In the statistical models I include the (log) number of tweets sent by an account to control for this variance.

Figure 6.4 shows that candidate tweets in my sample also mentioned manifesto priority issues with a high frequency, with *equality for women and marginalised groups*, *human security*, *gendered violence*, and *care* making up 48.8% of all mentions, only 2.2% less than the party accounts. In fact, candidates mentioned ‘minoritised groups’ and ‘gender equality’ more than party accounts. Thus, descriptive evidence shows first that the issue communication of the *feminist party* candidates is generally aligned with party platforms.

However, while I found a fairly even spread in non-priority issue mentions from party accounts, I find that candidates emphasised *specific* non-party priority issues with a high frequency. These include ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, ‘culture and media’, and ‘European Union’ (the difference in mentions of the ‘European Union’ category will be discussed in detail when comparing across candidate viability). Building on the issue mentions from the full dataset displayed in Figure 6.3, it appears that candidates rather than parties are driving the relative frequency of mentions of ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ in my sample. As discussed above, the findings of the newspaper analysis and social media data combined suggest that *feminist parties*, particularly FI and FP, emphasise anti-extremism as a way to carve out the

⁶⁹ Although the standard deviation among candidate account issue mentions (283.21) is in fact lower than that of party account issue mentions (436.48).

space for intersectional feminist politics. However qualitative investigation finds candidates also tweeted more personal objections to nationalism and extremism:

“This makes me so angry. And scared. It is a disgrace that the Nazis are allowed to demonstrate in Stockholm today. Our city is being hostage-taken and many do not dare to go out. NMR should not have been given permission to demonstrate. It is deadly to normalise a movement that calls for genocide. <https://t.co/4vfUVI0EAI>” Anna Rantala Bonnier, ‘FI (25/08/2018)

“Fascists to hell <https://t.co/40mFupBHsE>” Tero Hannula, FP (29/04/2019)

Candidates are also mostly responsible for the high proportion of mentions of ‘culture and media’ in the full dataset. Descriptive qualitative analysis finds similar party-level differences in the content of these issue mentions as outlined above. FI and FP candidates largely focused on cultural policy whereas WEP candidates tweeted more about the lack of representation of women in media and sports (see Figure M.2 in Appendix M for descriptive statistics on party-level differences in issue mention).

This divergence from the party platform may also indicate that *feminist parties* use social media, not just to broadcast their issue concerns, but also as a form of outreach. Past research has demonstrated that one strategy of parties and candidates on social media is to engage with media elites (Lilleker and Jackson, 2010). As the data for the social media analysis includes only original tweets and not replies to other tweets, it is not fully clear whether *feminist party* actors do the same. But there is evidence of candidates tweeting dissatisfaction with their own lack of representation in news media and mentioning specific media organisations’ accounts:

“For the second time, I will read about the “new parties” in the @hsfi, which include the protest movements of Harkimo, Soini and Väyrynen with 0-1% support. After all, the media cycle is short, but serious @fpuolue and @Liberaalipuolue are taking part in their 1st EK elections. So maybe new ones?” Katju Aro, FP (18/09/2018)

“I was not invited to @BBCRadioLondon Mayor debate. Licence-fee payer sick of women's voices being silenced? #VoteWE <https://t.co/81ZVg1PH7r>” Sophie Walker, WEP (08/04/2016)

“As a new political party accessing the media to tell our story is hard. WE have been excluded from hustings, new stories, TV! #WhereAreWE” Harini Iyengar, WEP (11/04/2016)

In summary, the descriptive statistics first offer indicative support to H6 that the three *feminist parties* and their candidates primarily emphasised *feminist party* priority issues in their Twitter communication. Party priority issues made up approximately half of the issues mentions from

party and candidate accounts. Party tweets also mentioned issues that are commonly salient to voters including ‘economics’, hence there is some evidence of *feminist parties* interacting with the broader issue agenda. Yet these issues received comparatively less attention than parties’ priority issues in their social media campaigns.

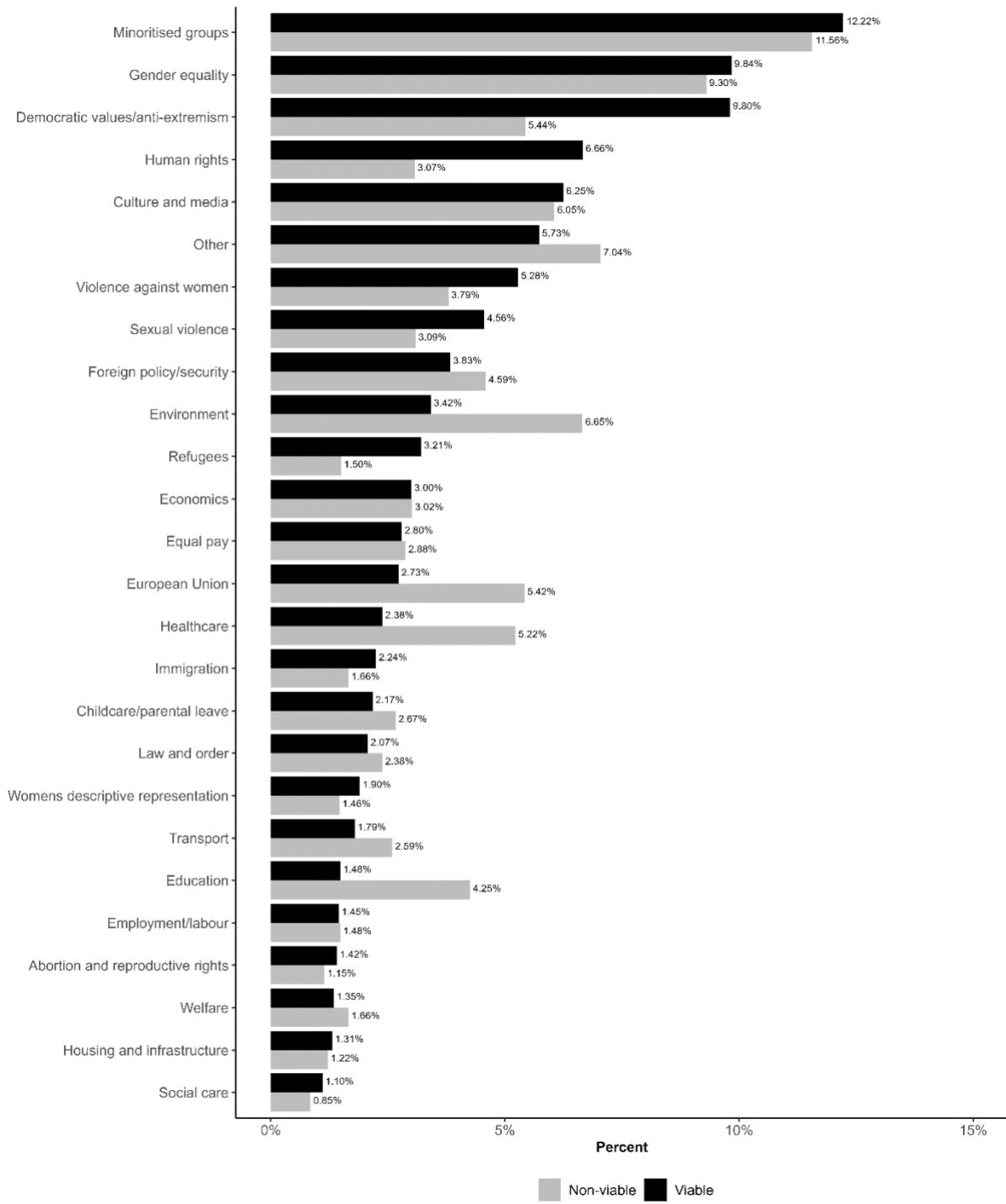
Second, contrary to my expectations, descriptive analysis of party and candidate issue mentions in the full dataset does not lend support to H7, yet these results require nuanced interpretation. On the one hand, *feminist party* candidates demonstrate a lower degree of divergence from the party platform than is found in research on mainstream candidate communication (Boyle et al., 2022; Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022). I found that *feminist party* candidates focused a comparable amount of attention to the party’s owned issues as party accounts. This suggests that candidates of small/niche parties also pursue an issue ownership strategy in their communication. However, there is evidence that the candidates in my sample also frequently mentioned a broader range of issues than parties and were more communicative on non-priority issues. In particular, the non-owned issues emphasised with a high frequency by candidates - such as ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, ‘European Union’, and ‘culture and media’ - indicate that candidates engage with the broader policy agenda to a larger extent than party accounts and use Twitter to signal to, or communicate with, other actors, such as media organisations.

6.5 Comparing issue mentions between viable and non-viable candidates

Building from the findings above, I expect to see greater divergence from *feminist party* priority issues in the tweets of the non-viable candidates in my sample. Figure 6.5 compares the proportion of issue mentions by viable and non-viable *feminist party* candidates, with the y axis ordered by relative frequency of mentions by viable candidates. It is important to reflect before the presentation of this data, that the number of cases of viable (6) and non-viable (37) candidates in my sample is imbalanced. Thus, I take care in my interpretation of the proportional issue mentions not to draw conclusions beyond my specific cases.

The issues mentioned the most by the viable candidates align broadly with *feminist party* manifesto priorities, with *equality for women and minoritised groups* (22.1%), *gendered violence* (9.8%), *human security* (17.1%), and *care* (3.3%), making up 52.3% of issue mentions from viable candidates.

Figure 6.5 Relative frequency of issue mentions from viable and non-viable candidate accounts



Notes: Viable candidate accounts ($n = 2897$), Non-viable candidate accounts ($n = 5666$)

Again, the only priority manifesto issues with a low frequency of mentions are ‘childcare/parental leave’ (2.2%) and ‘social care’ (1.1%). Thus, over half of all issue mentions from viable candidates come from fewer than half of the issue categories in the code scheme. The proportion of *feminist party* priority issue mentions from viable candidates is also 1.3% more than party accounts and 3.5% more than total candidate accounts. This indicates that the

three *feminist parties*' viable candidates also communicate in line with the party account on social media.

However, as with candidates more generally, there are examples of viable candidates diverging from the party platform. For example, viable candidates mentioned 'democratic values and anti-extremism' to near the same extent as they mentioned 'gender equality' (both just under 10%) and mentioned this issue near twice as much proportionally as non-viable candidates (9.8% compared to 5.4%). As with candidates generally, I find that mentions of 'democratic values and anti-extremism' are predominantly from FI and FP viable candidates and concern the rise of nationalism and far right extremism in Europe.

"Interesting confusion. For me, this is crystal clear: society is now divided by nationalism-feminism. In the modern sense of the concepts [*https://t.co/mhAY2SXROx*](https://t.co/mhAY2SXROx)" Katju Aro, FP (27/10/2016)

"We will never accept the spreading of hate and violence from neo-fascist and neo-nazi organisations. We will stand up for our democracy together #EuropeNeedsFeminism [*https://t.co/wPnsX5vSOn*](https://t.co/wPnsX5vSOn)" Soraya Post, FI (08/11/2018)

The viable WEP candidates instead mostly discussed democratic institutions, for example electoral reform. But they also engaged with the discussion of nationalism and in some cases these two issues are linked, for example the following Twitter thread:

"Our current voting system for most elections was built for stability. Instead it creates instability by excluding many of the perspectives it most urgently needs and ensuring a fractious political culture focused on power rather than national interest. @WEP_UK backs a move to PR"

"The new study also points to the way our antiquated voting system fosters extremism. And that's without factoring in the ways in which analogue laws fail to cope with polarising digital campaigning in which voters see sharply divergent messaging tailored to their susceptibilities [*https://t.co/4Ww5F2zd9c*](https://t.co/4Ww5F2zd9c)" Catherine Mayer, WEP (23/04/2019)

In my analysis of party news coverage, I explained that opposition to far-right nationalism was a concern of the two *feminist parties* in the Nordic region. It is perhaps relatively less emphasised by WEP and its candidates due to the lesser presence of competitive far right parties in UK politics (support for UKIP, the only competitive far-right party, collapsed after the 2016 Brexit referendum). However, I did not identify 'anti-extremism' as a key issue area emphasised in *feminist parties*' platforms in Chapter 4, nor does it appear in the analysis of the manifestos of the parties in my sample in Appendix H. Thus, there is some indication that viable candidates

emphasise issues outside of the party platform, but which are still a focus for the party. An alternative explanation is that ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ is *becoming* a core issue concern for *feminist parties* as far right nationalism spreads and grows across Europe. Thus, it may not have been captured in the manifesto analysis which covered a longer period and a wider geographic spread of parties.

In support of H8, Figure 6.5 demonstrates that there is more variation in issue mentions from non-viable candidates. Manifesto priority issues still take the top spot, with ‘minoritised groups’ and ‘gender equality’ receiving the highest proportion of mentions (combined 20.1%). Issues related to *gendered violence* (6.9%) and *human security* (15.9%) were also highly frequently mentioned. Non-viable candidates actually mentioned the ‘environment’ approximately proportionally twice as much as viable candidates (6.7% compared to 3.4%). Including *care* (3.5%), manifesto priority issues make up a total 47.1% of issue mentions from non-viable candidates. This is approximately 5% less than viable candidate accounts and 3.9% less than party accounts (but similar to the total candidate accounts, likely because of the imbalance in the viable and non-viable groups). Thus, while non-viable candidates do emphasise party priority issues, there is evidence of a (small) difference in the emphasis between the non-viable and viable candidates in my sample, offering indicative support to H8.

Moreover, I find that non-viable candidates mentioned specific non-priority issues with a higher relative frequency than viable candidates. Most notably ‘European Union’ (mentioned proportionally twice as much by non-viable candidates) and ‘education’ (mentioned proportionally three times as much by non-viable candidates). Descriptive statistics comparing party and candidate mentions (Figure 6.4) demonstrated that ‘European Union’ was an issue mentioned relatively more by candidates than parties and Figure 6.5 demonstrates that it is mentioned particularly by non-viable candidates.

Exploring party-level differences in issue mention (Figure M.3 in Appendix M), I find that mentions of the ‘European Union’ category are predominantly from WEP candidates. ‘European Union’ is also the sixth most frequently mentioned issue in tweets from WEP party accounts in the full dataset (Appendix Figure M.2) (in fact, 93% of ‘European Union’ issue mentions come from WEP party or candidate accounts). This party-level difference is explained as the two election campaigns under study in the UK are the London Mayoral and Assembly election 2016, which occurred two months prior to the Brexit referendum, and the 2019 European Parliament election, in which the UK participated for the final time and throughout the campaign of which, Prime Minister Theresa May was struggling to negotiate a withdrawal

agreement. Therefore, Brexit was among, if not *the*, most salient issue in both elections campaign periods.

After initially not taking a position on Brexit in 2016 (Evans and Kenny, 2019), WEP firmly campaigned for a second referendum and to remain in the EU come 2019. Therefore, the issue was also highly salient within the party in 2019 and featured heavily in their EP manifesto which was titled: “A manifesto not just to remain in the European Union, but to advance” (WEP, 2019) (see review in Appendix H). Thus understandably, the EU was highly frequently mentioned in WEP’s tweets during the EP campaign in particular (Figure M.4 in Appendix M). However, across both campaigns my data demonstrates that non-viable candidates mentioned the ‘European Union’ category twice as much, as a proportion of their overall issue tweets, as both viable candidates and party accounts.

Partly this difference may be accounted for by the imbalance between the samples of viable and non-viable candidates. For WEP, two candidates were coded as viable, London Mayoral candidate Sophie Walker and party founder and candidate Catherine Mayer. Comparatively, 14 WEP candidates are coded as non-viable in the EP and municipal elections. However, through qualitative review of the tweets within this category, I also find that WEP party and candidates communicate *different* concerns around Brexit. In party tweets, Brexit was discussed in relation to the lack of women’s representation in the decision-making process and the unequal impacts of Brexit on women, for example economic impacts and increased burden for women working in health and social care:

“91% of parliamentary debate time and 90% of press coverage on #Brexit has been given to men. WE are not asking for a second referendum, but for women’s participation in the first <https://t.co/d0Sd4ypC0H>” WEP UK (15/01/2019)

“Women are now being lined up again to increase still more the amount of unpaid and unvalued care work they provide, to take the economic hit from Brexit” - @SophieRunning” WEP UK (20/09/2018)

Similarly, communication from the viable candidates in the municipal (Sophie Walker) and European Parliament (Catherine Mayer) campaigns focused on similar themes:

“@LetMeVote_UK no party line. Am pro-EU tho it needs to support low-paid women & carers; both sides failing 2 discuss Brexit impact on women” Sophie Walker, WEP (02/05/2016)

“Hitting women disproportionately hard. And with the expectation that women will, as ever, try to make things work by increasing their unpaid labour. We need a #peoplesvote for women, not to remain in the EU but to advance in it <https://t.co/p0ptKZB94R>” Catherine Mayer, WEP (28/11/2018)

Alternatively, non-viable candidate tweets more commonly expressed general dissatisfaction with the referendum result and Brexit process, without linking this to the party stance or a specific policy area:

*“more reasons by #brexit makes no sense. It. Makes. No. Sense
<https://t.co/FSbOIXRpU>”* Rebecca Manson-Jones, WEP (25/01/2016)

*“Sign the petition: Londoners: we are part of Europe - Add your name today
<https://t.co/DA4GQa2USn>”* Jo Shaw, WEP (28/02/2016)

“£1,000 hole in budgets will be as nothing when there is no food on the shelves to buy. Do ERG zealots think we won't notice when planes cease to fly, when the M20 becomes a lorry park, when there's no insulin? Beyond deluded. #endthechaos #StopBrexitSaveBritain #PeoplesVote <https://t.co/Arfe0dxXuR2>”
Bea Gare, WEP (09/10/2018)

The distribution of the data may account for some of the difference in the proportion of tweets sent mentioning this issue. However, the qualitative examples offer evidence of non-viable candidates engaging in more general terms with issues of interest to voters and themselves rather than the issues that are emphasised in party manifestos and in party communication on Twitter.

Lastly, turning to ‘education’, non-viable candidates mentioned this proportionally four times as much as viable candidates. Qualitative analysis finds that mentions of ‘education’ were not consistently focused on one area. In fact, two thirds of all candidate mentions of education come from FP European Parliament candidate, Tero Hannula, whose tweets discussed free education, teaching practices and bullying, all from a personal perspective and not linked to party policy in any way.

“A good example of how the problem of bullying is not quite simple. Bullying sometimes springs from fear or even horror. I myself was afraid that I would be bullied all my time at school, which I had no means of dealing with. This was reflected in behavioural disorders. <https://t.co/BP5JKejIg3>” Tero Hannula, FP (08/01/2019)

“Remember this when the Center Party and the Conservative Party again make educational promises in elections <https://t.co/IloJrOVeOP>” Tero Hannula, FP (12/02/2019)

In comparison, tweets mentioning ‘education’ from FP party leader and EP and municipal candidate Katju Aro are predominantly either reflective of or directly quoting the party platform:

"1. Subjective right to day care, reduction of group sizes, salaries of early childhood education professionals up.

2. By advocating an equality fund to pay wage increases in female-dominated sectors and by adding sanctions to the law for violations of the principle of equal pay.

#nomoreplaymoney <https://t.co/P2bcdHcghP>" Katju Aro, FP (14/03/2019)

This is just one example of a highly prolifically tweeting non-viable candidate. However, their tweets, along with those of WEP candidates discussing Brexit, demonstrate evidence of non-viable candidates diverging from the party platform. Moreover, as these tweets are framed from a personal perspective and not linked to party policy, they provide some support to my argument that less viable candidates from small/niche parties may diverge from the party line because they lack the incentives, skills, or resources to run professionalised social media campaigns.

In sum, the descriptive analysis lends indicative support to H8 as viable candidates' issue communication is more aligned with both party platforms and party social media communication. Where they diverge, their communication follows similar patterns to the main party account and their communication is reflective of party priorities. Partly this may be because viable candidates are more involved in the production of the parties' Twitter content, particularly those viable candidates that are also the party leader. Both WEP and FI have professional communications and social media staff running their party Twitter accounts (I was unable to find information on the operation of FP's party communication). Thus, being at the centre of the party and working with professional staff, the viable candidate's communication appears more focused on the party platform and more polished in its content.

Comparatively, I find that the non-viable candidates in my sample diverged from the party platform to a greater extent than viable candidates, mentioning a broader range of issues in their tweets and communicating more on issues that were not prioritised in party manifestos. Particularly, qualitative analysis from WEP and FP, demonstrates that non-viable candidates appear to engage to a greater extent with issues that are of interest to voters, and which populate the broader policy agenda and often communicate their own political views rather than discuss party policy. This supports my argument that less viable candidates of small parties, who are further removed from central party control and have less professional campaign training, are less likely to promote party issues in their campaign communication. These findings therefore differ from existing research on mainstream parties which has indicated that more viable candidates are more likely to diverge from the party platform (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022).

6.6 Differences across election campaigns

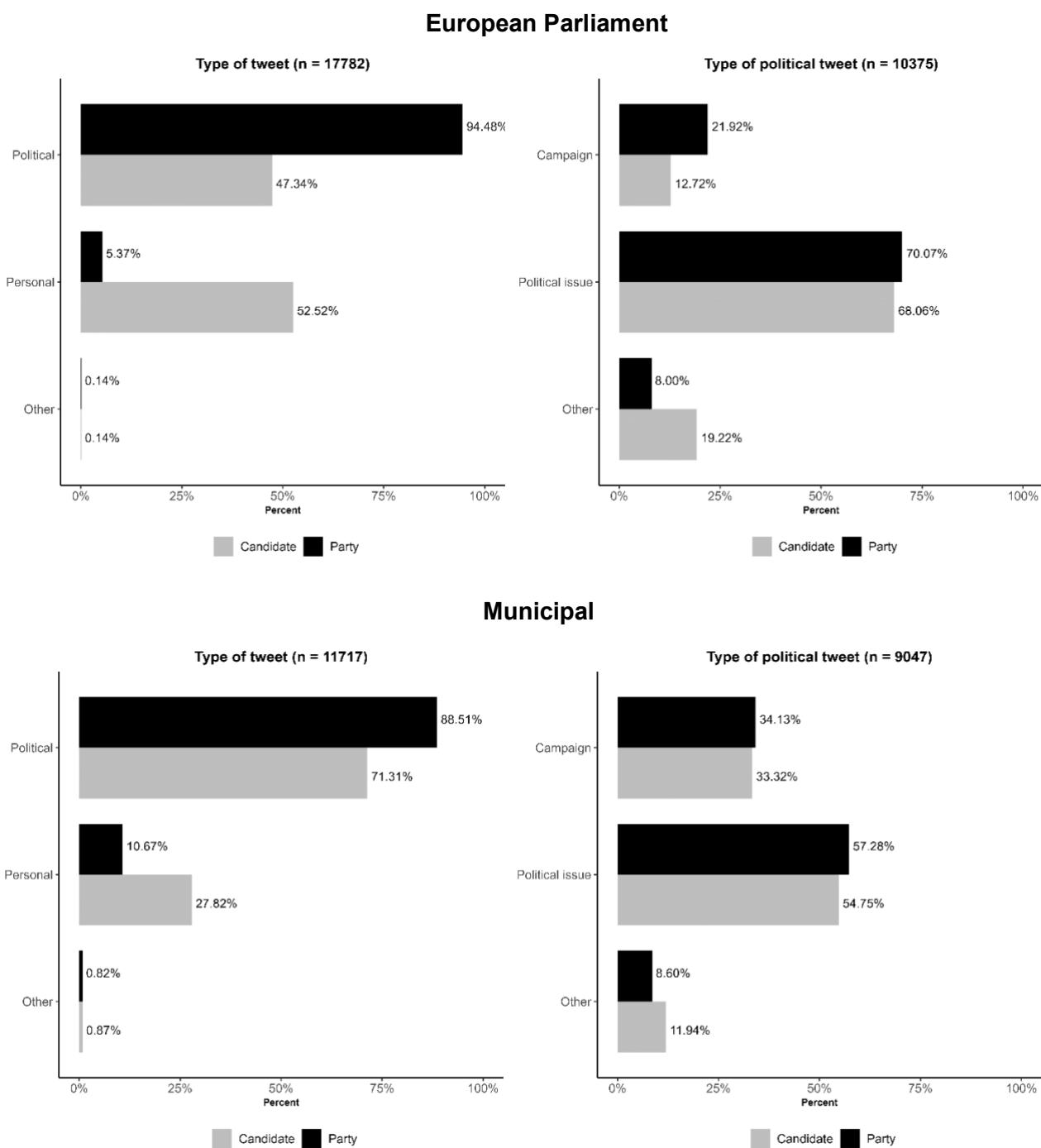
Finally, before the explanatory analysis, I compare party and candidate issue mentions across the two election campaigns. My expectation is that party accounts will maintain a focus on *feminist party* priority issues across both campaigns, whereas candidates will diverge more from the party platform in the municipal campaigns.

First, Figure 6.6 compares the type of tweet and type of political tweet sent by party and candidate accounts in the European Union and municipal election campaigns. Candidates in EP elections send more personal tweets than candidates in municipal elections. This is an interesting finding as I had expected that communication from candidates in municipal elections would be less politically oriented and less in aligned with the party platform. This would perhaps imply that candidates in municipal elections would send fewer political tweets. However, my data shows that in municipal elections nearly three quarters (71.3%) of tweets from *feminist party* candidates include political content, compared to less than half (47.3%) for EP candidates.

Looking at the type of political content, for both party and candidates' accounts there is less issue-related communication at the municipal level, with over a third of party and candidate tweets coded as campaign messages. In comparison, campaign messages make up 21.9% of party and only 12.7% of candidate tweets at the EP level, whereas 70.1% of party tweets and 68.1% of candidate tweets include political issue content. Thus, while there is proportionally more personal tweeting at the EP level, the share of political tweets focused on political issues is greater in the EP campaign, in line with my expectations. Finally, in the EP campaign nearly 19% of candidate tweets contain 'other' political content which is neither campaign related nor mentioning a political issue.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ It is worth reiterating that my dataset includes only original tweets, meaning retweets are excluded. This may affect the proportion of political versus personal tweets and types of political tweet from party and candidate accounts. For example, if a candidate regularly retweets 'political issue' tweets from the party account, this is not reflected in my data.

Figure 6.6 Type of tweet and type of political tweet sent by *feminist party* and candidate accounts during European Parliament and municipal campaigns



Potential explanations for these differences are, first, that local party offices and candidates may use social media to advertise local events, increasing the proportion of ‘campaign’ tweets. Second, it is possible that the greater viability of small parties at the municipal level may incentivise increased campaign messaging as, rather than pursuing a policy-seeking goals, parties may instead prioritise office-seeking goals. Nevertheless, across election type attention

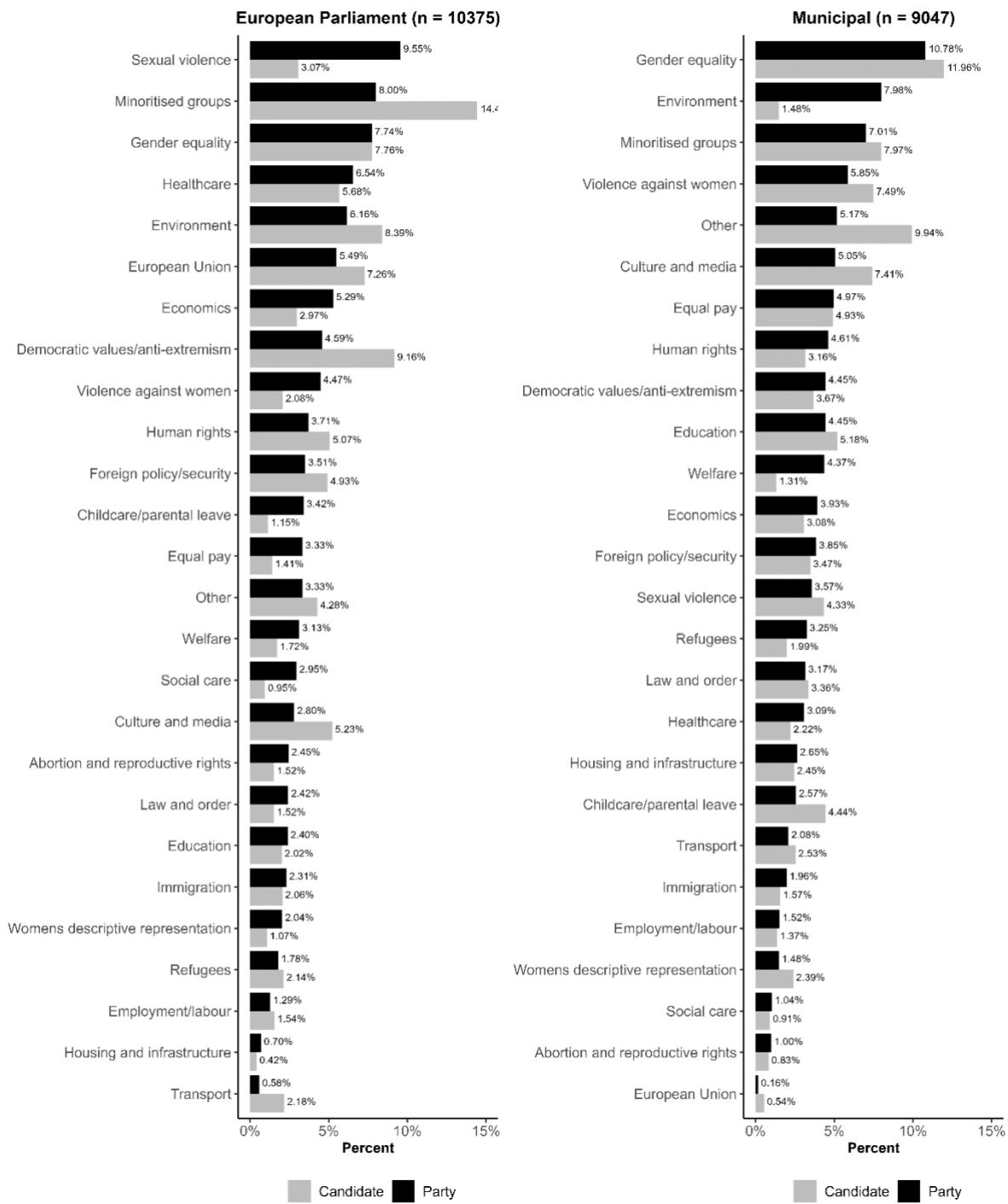
to political issues remained fairly high, with an average of 69.1% political issue tweets in EP election campaign and 56% at the municipal level. Therefore, the majority of *feminist party* and candidate communication is focused on political issues, in line with the literature on small and niche party social media campaigning (Evans et al., 2014; Evans et al., 2019; Pineda, 2021).

I now turn to investigate *what* issues are mentioned in tweets by the parties and candidates in my sample in each election campaign. Figure 6.7 compares the issue mentions from party and candidate accounts in the two election campaigns, with issues on the y axis ordered by the relative frequency of mentions from party accounts. The first important observation is that *feminist party* priority issues (*gender equality and equality for minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care*) remain those most emphasised by *feminist parties* in both election types. However, there are important differences in the total number of mentions across election type. In the total dataset, priority issues accounted for 51% of party issue mentions. They make up a similar proportion of party mentions in European Parliament campaigns (51.3%) but only 44.7% in municipal campaigns.

Thus, contrary to my expectations (H9) *feminist party* priority issues are mentioned with a higher relative frequency by parties during the EP campaign. There are also differences in which priority issues are most emphasised, with ‘sexual violence’ the most mentioned issue by parties in the EP campaign (9.6%) but ranking 14th in issue mentions in the municipal campaigns (3.6%). Instead, issues such as ‘culture and media’, ‘equal pay’, and ‘education’ feature with a higher relative frequency in municipal campaigns.

One explanation for this could be that WEP’s manifesto for the 2016 London Mayoral and Assembly election did emphasise issues such as ‘equal pay’ (see review in Appendix H). Indeed, 83.6% of mentions of ‘equal pay’ in the full dataset come from WEP party and candidate accounts (see party-level differences in issue mention in Appendix M.1). However, it is interesting to note that ‘sexual violence’ was not heavily emphasised by parties during the municipal campaign, as this featured in the municipal manifestos of each of the parties in my sample (Appendix H).

Figure 6.7 Relative frequency of issue mentions from party and candidate accounts in European Parliament and municipal campaigns



Notes: EP campaign: Candidate (n = 5042), Party (n = 3243); Municipal campaign: Candidate (n = 3511), Party (n = 2495).

At the EP level there is also some variation in party issue mentions, with increased mention of issues such as ‘healthcare’, ‘economics’ and ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’. While the full dataset indicated that *feminist parties* emphasised their core issues on social media, comparing across election campaigns demonstrates that parties do appear to moderate their

communication based on the electoral context, though priority issues remain those most emphasised.

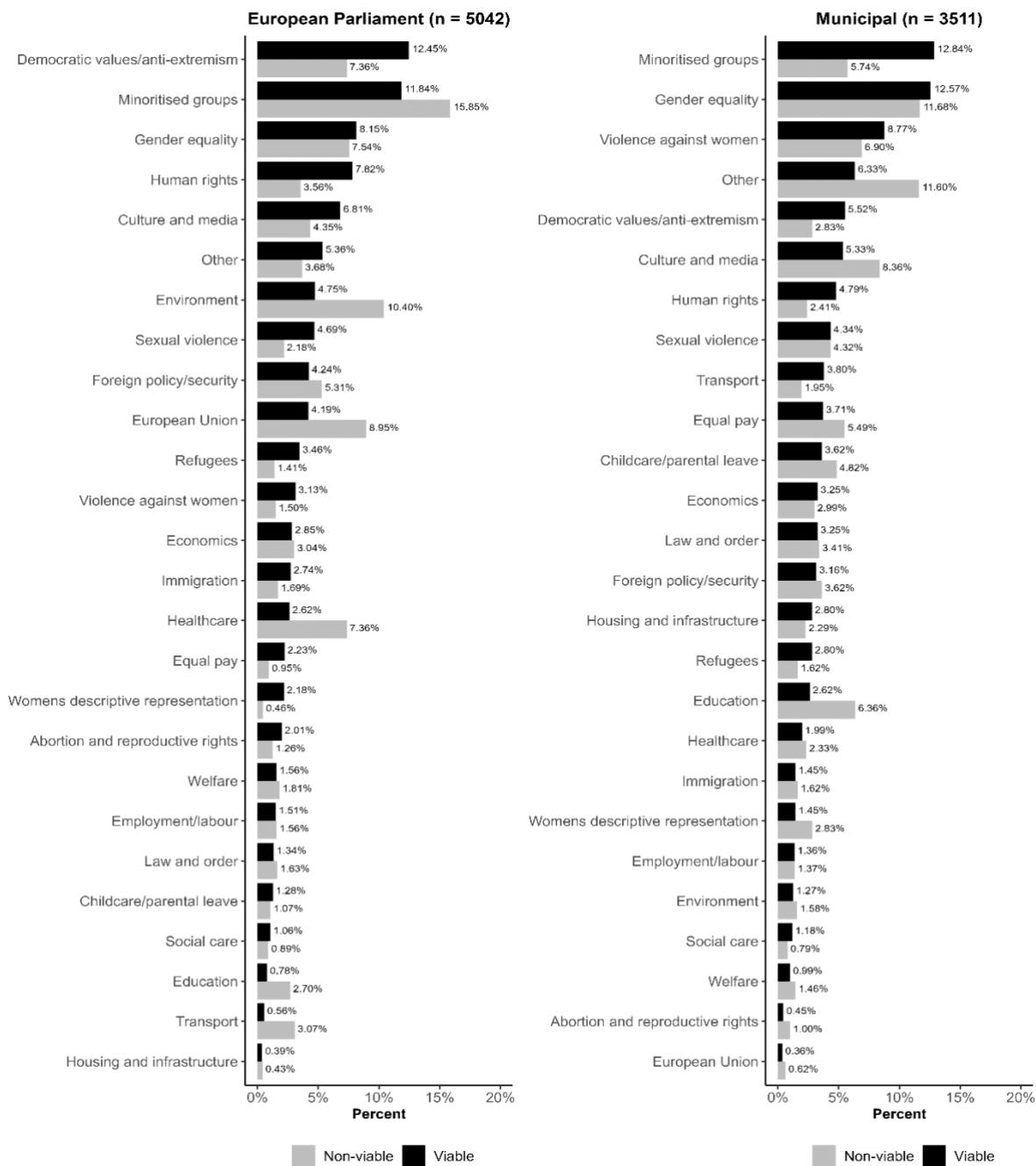
In comparison, candidates show more variation in issue mentions than parties in both election campaigns. In the European Parliament campaign, ‘gender equality’ was the fourth most frequently mentioned issue, following ‘minoritised groups’, ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’, and the ‘environment’. ‘Democratic values and anti-extremism’ make up 9% of candidate issue mentions compared to 4% party issue mentions in the EP campaign. Meanwhile candidates mentioned *gendered violence* (‘sexual violence’ and ‘violence against women’) only relatively half as much as parties, despite this being a key priority for *feminist parties* and highly mentioned in the dataset as a whole. Thus, candidate communication in the EP campaign shows stronger representation of values-based issues, such as those that align with party platforms including equality and environmentalism, but also democracy and anti-extremism. This supports literature that argues that the EP elections are increasingly oriented around values-based issues (Galpin and Trenz, 2019; Han and Finke, 2022)

At the municipal level, *equality for women and minoritised groups* and *gendered violence* are the most frequently mentioned issues by candidates. However, like parties, local or national level issues such as ‘childcare/parental leave’, ‘equal pay’, ‘education’, and ‘culture and media’ received more attention than in the EP campaign. Again, this may reflect the relative focus of WEP on these issues during the 2016 municipal election. It is interesting that ‘democratic values and anti-extremism’ accounts for only 3.7% of candidate issue mentions at the municipal level and was thus mentioned relatively half as much by the *feminist party* candidates locally than in the EP campaign. The data indicates that locally, candidates devoted less attention to ideological or values-based issues and focused their communication more on local-level issues and policies. This therefore offers indicative support of H10 and suggests that individual candidate’s communication is affected by the electoral context, with a greater focus on values-based issues in the EP campaign and local and national level issues in municipal elections.

Finally for the descriptive analysis, Figure 6.8 compares the issue mentions by viable and non-viable candidates in each election campaign, with categories ordered by relative frequency of issue mention by viable candidates.⁷¹

⁷¹ In interpreting this data, it is important to make clear that the tweets from viable *feminist party* candidates come from just six accounts in comparison to 37 non-viable accounts. Thus, differences in proportion may not reflect differences in the individual number of issue mentions in tweets from each group.

Figure 6.8 Relative frequency of issue mentions from viable and non-viable candidate accounts in European Parliament and municipal campaigns



Notes: European Parliament: Non-viable candidate (n = 3261), Viable candidate (n = 1791); Municipal: Non-viable candidate (n = 2405), Viable candidate (n = 1106).

In the EP campaign, the difference in the proportion of feminist party priority issue mentions between viable (50.4%) and non-viable (49.7%) candidates is negligible and priority issues make up a substantial amount of each group's issue mentions. However, the difference is substantially larger in the municipal campaigns, where priority issues account for 54.1% of viable candidate's issue mentions compared to 43.5% of non-viable candidate's issue mentions.

This further indicates that the likelihood of a candidate diverging from the party platform is moderated by the type of election. It also offers further support to my argument that candidates with the least formal campaign training, such as non-viable municipal candidates, are those least likely to coherently communicate the party platform in their social media campaigns.

Interestingly, viable candidates do still demonstrate divergence from the party platform. Most clearly, ‘democratic values/anti-extremism’ was the most relatively frequently mentioned issue from viable candidates during the EP campaign (12.5%) and was mentioned relatively more by viable candidates than non-viable candidates in both election campaigns. In the EP campaign, viable candidates also mentioned certain party priority issues less than non-viable candidates, for example mentioning ‘environment’ only relatively half as much.

However, non-viable candidates were generally less aligned with party manifesto issues in their communication, with the most prevalent issues in tweets being ‘minoritised groups’, followed by ‘environment’, ‘European Union’, and ‘healthcare’. Again, qualitative evidence finds that a high volume of mentions for these latter two topics comes from WEP candidates in reference to Brexit and its impact on the NHS.

*“This awaits us... Support the NHS #StopBrexit #StopbrexitSaveBritain
#StopBrexitSavetheNHS <https://t.co/K1NynlXWtk>” Bea Gare, WEP (06/08/2018)*

*“Brexit will push the NHS & social care services beyond breaking point to over the edge. It’s a care emergency #breakingbarriers sign our petition
<https://t.co/ZyM7eRfl8p> and vote @WEP_UK for #Euelections2019
<https://t.co/rwitCi5iQz>” Olivia Vincenti, WEP (16/05/2019)*

In municipal campaigns, viable candidates were more closely aligned with party manifestos in their communication, emphasising issue areas such as *equality for women and minoritised groups* (25.4%) and *gendered violence* (14.1%), while individual issues within the domain of *human security* (12%) were less frequently mentioned. There was also increased mention of local issues such as ‘transport’ and ‘childcare/parental leave’ at the municipal level.

Yet, as mentioned, non-viable candidates again showed greater divergence, with the ‘other’ category the second most prevalent issue category. Qualitative review indicates that issues frequently occurring in the ‘other’ category are homelessness and begging and women’s representation in STEM⁷². These are issues of primarily national and local governance and offer some examples of candidates diverging from the core issues of the party platform to engage

⁷² The coding scheme included a category for ‘women’s descriptive representation’ but this was exclusive to political representation, meaning mentions of women’s representation in STEM or in the private sector were coded in the ‘Other’ category.

more closely with specific issues relevant to the electoral context. The final evidence of candidates moderating issue mentions at the municipal level is that ‘European Union’ is the least mentioned issue for both non-viable *and* viable candidates at the municipal level. In comparison it is the third most frequently mentioned issue by non-viable candidates in the EP campaign.

Overall, the descriptive analysis suggests that *both* parties and candidates moderate their issue mentions depending on the election campaign. This means I find no indicative support for H9. The evidence of the *feminist parties* moderating their issue mentions across elections does however support literature which has found the same in examining mainstream parties in national and EP campaigns (Braun and Schmitt, 2020; Spoon and Klüver, 2014).

On the other hand, descriptive evidence does offer initial support to H10 because, in comparison to candidates, parties maintain a higher level of communication on owned issues across election campaigns. Among candidates, divergence from the party platform is more present at the municipal level and, in particular, non-viable candidates are those who showed the greatest divergence from the *feminist party* priority issues and from party tweets.

6.7 Explanatory models

Moving from a descriptive to an explanatory analysis, Table 6.5 presents the results of multilevel binomial logit models, nested by Twitter account, testing the likelihood of different actors mentioning *feminist party* priority issues in their tweets. As outlined in the data and methods section of this Chapter, I use nested models because tweets are clustered within candidates and parties. Thus, multilevel models do not treat tweets sent by the same account as independent observations. In each model the dependent variable is the mention of a manifesto priority issue in the tweet. These are: *equality for women and minoritised groups* (‘gender equality’ and ‘minoritised groups’), *gendered violence* (‘violence against women’ and ‘sexual violence’), *human security* (‘environment’, ‘foreign policy’, ‘human rights’ and ‘refugees’), and *care* (‘childcare/parental leave’ and ‘social care’).

Table 6.5 Likelihood of tweet mentioning a *feminist party* priority issue, logistic regression results

	All tweets	Candidate tweets
	Model 1	Model 2
Candidate	-0.12 (0.19)	
Viable candidate		0.50+ (0.27)
European Parliament	0.42** (0.06)	0.26* (0.12)
Total tweet (log)	0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.07)
(Intercept)	0.20 (0.31)	0.15 (0.32)
Tweets.	12183	7395
Twitter accounts	55	43
AIC	15832.68	9491.56
BIC	15869.72	9526.11
Log Likelihood	-7911.34	-4740.78

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; +p < .1. Standard error in parentheses.

Model 1 regresses party and candidate against mention of a priority manifesto issue. The coefficient does not reach statistical significance but is in the expected direction. Thus, the negative coefficient indicates that tweets from *feminist party* candidates have a lower probability of including a manifesto priority issue than tweets from party accounts. Yet the result is not statistically significant. In the descriptive analysis I also found little substantial difference between the proportion of *feminist party* priority issue mentions from party (51%) and candidate (48.8%) accounts. Although, I did observe more variation in candidate issue mentions *beyond*

the priority issues, which will not have been captured in the regression model. Nevertheless, descriptive and explanatory statistics offer no support to H7.

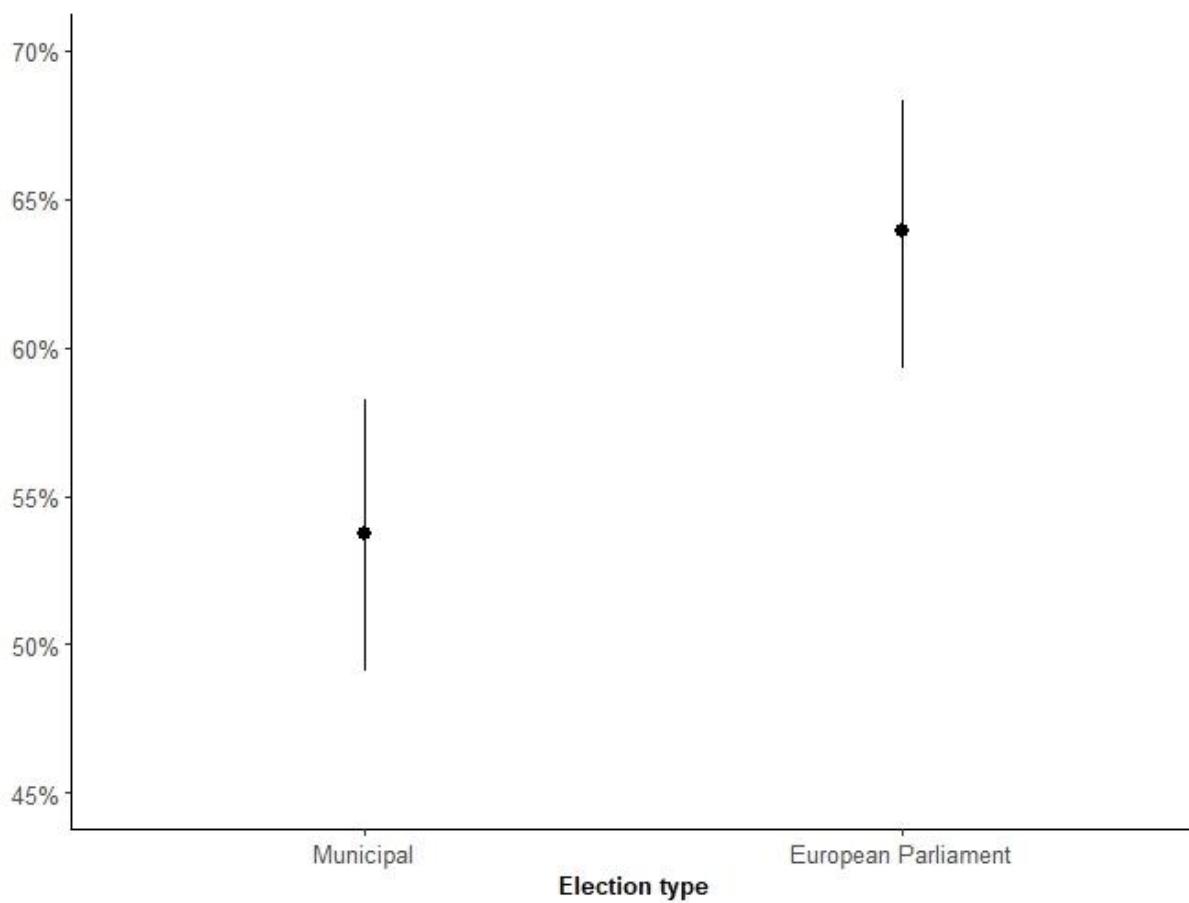
In Model 2, I test the effect of candidate viability. The coefficient for viability is positive and significant at the $p < .1$ threshold (I use a lower threshold because of the smaller number of cases). Therefore, I find statistical evidence that tweets from viable *feminist party* candidates have a higher probability of mentioning a manifesto priority issue than tweets from non-viable *feminist party* candidates. The low number of cases and imbalance between viable and non-viable candidate accounts means that I do not argue that the results of the regression model confirm H8. However, the results provide good face validity to the results of the descriptive analysis.

In both models the coefficient for election type is significant and positive. This means that when all other variables are held at their mean, it is more likely that a *feminist party* priority issue will be mentioned in a tweet for the European Parliament campaign than municipal campaign. Substantive interpretation of logit models is complicated as the coefficient represents the change in the logged odds of the dependent variable given a one-unit change in the independent variable, or in this case where the predictor is a dummy, the change in the logged odds given the change from the reference to test category.

Thus, to interpret the results substantively, Figure 6.9 models the predicted probability of a tweet including a *feminist party* priority issue in each election type. It shows that tweets from European Parliament election campaigns are around 10% more likely to contain a *feminist party* priority issue than tweets from the municipal campaigns. The evidence from the logit models therefore supports H10 but go against my expectations for H9.

A first potential explanation for this finding comes from research which has indicated that EP elections are increasingly oriented around values-based issues such as environmentalism, gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, and democratic values (Abou-Chadi, et al., 2021; Galpin and Trenz, 2019; Han and Finke, 2022). When and where these issues are salient on the issue agenda *feminist parties* may be incentivised to increase their communication on said issues to reinforce their issue ownership perceptions and to engage in competition with other parties over the issues.

Figure 6.9 Predicted probability of a tweet mentioning a *feminist party* priority issue in European Parliament and municipal campaigns, with 90% confidence intervals



A second consideration is that WEP's 2016 municipal manifesto included issues that were not identified as *feminist party* priority issues in the analysis of party manifestos in Chapter 4. These include 'equal pay' and 'culture and media', which the descriptive analysis indicated were issues that were emphasised in the municipal campaigns. This reflects a limitation in comparing the Twitter data from three parties and two election campaigns against the larger sample of party manifestos from a broader time period. However, WEP's 2016 municipal manifesto did also emphasise issues such as *care* and *gendered violence*, thus I do not believe that the findings can be fully explained by this limitation. On the whole, while the findings do not support my expectations, they do support a broader body of literature which has argued that parties moderate their issue appeal in different elections in pursuit of different goals (Braun and Schmitt, 2020; Spoon and Klüver, 2014).

6.8 Discussion and conclusions

In this Chapter, I have provided the first comparative analysis of *feminist parties*' issue communication on social media. I sought to investigate a) whether *feminist parties* pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media campaigns (H6), b) whether candidate's issue communication diverges from the party platform (H7), c) whether less viable candidates diverge to a greater extent than more viable candidates (H8), and finally d) whether these dynamics differ across local and EP election campaigns (H9 and H10).

Before I discuss the results, an important consideration in the interpretation of my findings is that my measure *feminist parties*' priority issues was developed from my analysis of the larger sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4. Therefore, my analysis in this Chapter is not a direct test of the issue emphases in party manifestos and party and candidate tweets of Feministinen Puolue, Feministiskt Initiativ and the Women's Equality Party. It is a broader test of whether the key issue concerns of European *feminist parties* as a family of niche parties are represented in these parties' tweets.

However, it is worth reiterating that over half of the manifestos in the sample in Chapter 4 were produced by FP, FI and WEP (18 of 32 manifestos). Moreover, I present a review in Appendix H which demonstrates that the priority issues identified in Chapter 4 were also heavily emphasised in the manifestos produced by these three *feminist parties* for the EP and municipal elections that I have studied. Throughout this Chapter I have ensured to consider how the specific issue concerns within particular parties' manifestos may have affected the results.

Taking each hypothesis in turn, I first find strong descriptive evidence in support of H6. The issues that I identified as central concerns of *feminist parties* in the manifesto analysis in Chapter 4 were consistently emphasised in tweets from the three *feminist parties* and their candidates, accounting for approximately half of all issue mentions. I also found these issues to be emphasised by *feminist party* actors in news coverage in Chapter 5. This therefore offers evidence that the three *feminist parties* in my sample pursue an issue ownership strategy in their social media campaigns. This supports existing research on small/niche parties which argues that these parties' communication will maintain focus on owned issues (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Wagner and Meyer, 2017). In particular, it supports studies on issue ownership in small/niche parties' online communication (Pineda et al., 2021; Praet et al., 2021) and extends this research by comparing parties' social media communication with their election manifestos and newspaper coverage.

Second, my descriptive and explanatory analyses do not support H7, yet these results require nuanced interpretation. Descriptively, I found that candidates do mention *feminist party* priority issues to a lesser extent than parties, however, the effect is not as strong as I had anticipated and was not significant in the logit model. On the whole, candidates' most frequently mentioned issues were reflective of *feminist parties'* priorities. Beyond *equality for women and minoritised groups*, which forms the ideological foundation of *feminist parties*, issues of *human security* and *gendered violence* were mentioned at high proportions. *Care* was the only priority issue that was not consistently emphasised by candidates but was similarly not prevalent in party tweets.

Moreover, where candidates did diverge from the election platform, it was largely in line with party messaging. For example, I found that candidates often mentioned 'democratic values and anti-extremism' in their Twitter communication. This supports the results of the newspaper analysis in Chapter 5, as mentions were predominantly from FI and FP candidates voicing opposition to extremist groups and promoting feminist politics as a counterforce to rising nationalism. This issue was mentioned by party accounts but more so by candidates who were speaking out against the mobilisation of far-right nationalism within their specific electoral context. Thus, my findings indicated that candidates do diverge from the party platform, but that their communication is broadly aligned with the party line.

The evidence from my sample of *feminist parties* therefore suggests, counter to my expectations, that candidates of small/niche parties may not pursue individualisation in their social media campaigns. A possible reason for this is perhaps that the policy-seeking strategies of these parties to increase the salience of their core issues outweigh the appeals of individualisation. Particularly, in doctrinal parties, candidates are likely to be personally invested in the parties' policies and will want to communicate them. While in Chapter 2, I noted that feminism was a broad enough ideology to encompass different issue concerns and positions, candidates may still want to emphasise those that are shared across the party. While it is unwise to generalise beyond my specific cases, it would be fruitful for future work on candidate individualisation to consider in more detail the alternate motives of small/niche parties and their candidates.

I found stronger support for H8, as the descriptive statistics consistently demonstrated that non-viable candidates diverged further from the party platform than viable candidates. Priority issues were emphasised to a large extent by both groups but proportionally less so by non-viable candidates, accounting for 47.1% of mentions from non-viable and 52.3% of mentions from viable candidates (compared to 51% of party mentions). The qualitative analysis revealed that

the content of tweets from non-viable candidates was also different to that of viable candidates. For example, examination of the communication of WEP candidates on Brexit highlighted that non-viable candidate's communication on political issues commonly reflected personal views, whereas viable candidates more often linked issues to the party and the campaign. Thus, the descriptive analysis indicated that viable and non-viable candidates talk about different issues but also talk about the same issues in a different way. In the logit model, the coefficient for viability was positive and significant at the $p<0.1$ level, lending good face validity to these findings.

These findings expand on existing research on candidate divergence on social media that has focused on mainstream parties (see Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022). I demonstrate that in the cases of the three *feminist parties* in my sample, unlike mainstream parties, the non-viable candidates of small/niche parties are *less* likely to communicate the parties' manifesto priorities. Qualitative analysis further indicates that non-viable candidates, show greater focus on issues that they personally care about rather than the party position. While my analysis cannot determine what mechanisms influence this divergence, the qualitative analysis indicated that non-viable candidates communicated in a more personal tone. One possible explanation for this is that the lack of professional campaign training and resources afforded to small/niche party candidates may limit their ability to run sophisticated issue campaigns online (Southern, 2015).

An important caveat to my findings on candidate viability is that the imbalance of cases between the two groups of viable and non-viable candidates in my sample means these results are not widely generalisable beyond their specific context. However, the combination of the quantitative and qualitative descriptive data does indicate a difference in how these candidates use their social media to communicate. Future research may collect more data from a larger sample of small party candidates, for example looking to other party families such as green parties, to test intra-party communication dynamics of small/niche parties and investigate the underlying mechanisms more comprehensively.

Finally, to the election type hypotheses, I find neither descriptive nor statistical evidence in support of H9. Descriptively, across both election types, parties did emphasise priority manifesto issues. However, there was also evidence of a divergence from priority issues, particularly during the municipal campaigns. In part this can be explained by the specifics of my sample, with one WEP manifesto emphasising slightly different issues to the broader sample of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4 (in the review in Appendix H, I explain that WEP's

position has since shifted towards that of FP and FI). Yet both FP and FI also demonstrated different issue mentions in the two different election campaigns.

Moreover, the explanatory models also found a statistically significant relationship between the mention of a *feminist party* priority issue and the EP campaign. Taken together, these results demonstrate evidence that the *feminist parties* in my sample do moderate their issue emphases across electoral contexts. While my results provide limited generalisability to small/niche parties more broadly, they do indicate support to studies on mainstream party strategy that show parties to be responsive to different electoral contexts (Braun and Schmitt, 2020; Spoon and Klüver, 2014).

On the other hand, the descriptive and explanatory analyses offer support to H10, as I find that candidates diverged to a greater extent from *feminist party* manifesto priority issues at the municipal level. In particular, it was the non-viable candidates that diverged the most from *feminist party* priority issues in their tweets. These findings offer support to my argument that the party's candidates have a greater incentive communicate the party line during the EP campaign as there is greater alignment between the party's owned issues and the European policy agenda. Alternatively, I argued that at the municipal level, small party candidates have the greatest likelihood of electoral success (Lindstam, 2019), encouraging *feminist party* candidates to diverge from the party platform to engage in issues that are of interest to voters. Not only did I find that candidates send proportionally twice as many campaign tweets during the municipal elections (Figure 6.1), but they mention a greater proportion of local issues such as 'childcare/parental leave'. Thus, the evidence from my cases suggest that *feminist party* candidates are strategic in their communication across different election campaigns.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to assess the extent to which *feminist parties* issue concerns are accurately and effectively communicated across different mediums. The results from this Chapter show that *feminist parties* utilise Twitter as a medium to communicate their issue priorities. Both parties and candidates heavily emphasised manifesto priority issues in their tweets. In particular viable candidates, including party leaders and incumbents, communicate the party platform coherently. Thus, social media may offer an opportune medium for *feminist parties* to communicate their platforms to voters and other political actors, free from the mediation of mainstream news. However, candidates at the lower end of the party hierarchy, produce communication that is less focused on party priority issues and less polished in its presentation. Thus, while social media offers an opportunity for *feminist parties* to communicate their party platform cohesively and coherently, individual candidates may be less able to enact this.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

The overarching aim of this thesis was to investigate the issue communication of women's parties, specifically *feminist parties*, as both representatives of women's substantive interests and as strategic political actors. In the first of three empirical chapters (Chapter 4), I mapped out the issue concerns presented in women's parties' manifestos and established *feminist parties* as a distinct type of women's party. Specifically, I outlined that *feminist parties* act as niche parties, mobilising around a narrow set of mostly neglected gender-based issues. In the following two chapters (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), I investigated how effectively the issue concerns of three European *feminist parties* were communicated via traditional news media and social media across two election campaigns. In the first section of this Chapter I summarise my main findings and discuss the contributions that this thesis makes to existing research.

7.1 Summary and key contributions

In Chapter 4, I analysed the issue mentions in an originally compiled dataset of 45 European women's party manifestos, 1990-2020. The purpose of this analysis was to address two research questions:

RQ1: What are the shared issue concerns of the women's party family?

RQ2: Do *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* constitute distinct types of women's party?

Using word frequency analyses, structural topic modelling, and thematic analysis, I outlined two shared issue concerns across the women's party family: (i) social justice for women and minoritised groups and (ii) social policy, particularly those which disproportionately affect women within their socialised roles as mothers and caregivers. My analysis therefore offers empirical evidence to support the definition of the shared ideology of the women's party family suggested by Cowell-Meyers et al. (2020: 13) as centred on 'gender equality' and a 'pro-women perspective on social justice'. However, I offer evidence counter to the broader definition of women's parties as any party which takes gender as its 'principal organizational and analytical focus' (Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020: 6; Shin, 2020). Under this definition, the existence of a women's party with an anti-gender equality platform is theoretically possible (Shin, 2020: 83). Yet my analysis, on the largest available dataset of women's party manifestos to date, suggests that, in practice, an aim to secure and increase gender equality is shared across the women's party family.

I also offer empirical evidence that substantiates the typologies of women's parties that have been outlined in past research (Cowell-Meyers, 2016; Shin, 2020). My mixed-method text analysis identified both differences in issue concern and issue framing between *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* that extend beyond their specific socioeconomic contexts to suggest an ideological differentiation.

First, through topic modelling and word frequency analyses, I identified several issue concerns that were specific to *feminist parties*' platforms, including human security and gendered violence. *Essentialist women's parties*' platforms instead focused on improving women's material needs through economic redistribution, increased welfare provision, and securing democratic legitimacy and stability. In addition, through the thematic analysis, I found that *feminist parties* and *essentialist women's parties* take differing positions on the same issues. For example, while a shared concern across women's parties was increasing provision of social policy such as childcare, *feminist parties* extended this to tackle structural inequality, whereas *essentialist women's parties* focused solely on meeting women's material needs. In support of previous research, my empirical evidence indicates that *essentialist women's parties* concentrate on addressing women's material needs, while *feminist parties* focus on transforming the social relations that underpin the subordination of women and other minority groups (Shin, 2020: 82). Although the specific political and economic contexts and differences in welfare system across countries and time periods surely accounts for some of these differences in policy proposals, I found consistent evidence of a difference in how *essentialist women's parties* and *feminist parties* approached the substantive representation of women. This indicates that future research on the issue competition and communication of women's parties would benefit from treating these as two distinct groups.

The analysis in Chapter 4 also makes a broader substantive contribution by situating women's parties in the field of comparative party politics research. Through my analysis of party manifestos, I conceptualised European *feminist parties* as niche parties, based on their mobilisation around a narrow set of issues that are largely neglected by mainstream parties (Meyer and Miller, 2015). The election platforms of *essentialist women's parties* commonly advocated for economic redistribution in favour of women and marginalised groups, as well as increased provision of social welfare. Therefore, just as Bischof (2017) argues that many communist parties should not be classified as niche parties, since they present an alternative perspective on traditional issues rather than mobilising around 'different' issues. Similarly, I argue that *essentialist women's parties* do not fulfil the definition of a niche party, as their platforms advocate for greater provision in favour of women *within* major policy areas.

Feminist parties' platforms, on the other hand, emphasised novel (Meguid 2005, 288) and often neglected (Meyer and Miller, 2013) issue areas such as *equality for women and minoritised groups, gendered violence, human security, and care*. Therefore, while *essentialist women's parties* can be categorised as small parties, only *feminist parties* construct niche issue platforms.⁷³

My analysis of women's parties' manifestos also makes several methodological contributions. First, I collect and provide a novel dataset of European women's party manifestos 1990-2020. This dataset contains 45 manifestos from 20 parties in 18 European countries, available in their native languages and translated to English. It is itself a contribution to future work on women's parties' issue concerns and strategies as well as a step towards including women's parties into comparative research on party issue competition and communication.

Second, I provide a mixed-method text analysis approach to identify and map issue concerns within party manifestos. This approach combines inductive quantitative and qualitative methods such as structural topic modelling and thematic analysis, which explore the issues emphasised within and across party manifestos. By employing this approach, I offer a method to investigate parties' issue concerns and ideology that is not confined to deductive code schemes or to measuring ideology through placement on a left-right scale. It therefore proves valuable in investigating the issue concerns of parties which mobilise around new or neglected issues – especially around gender equality – and which are not adequately captured by existing frameworks. Additionally, the incorporation of nuanced qualitative analysis addresses the potential limitations of statistical analyses conducted on a relatively small dataset of texts. Therefore, this mixed-method design holds significant value for future research focused on small or understudied party families with limited manifesto data.

Third, from my analysis of party manifestos, I developed a comprehensive codebook of issue concerns to deductively measure the mention of gender-based issues in political texts. My code-scheme contains 26 issue areas, a mix of traditionally understood women's issues, feminist issues, and issues which are not typically assumed to have a gendered dimension (but for which

⁷³ It is worthwhile clarifying that I do not suggest that feminism as an ideology or as a political movement is itself niche. In Chapter 2 I outlined my choice to use a definition of a niche party based on relative issue emphasis (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015; Zons, 2016). Unlike ideological measures of niche parties, which are often dichotomous and predetermine which parties are considered niche (Adams et al., 2006; Meguid, 2005, 2008), definitions based on issue emphasis understand nicheness as a continuous measure, allowing parties to move in and out the niche category based on their issue platform (Meyer and Wagner (2013: 1248).

feminist parties would argue there are gendered impacts). This extends on existing widely used coding apparatus for political texts, including the Comparative Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al., 2023) and Euromanifesto Study (Carteny et al., 2023) code schemes, which do not include indicators to measure mentions of specific gender-based issues. This code scheme therefore provides a novel framework for deductive coding of the salience of gender-based issues in political texts that can extend far beyond women's parties.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I use this code scheme to measure attention to *feminist parties*' issue concerns in traditional news media and social media. My analysis in Chapter 4 bridges a gap between gender politics and party politics research by conceptualising *feminist parties*, not just as potential critical actors of women's substantive representation, but as strategic political actors emphasising specific issues in the pursuit of both office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. To achieve these goals, it is crucial that *feminist parties* are able to communicate their issue priorities accurately and effectively to the electorate and to other parties. Yet, in Chapter 2, I outlined the potential barriers that they may face in achieving these aims, as both small/niche parties and as parties mobilised around gender-based issues. Therefore, in Chapters 5 and 6, I tested 10 hypotheses collectively investigating the extent to which the issue concerns of three European *feminist parties* in Finland, Sweden and the UK were effectively communicated through print news media and social media during two second order election campaigns. The results of these hypotheses are summarised in Table 7.1.

In Chapter 5, I analysed the results of a quantitative content analysis of issue mentions in 1213 news items that mentioned either a *feminist party* or candidate. My general expectation was that the news coverage that *feminist parties* and their candidates received would not reflect the issues emphasised in their manifestos but would relate them to stereotypically feminine issue areas. My initial descriptive analysis indicated that the newspaper coverage of *feminist parties* did relate parties and candidates more to stereotypically feminine issues than stereotypically masculine issues (H1). However, an important caveat is that the issues that were most mentioned in news coverage were reflective of the issues emphasised in the broader sample of *feminist party* manifestos, such as gender equality, gendered violence, and human security. This supports research on party manifesto and news media linkages which finds that parties mostly receive news coverage on their manifesto issues (Merz, 2017). It offers some optimistic evidence that *feminist parties*' core issue concerns are represented in their, albeit limited, media coverage.

Table 7.1 Summary of hypotheses tests

Hypothesis	Test	Supported?
<i>Traditional news media</i>		
H1: Newspaper coverage of <i>feminist parties</i> and candidates is more likely to focus on stereotypically feminine issues than stereotypically masculine issues.	Descriptive analysis	Yes
H2: Journalists are more likely than <i>feminist party</i> leaders, candidates, and members to mention stereotypically feminine issues.	Multinomial logit	Yes
H3: The fewer issues that are mentioned per news item, the more likely that those issues are stereotypically feminine.	Multinomial logit	No
H4: In particular, journalists are more likely to mention stereotypically feminine issues where the number of issues per news item is small.	Multinomial logit	No
H5: Articles written by <i>feminist party</i> leaders, candidates, or members are more likely to mention stereotypically masculine issues compared to articles written by journalists.	Multinomial logit	No
<i>Social media</i>		
H6: <i>Feminist party</i> and candidate tweets are more likely to mention issues prioritised in <i>feminist parties'</i> manifestos compared to other political issues.	Descriptive analysis	Yes
H7: Tweets from <i>feminist party</i> candidate accounts are less likely to mention <i>feminist party</i> priority issues than tweets from <i>feminist party</i> accounts.	Multilevel binomial logit	No
H8: Tweets from more viable candidates of <i>feminist parties</i> are more likely to mention <i>feminist party</i> priority issues than tweets from less viable candidates.	Multilevel binomial logit	Yes
H9: <i>Feminist party</i> accounts will not moderate their issue mentions in tweets across European Parliament and municipal election campaigns.	Multilevel binomial logit	No
H10: <i>Feminist party</i> candidates are more likely to mention <i>feminist party</i> priority issues in their tweets for the European Parliament campaign than in municipal campaigns.	Multilevel binomial logit	Yes

However, I also found both descriptive and explanatory evidence that journalists are more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention stereotypically feminine issues (but are not less likely to mention stereotypically masculine issues). I explored this bias, and the underlying mechanisms, in more detail using multinomial models, which tested journalist and *feminist party* actor's likelihood of mentioning of specific issue areas. First, in support of the descriptive analysis, I found no statistically significant difference in journalist or *feminist party* actor's likelihood of mentioning priority issue areas such as gendered violence, the environment, or security. Yet beyond this, journalists were more likely than *feminist party* actors to mention stereotypically feminine issue areas and particularly those associated with the feminist movement, such as reproductive rights. This issue was mentioned relatively infrequently in *feminist party* manifestos and by *feminist party* actors in news items and hence is over-emphasised by journalists. Besides reproductive rights, journalists were more likely to mention the issue area of equal rights in comparison to almost any other issue area, whether masculine, feminine or neutral (the only exception was 'European Union').

These findings, in the first instance, support past research which has found evidence that women political actors receive greater coverage on stereotypically feminine issue areas than stereotypically masculine issue areas (Kahn and Goldberg, 1991; Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008; Meeks, 2012; Van der Pas and Aaldering, 2020). In particular, my results support past research which has demonstrated a gendered bias in issue coverage relative to actor's own communication on gender-based issues (Greene and Lühiste, 2018; Kahn, 1994).

Exploring the mechanism behind the bias in more detail, my findings also offer good evidence in support of Hughe's (2016) 'agenda dissonance' theory. Focusing on green parties, Hughes argued that due to their limited agenda-setting capacity, media coverage of green parties emphasises stereotyped heuristics of their own issues, rather than the issues the parties themselves communicate. My results indicate a similar dissonance in the coverage of *feminist parties* with an over-emphasis of issues stereotypically associated with the women's movement, such as reproductive rights. My findings strongly echo previous research on the media coverage of women's movements, which similarly identified an overemphasis of second-wave feminist concerns including abortion (Bronstein, 2005; Schrieber, 2010). Thus, the over-emphasis of traditional women's issues in *feminist parties*' news coverage may arise not only from gender bias but also from their limited agenda-setting capability as small/niche parties (Hughes, 2016).

Indeed, I found that this dissonance was exacerbated where the *extent* of issue coverage of *feminist parties* in a news item was lower. On the one hand, I found no statistical evidence that

the likelihood of the *feminist parties* and candidates in my sample receiving gender-stereotypical issue coverage increased in news items with fewer issue mentions (H3). However, using multinomial models with specific issue areas as the dependent variable, I observed that the issue area of ‘equal rights’ had a higher probability of being mentioned compared to almost any other issue area. This finding suggests that when media coverage is less in-depth, it relies more heavily on readily available heuristics regarding *feminist parties*’ issue concerns, particularly their focus on women’s rights.

When controlling for the number of issues mentioned in a news item, journalists remained more likely to mention a stereotypically feminine issue area. However, the interaction effect between journalist and fewer issue mentions did not yield statistically significant results, meaning I found no support for H4. In Chapter 5, I outlined that a potential explanation for this result is that issue mentions by *feminist party* actors in news items with fewer mentions were commonly standalone quotes handpicked by journalists. Thus, in these instances, the narrative of the item was still controlled by the journalist. This again highlights the significance of news values in the media representation of parties’ issue concerns.

Finally in Chapter 5, I found no statistical support for H5, yet there was good descriptive evidence that *feminist parties* emphasised their priority issue mentions in their self-authored news coverage. This indicates that *feminist parties* utilise news media to increase the salience of their priority issues, a strategy that has previously been observed in European green parties (Spoon, 2014; Hughes, 2017).

In sum, my research in Chapter 5 not only supports previous studies on gendered mediation but also extends and develops them. I employed a novel and comprehensive code scheme of 26 issues, developed from my analysis of party manifestos, and utilised multinomial models where the dependent variable was distinct issue areas. This approach allowed for a more precise examination of the specific gender-based issue areas that journalists emphasised in their news coverage of *feminist parties* and candidates.

Through this approach, I found that the emphasis of stereotypically feminine issues in the news coverage was conceivably a product of both gender bias and media logic. Journalists seemingly relied on easily accessible heuristics of *feminist parties*’ issue concerns, the most obvious being their focus on women’s rights and gender equality. While *feminist parties* continue to emphasise their specific gender-based policy concerns in media coverage, their status as small/niche parties may limit their ability to impact the issue agenda and counteract this misrepresentation. This extends my findings beyond previous studies, which have often relied

on simpler dichotomous or trichotomous coding of stereotypically feminine and masculine issue areas. Such simplified coding may have obscured important variation in the specific issues that are mentioned in coverage of women political actors. My approach allows for better interrogation of the mechanisms that underpin the gendered bias in women political actor's news coverage.

My methodological approach also addresses a recognised problem that past research on issue coverage of women political actors has largely failed to account for the issue communication of the actors themselves and thus is unable to delineate if gendered issue coverage is a result of media bias or simply an accurate reflection of actor's own communication (See Kittilson and Fridkin, 2008: 382). To address this problem, my code scheme captured the role of the actor mentioning the individual issue, allowing me to directly test differences in issue mention between journalists and *feminist party* actors. In addition, I developed the issue code scheme from my analysis of *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4. Thus, in my descriptive analysis and multinomial models, I could reflect the results from my cases against my findings on the issues emphasised in the larger sample of *feminist parties'* election platforms. My findings ultimately show that, even when taking *feminist parties'* own communication into account, there is evidence of a gendered bias in *feminist parties'* news coverage.

Hence, in Chapter 6, I investigated the extent to which *feminist parties* and their candidates emphasised their priority issues in their social media campaigns on Twitter. The purpose of this was to investigate *feminist parties'* unmediated and dynamic issue communication. My general expectation was that *feminist parties* would pursue issue ownership in their social media campaigns, while individual candidates would be more likely to build personalised campaigns, diverging from the party platform. I applied my original code scheme of issue mentions to an originally constructed dataset of 29,499 tweets from 54 *feminist party* and candidate accounts to address my second set of hypotheses (Table 7.1).

I first find evidence that the *feminist parties* in my sample did broadly adopt an issue ownership strategy in their social media communication (H6), with party and candidate accounts frequently mentioning issues that I found to be emphasised in *feminist party* manifestos in Chapter 4 and by parties and candidates in their news coverage in Chapter 5. This finding supports past research on small parties' social media communication which has found them to focus attention on their owned issues (Evans et al., 2019; Pineda et al., 2020). It adds a further perspective with a specific focus on niche parties, which have been argued to pursue an issue

ownership strategy in their communication (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Wagner and Meyer, 2017), but have received little focus on their social media campaigns.

Moreover, descriptive analysis supplemented with multi-level binomial logit models showed good indication that candidates of *feminist parties* also heavily emphasised party priority issues in their social media communication, counter to my expectations (H7). However, and in contrast to existing research on mainstream parties (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer, et al., 2022), I found that non-viable *feminist party* candidates were more likely to diverge from the party platform than viable candidates (H8). The descriptive analysis of issue mentions in tweets, supplemented with qualitative examples, indicated that the non-viable *feminist party* candidates in my sample were more responsive to the broader issue agenda and more commonly discussed political issues from their personal perspective, rather than linking them to the party's position. Viable candidates on the other hand, such as party leaders, more strongly reflected the party platform in their communication, supporting past research which has found leaders of small parties to operate issue ownership strategies (Allen, 2017; Ennser-Jedenastik, Gahn et al., 2022).

These findings suggest that the communication of less viable candidates may impede the party's ability to effectively convey a focused and coherent set of issue priorities. Moreover, the findings contribute to the broader understanding of intra-party communication dynamics by highlighting the differential impact of party hierarchy on candidate communication strategies within policy-seeking small/niche parties, as compared to mainstream parties. These differences may be driven both by differences in issue communication strategy as well as resource disparities.

Finally, I found mixed support for the election-type hypotheses (H9 and H10) as the multilevel binomial logit models indicated that both *feminist parties* and candidates were more likely to mention manifesto priority issues in the European Parliament election campaign than in municipal campaigns. Descriptive analysis supported this, demonstrating a greater relative emphasis on values-based issues during the EP campaign and a greater proportion of mentions of local-level issues, such as transport, in the municipal campaigns. Thus, while *feminist parties* broadly pursue an issue ownership strategy, I found evidence that they do moderate their issue emphases across election campaigns. This effect has been observed in research on mainstream parties (Braun and Schmitt, 2020; Spoon and Klüver, 2016), but has yet to be explored in detail in the case of small/niche parties.

Pulling the three strands of the empirical research in this thesis together, the analysis of party manifestos established that there is a shared ideology underpinning the women's party family, focused on equality and social justice, but that *feminist parties* constitute a distinct type of niche women's party, pursuing an issue ownership strategy through emphasis of a narrow platform of gender-based issue concerns. The ability of *feminist parties* to communicate these issue concerns accurately and effectively to voters and other parties is inhibited by an agenda dissonance in their news coverage premised on stereotypes about the issue concerns of women political actors and the feminist movement. Yet, while *feminist parties* take advantage of the opportunities of social media to emphasise their issue priorities, candidates, particularly those less well-trained and resourced, diverged their communication from the party platform, muddying the communication of parties' priority issues.

7.2 Methodological limitations

In this section I reflect on the potential issues in my data and research design and explain the steps I took to address these limitations.

First, adjustments had to be made to my analyses to account for the amount of data that I was able to collect. In Chapter 4, I provide a comprehensive examination of 45 women's party manifestos from 20 parties in 18 European countries over a 30-year period. While I believe this dataset to be a good representation of the breadth and variety of women's parties contesting elections at different levels in that period, it is nevertheless a relatively small text corpus. As such, I faced limitations in the statistical analyses I performed. For example, I was only able to run a topic model with five topics to produce results balancing accuracy with semantic coherence (Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4).

To address this limitation, I approached my investigation using a mixed-method text analysis design that combined computational techniques with qualitative analysis, including KWIC analysis of frequent terms in the corpus and the in-depth thematic analysis of a sample of six manifestos (of which half were from *essentialist women's parties*). This qualitative analysis provided support to the findings of the computational analyses while adding further understanding of similarities and differences in specific policy proposals and the framing of issues across the women's party family. Therefore, the mixed-method design offered an approach to analysing issue concerns which mitigated some of the potential issues of using statistical analyses on a small corpus of texts.

Second, I also faced a problem with imbalanced data in the analysis of candidate tweets. I scraped a total of 96,390 party and candidate tweets which I reduced to a dataset of 29,499 *original* tweets. This is a considerably large dataset for a manual content analysis and a total of 14,481 issue concerns were identified in these tweets, providing a robust dataset for descriptive analysis. However, the statistical analysis was somewhat limited as data was available only from 11 party and 43 candidate accounts. In particular, there was an imbalance in the number of viable (6) and non-viable candidates (37) in my sample. The small number of cases limited the power in the statistical models to produce significant results and meant that I was unable to run multinomial models as used in the analysis of *feminist party* and candidate news coverage. Thus, while my statistical results showed good face validity for the detailed descriptive analysis, a wider pool of cases is required to provide more robust statistical evidence of this effect.

Finally, a comment on the issue mention code scheme. While good inter-coder reliability was reported across the coding of issue concerns in both newspaper coverage and party and candidate tweets, I observed lower scores in categories that are, in practice, not mutually exclusive. In particular, the categories of ‘gender equality’, ‘minoritised groups’, and ‘human rights’ had lower reliability scores than other issues (Appendix D and Appendix F). One explanation for this is that ‘gender equality’ is ubiquitous in *feminist parties’* communication, therefore creating difficulty for coders in teasing out when ‘gender equality’ was mentioned as a stand-alone issue and when it was being used as a lens to frame a separate issue.

A second explanation is that, as all three of the *feminist parties* I study advocate intersectional feminism, there was a level of crossover in coding, particularly between the categories of ‘gender equality’ and ‘minoritised groups’. For example, if a news item or tweet mentioned ‘BAME women’ this could be coded as ‘gender equality’, ‘minoritised groups’, or both. This issue was discussed in the training session for coders, yet it still presented as a problem in the coding and thus reflects an area for development in the code scheme itself. Future research could draw on research on group appeals in party manifestos (see for example, Dolinsky (2022)), which may offer a more refined approach to coding issue mentions of both individual and intersecting social groups.

7.3 Avenues for future research

I end this Chapter with a discussion of the ways in which my thesis can be extended and developed in future research.

The primary recommendation of this thesis is for future studies to make greater effort to conjoin the fields of gender politics and party politics research. These two fields have been accused in the past of ‘speaking past’ one another (see an overview in Kenny and Verge, 2016). Attempts to bridge this gap have made strong contributions to the analysis of the ways in which ‘gender shapes parties’ form, function and activities’ (Celis et al., 2016: 572) in areas such as political recruitment (Barnes and Holman., 2020; Kenny and Verge, 2016; Van Dijke, 2023; Verge and Wiesehomeier, 2019; Yerevel, 2019) and women’s behaviour as legislators (Funk et al., 2022; Hargrave and Langengen, 2021; Höhmann, 2020; Lloren, 2020; Thomson and Sanders, 2020).

This thesis suggests that the fields of gender politics and party politics should also speak to each other in investigation of party competition over gender-based issues. Recent research in the field of party politics has started to examine the (re)politicisation of gender-based issues across Europe (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021; Cabeza-Perez, Alonso, et al., 2023; UNTWIST, 2023). However, these studies have mainly focused on the mobilisation of gender-based issues and anti-feminist discourses by radical right parties (Akkerman, 2015; Bernardez-Rodal et al., 2022; Colella, 2021; De Giorgi et al., 2023; Sprengholz, 2021; UNTWIST, 2023).

In Chapter 4, my analysis indicated that *feminist parties* function as niche parties, mobilising around platforms of gender-based issues. They therefore aim to place gender-based issues on the political agenda, inviting competition from other parties. Moreover, these contemporary European *feminist parties* are explicit in their pursuit of policy-seeking goals, seeking to exert influence over mainstream parties’ platforms. A prominent example of such efforts is the ‘Nickable Policies’ campaign launched by WEP in the run-up to the 2017 General Election, wherein the party delivered copies of its manifesto to competitor parties’ offices with the words “Steal Me” written on the cover. Case study evidence has also demonstrated that *feminist parties* have achieved some success in exerting a contagion effect on mainstream parties’ platforms (Cowell-Meyers, 2017).

Therefore, as contestation over gender-based issues intensifies across Western Europe, future research should consider the roles played by *feminist parties*. Scholars may explore the extent to which mainstream parties represent gender-based issues, identify which parties most actively advocate these issues, and assess whether *feminist parties* influence a contagion effect on mainstream parties’ position and communication on these issues. Additionally in Chapters 5 and 6 I found that the *feminist parties* in my sample positioned themselves as direct challengers to far right parties. Future research may investigate the competition between these party families

over gender-based issues. Understanding these dynamics can offer valuable insights into the evolving landscape of gender politics and party competition in Western Europe.

To address these questions effectively, gender-based issues should be better incorporated into measurement of party issue emphasis and positioning. Existing well-established measures of issue emphasis and positioning in party manifestos, such as the Comparative Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al., 2023) and Euromanifesto Study (Carteny, et al., 2023), lack specific indicators of gender-based issues such as abortion or sexual violence. The Comparative Manifesto Project code scheme does not in fact have a dedicated code to capture references to women as a distinct group. Instead, women are coded within a broader ‘non-economic demographic group’ which also includes university students and age groups.⁷⁴

Recent research has made some progress in measuring the salience of gender-based issues in party manifestos. For example, Cabeza-Perez, Gómez, et al. (2023) extended the Regional Manifestos Project code scheme to include four gender-based codes: (i) welfare and labour market, (ii) gender violence, (iii) equal representation and (iv) values and gender identity. They then applied this code scheme to regional manifestos in Spain (also explored in Cabeza-Perez, Alonso, et al., 2023). Future research may build on these advancements and incorporate indicators for gender-based issues into cross-national study.

This thesis also suggests that more nuanced measures of gender-based issues are necessary in future research on gendered mediation. My findings in Chapter 5 indicated that statistical analyses of gendered issue coverage should move beyond dichotomous and trichotomous coding of stereotypically masculine and feminine issue areas, as these simplistic categorisations obscure important variation in the specific gender-based issues that are emphasised. Future work may make use of more comprehensive issue code schemes, such as the code scheme I have developed from women’s parties’ manifestos and use multivariate analyses to explore the gendered mediation of women political actors.

My analysis also highlights the importance of research on gendered issue coverage accounting for the communication of actors themselves. Similar reflection has been made in past research but surprisingly few studies address this issue (exceptions being Kahn (1994) at the candidate level and Greene and Lühiste (2018) at the party level). My approach to coding both the issue

⁷⁴ The full code including women in the MARPOR code scheme is as follows: “Non-economic Demographic Groups: General favourable mentions of demographically defined special interest groups of all kinds. They may include: Women; University students; Old, young, or middle-aged people. Might include references to assistance to these groups, but only if these do not fall under other categories (e.g., 503 or 504).”

mentioned and the actor mentioning the issue offers one methodological advance to address this limitation.

Finally, moving away from a focus on gender, this thesis also suggests that party politics research would benefit from further investigation of the communication strategies of small and niche parties. The existing literature on niche party competition heavily focuses on the reaction of mainstream parties or the broader party system to the presence of a niche party (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020; Cowell-Meyers, 2017; Green-Pederson and Otjes, 2019, Han, 2015; Meguid, 2005; Spoon et al., 2014; Van Spanje, 2015). Recent literature has begun to examine the issue competition strategies of niche parties themselves, such as their responsiveness to positional shifts of other parties (Tromborg, 2015), public opinion (Adams et al., 2006; Bischof et al., 2020; Klüver and Spoon, 2016) and policy appeasement (Meguid, 2023) and has demonstrated that niche parties are strategic in their behaviour. However, the focus has largely been on the spatial movement of parties' positions and has relied on existing measures of issue salience and positioning.

The issue *communication* strategies of small and niche parties have received considerably less attention. This thesis has presented substantial evidence that *feminist parties* employ strategic communication campaigns across various platforms, including party manifestos, news media and social media in the pursuit of office-seeking and policy-seeking goals. Notably, in Chapter 6, I demonstrated that *feminist party* candidates' issue communication on social media differs from what has previously been observed in research on mainstream party candidates' communication (Ennser-Jedenastik, Haselmayer et al., 2022). By examining the issue communication strategies of *feminist parties* across different mediums, I have demonstrated the value in investigating the strategic communication practices of policy-seeking small/niche parties in pursuing the contagion effects that have been observed in existing research. *Feminist parties*, as policy-seeking small/niche parties mobilising neglected gender-based issues, offer an intriguing case for future research on small and niche party strategy and behaviour.

Appendices

Appendix A. Dataset of women's parties in Europe, 1990-2020

Table A. 1 Women's parties in Europe, 1990-2020

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
Armenia	Shamiram	1995	Nadezhda Sarkisian; Shoger Matevosyan; Gayanee Sarukhyan	1995	National	16.9%	Twelve seats
				1999	National	0.6%	No seats
Belarus	Nadzeya (Hope)	1994	Alena Jaškova; Valentina Polevikova	1995	National	-	No seats
				2004	National	-	No seats
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Stranka Žena BiH (Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina)	1996		1996	National	0.20%	No seats
				1998	-	-	-
				2000	National	0%	No seats
				2002	National	0.03% 0.21%	No seats - National Assembly No seats - House of Representatives
Bulgaria	Partiya na Bulgarskite Zheni (Party of Bulgarian Women)	1997	Emilia Macharova; Vesela Draganova	1997	National	0.33%	No seats
				1999	-	-	-
				2001	National		Joined coalition with NMSS and other parties
				2005	-	-	-
				2007	-	-	-
				2011	-	-	-
				2013	National	-	-
				2015	Municipal	-	Coalition with България без цензура (Bulgaria Without Censorship)
Croatia	Marija Jelinčić	2007	National	-	-		

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
Czechia	Demokratska Stranka Žena (Democratic Party of Women)	2011 2017 2019	National Municipal European Parliament	-	-	-	
				-	-	-	
				-	As part of Green List		
Czechia	Politickou Stranu žen a Matek Československa (Political Party for Women and Mothers of Czechoslovakia)	1990	Founder: Alena Valterova	1992	Federal Assembly	-	Valterova ran as independent candidate
Denmark	Feministisk Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	2017	Spokesperson: Muneeza Rosendahl	2017	Municipal	-	-
Estonia	Eesti Naisiit (Estonian Women's Union)	1992		1992	National	12.25%	Member of alliance: Valimislit 'Rahvarinne' (Electoral Union 'Popular Front'): Union won 15 seats
Finland	Suomen Naisten Demokraattinen Liitto (Finnish Women's Democratic League) Member of alliance: Vasemmistoliitto	1990		1994	Presidential	2.80%	First round
				2012	Presidential	5.50%	First round
				2018	Presidential	3.00%	First round
Finland	Naisliike/Kvinnop ati (Women's Movement)	1991		1991	-	-	-
				1995	-	-	-
Finland	Feministinen Puolue (Feminist Party)	2016		2017	Municipal	0.30%	1 councillor- Katju Aro elected to City Council of Helsinki
				2019	National	0.20%	No seats
				2019	European Parliament	0.20%	No seats

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
France	Feministes pour un Europe Solidaire (Feminists for a United Europe)	2014	Caroline de Haas	2014	European Parliament	0.14%	No seats
Georgia	Georgia Women Party for Justice and Equality	2008		2008	National	0.44%	No seats (Alliance with Union of Georgian Traditionalists and Our Georgia)
	Women's Protection Union			2012(?)	-	-	-
	Political Union of Citizens-Georgia's Women to the Elections	?		1995	National	1.00%	No seats
	Women's Party of Georgia	1995	Marina Abesade	1995(?)	-	-	-
Germany	Feministische Partei DIE FRAUEN (Feminist Party THE WOMEN)	1995		1990	National	<1%	No seats
				1998	National	0.10%	No seats
				1999	European Parliament	0.40%	No seats
				2002	National	0.10%	No seats
				2004	European Parliament	0.60%	No seats
				2005	National	<1%	No seats
				2005	Federal Election	0.10%	No seats
				2009	European Parliament	0.30%	No seats
				2019	European Parliament	<0.1%	No seats
Greece	Γυναίκες για μια άλλη Ευρώπη (Women for Another Europe)	2004	Nena Venetsanou,	2004	European Parliament	0.76%	No seats (Coalition of other small left-wing parties, independents and women's organisations)

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
	Hellenic Women's Political Party	-	-	-	-	-	Asked supporters to vote for populist right-wing LAOS party
Greenland	Arnat Partiat (Women's Party)	1999	-	2002	Parliament	2.4	No seats
Hungary	Magyar Anyák Nemzeti Pártja (National Party for Hungarian Mothers)	1992	-	1994	National Assembly	0.01%	No seats
				1998	-	-	-
Iceland	Kvennalistinn (Women's Alliance)	1983	-	1983	National	5.5%	3 seats
				1987	National	10.1%	6 seats
				1991	National	8.82%	5 seats (5th largest party)
				1995	National	4.87%	3 seats (6th largest party)
				1999	Legislative	30.20%	20 seats (As member of Social Democrat Alliance which later formed as a party).
Italy	Movimento Femminile Italiano (Italian Feminist Movement)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Latvia	Social Democratic Women's Party	1998	-	1998	National	<1%	No seats
Lithuania	Lietuvos Moterų Partija (Women's Party)	1995	Kazmiera Prunskiene	1996	National	3.86%	1 seat
				2000	National	-	As part of Social-Democratic Coalition of Algirdas Brazauskas
Moldova	Asociația Femeilor din Moldova (Association of Women of Moldova)	1994	Lyudmilla Scalnii	1994	National	2.8%	No seats
				1998	-	-	-

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
	LDCF Liga Democrată Creștină a Femeilor (Women's Christian Democratic League)	-	-	1998	-	-	Member of alliance: Blocul Electoral Convenția Democrată din Moldova
Netherlands	Vrouwenpartij (Women's party)	1986	-	1986	-	-	-
				1989	-	-	-
Norway	Feministisk Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	2015	Cathrine Linn Kristiansen; Sunniva Schultze-Florey	2015	Municipal	-	No seats
				2017	National	696 votes	No seats
Poland	Niezależny Komitet Wyborczy Wielkopolski 91 (Independent Election Committee of Women of Great Poland '91)	1991	-	1991	-	-	-
	Sojusz Kobiet Przeciw Trudnościom Życia (Women's Alliance Against Life's Difficulties)	1991	-	1991	-	-	-
	Koalicja Srodowisk Kobiecych (Women's Coalition)	1991	-	1991	National	<1%	No seats
				2001	National	<1%	No seats

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
	Czas na Kobiety (Time for Women)	-	-	-	-	-	-
	PartiKobiet* (Women's Party) *post-2016 as Inicjatywa Feministyczna (Feminist Initiative)	2007	Katarzyna Kadzeila; Iwona Piatek	2007	National	0.28%	No seats
				2009	European Parliament	-	-
				2011	General Election	-	No seats (part of Democratic Left Alliance)
				2014	European Parliament	-	-
Russia	United Party of Women	1991	-	-	-	-	-
	Sociopolitical Movement of Russia's Women	1997	-	-	-	-	Founded by Alevtina Lakhova, splitting from WOR
	Russian Party for the protection of women	1998	Tatyana Roschina	1999	National	0.6%	No seats
	Zhenshchiny Rossii (Women of Russia)	1993	Alevtina Fedulova; Yekhaterina Fedulova	1993	National	8.13%	23 seats
				1995	National	4.70%	3 single-member district seats
				1999	National	2%	No seats
Slovakia	Active Women Slovakia	2002(?)	-	2002	-	-	-
	Zena a Rodina (Woman and Family)	2002	Henrieta Blumenfeldov a	2002	National	<1%	No seats
Slovenia	Glas Žensk Slovenije (Voice of Slovenian Women)	2000	Monika Piberl	2000	National	<1%	No seats
				2002	National	<1%	No seats
				2004		0.54%	No seats
				2018	Municipal	-	-

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
Spain	Partido Feminista de España (Feminist Party of Spain)	1981	Lidia Falcon	1999	European Parliament	0.14%	No seats (Confederation of Feminist Organisations with Feminist Parties of regions EG Catalunya, Basque Country and Valencia)
	Iniciativa Feminista (Feminist Initiative)	2008	-	2009	European Parliament	-	No seats
				2011	National		No seats - Ran 1 candidate for Senate in Catalonia
				2014	European Parliament	-	No seats
				2015	National	-	No seats
				2019	European Parliament	-	No seats
				2019	National	-	No seats
Sweden	Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative)	2005	Gudrun Schyman; Gita Nabavi; Luis Lineo	2006	National	0.68%	No seats
				2009	European Parliament	2.20%	No seats
				2010	National	0.40%	No seats
				2010	Municipal		4 city council seats (Simrishamn)
				2014	General Election	3.10%	No seats but largest party outside of parliament
				2014	Municipal		Seats in 13 municipalities (part of Red-Green-Pink coalition in Stockholm)
				2014	European Parliament	5.30%	Soraya Post elected as MEP (joined Socialists and Democrats group)
				2018	National	0.40%	No seats
				2018	Municipal		Lost 4 seats
				2019	European Parliament	0.80%	Soraya Post loses seat
Switzerland	Feminist Green Alliance	1979	-	1987	-	-	-
	Feministische und grün-alternative Gruppierungen	-	-	1991	National	1.25%	No seats
				1995	National	1.47%	No seats
				1999	National	0.32%	No seats

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
	(Feminist and green-alternative groups)			2003	National	0.53%	No seats
				2007	National	0.00%	No seats
				2011	National		
	Frauen Macht Politik! (Women Make Politics!)	1986	-	1987	Cantonal legislature	3.40%	2 seats
				1990	Municipal	1.50%	3 seats
				1991	National	1.50%	1 seat
				1991	Cantonal legislature	0.87%	2 seats
				1994	Municipal	4.20%	5 seats
				1995	National	2.10%	1 seat
				1995	Cantonal legislature	1.54%	1 seat
				1998	Municipal	3.20%	1 seat
				1999	National	0.80%	No seats
				1999	Cantonal legislature	0.79%	No seats
Turkey	Kadin Partisi (Women's Party)	2014	Fatma Aytac; Fatma Benal Yazgan	2015	National	-	-
Ukraine	All-Ukrainian Party of Women's Initiatives	1997	Valentina Datsenko	1998	National	0.58%	No seats
	Партія Солідарність жінок України (Solidarity of Women of Ukraine)	1999	Nechay Anna Anatolyevna (?)	2002	National	-	No seats
				2006	National	0.06%	No seats (As part of Yevhen Marchuk- Unity bloc)
				2012	National	-	No seats
				2014	National	0.66%	No seats
	The Women of Ukraine Party	1997	Alina Komarova	-	-	-	Failed to register for 1998 election

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
	All-Ukrainian Political Union-Women for the Future	2001	Lyudmila Kuchma (wife of then President Leonid Kuchma)	2002	National	2.10%	No seats
			Viktor Medvedchuk	2006	National	1.01%	No seats (as part of 'Ne Tak' Coalition)
UK	Northern Ireland Women's Coalition	1996	Monica McWilliams; Pearl Sagar	1998	Assembly	1.6%	McWilliams and Jane Morrice elected
				2001	Municipal	0.4%	
				2001	National	-	No seats
				2003	Assembly	0.8%	Lost both seats
	Women's Equality Party	2015	Sophie Walker; Mandu Reid	2016	London Mayoral/London Assembly	2.4% / 3.5%	No seats. Mayoral candidate Walker = 2.04% in first round; 3.5% in London-wide list
				2016	Assembly	0.30%	No seats
				2016	Assembly	1.20%	No seats
				2017	Liverpool City Regional mayoral election	1.50%	No seats. 7th in first round
				2017	General Election		No seats. All 7 candidates elected- all lost deposit-
				2018	Municipal Elections		No seats. 0/30 candidates elected
				2018	By-election	2.30%	No seats. Lewisham East: Mandu Reid (5/14)
				2019	General Election		No seats. All 3 candidates lost their deposit. All candidates stood in seats where previous/sitting MP accused of sexual assault/harassment; 2 more WEP candidates stood aside to Lib Dems
				2019	Municipal Elections	5.70%	1/20 candidates elected (Kay Wesley 5.7% Congleton)

Country	Party Name	Year Founded	Leaders	Election year	Election type	Results	Notes
Yugoslavia	Zenska Stranka (Women's Party)	1990	-	-	-	-	-

Notes: Information on women's parties was collated from numerous sources including existing literature (Cockburn, 1991; Cowell-Meyers, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2020; Cowell-Meyers et al., 2020; Dominelli and Jónsdóttir, 1988; Evans and Kenny, 2019; Evans and Kenny, 2020; Ishiyama, 2003; Levin, 1999; Slater, 1995), political party and election databases (Brancati, no date; Bederke et al., no date; Carr, no date; European Election Database (EU-NED); Nohlen and Stöver, 2010; Poguntke et al., 2017; Scartasceni, 2017), party websites, news stories, and finally from the dataset compiled by Cowell-Meyers, Evans and Shin (2020).

Appendix B. Thematic analysis codes

1	Challenging androcentric/masculinised norms/discourses in policy and political leadership
2.1	Promoting stereotypical feminine leadership traits e.g. cooperation, compassion, empathy
2.2	Cooperation and coalition as party strategy
2.3	Internationalism
3	Personal is political- Explicit reference to/policies concerned with individual/private sphere
4.1	Traditional economics, economic growth and development
4.2	Welfare economics/caring economy/economics of wellbeing
4.3	Social justice/social inequality/fighting poverty/redistribution of income and resources
5	Environmentalism/sustainability
6.1	Mention of future generations/long-term goals
6.2	Maternalist discourse i.e. women protecting/nurturing society
7.1	Traditional security and foreign policy
7.2	Human security i.e. individual impact of conflict
7.3	Gender/sex-based violence/domestic abuse
8	Language/policies assisting men/ emphasis on both men and women
9.1	Social welfare programs/social services: Education
9.2	Social welfare programs/social services: Healthcare
9.3	Social welfare programs/social services: Women's healthcare e.g. abortion, childbirth, menopause
9.4	Social welfare programs/social services: Social care
9.5	Social welfare programs/social services: Childcare/nursery
9.6	Social welfare programs/social services: Welfare benefits/income support
9.7	Social welfare programs/social services: Minimum wage/living wage/universal wage
9.8	Social welfare programs/social services: Pensions
9.9	Social welfare programs/social services (general) i.e. need to provide for basic needs of population/safety net
10.1	Intersectionality
10.2	Diversity, multiculturalism, tolerance
10.3	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Youth
10.4	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Elderly
10.5	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: LGBTQ+
10.6	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Race/ethnicity
10.7	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Disability
10.8	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Low socioeconomic status/working class
10.9	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups: Other
10.10	Support for marginalised/disadvantaged groups of women e.g. single mothers, pregnant women, victims of domestic violence etc.
11.1	Essentialist discourse/language
11.2	Supporting women within their social role i.e. as mothers/carers
11.3	Focus on children/policies supporting children and parents and families
11.4	Support for nuclear family
11.5	Support for non-traditional family/ single parents/same-sex parents
12.1	General feminist discourse/language/appeals for gender equality and discussion of empirical inequality and women's rights
12.2	Mention of patriarchy/structural discrimination/gendered social narratives and structures
12.3	Gender pay gap/equal pay
12.4	Sexual division of labour/unpaid domestic labour/unpaid care work

12.5	Challenging gendered stereotypes
12.6	Gender mainstreaming/gendered policy lens/gender budgeting
13.1	Democracy and legitimacy
13.2	Women's representation/gender equality as a key aspect of democratic legitimacy
13.3	Preserve fabric of society/moral values/culture
13.4	Human rights/civil rights/equality and rights for all people
14.1	Women's descriptive political representation/quotas/shortlists etc.
14.2	Women's substantive political representation/decision making power
14.3	Women's representation in media
14.4	Women's representation in private sector/business
15.1	Sexual exploitation: Prostitution/sex trafficking
15.2	Sexual exploitation: Pornography
16.1	Grassroots/community-led politics
16.2	Relationships with women's movements
17	Employment policies/flexible working/job sharing etc.
18	Other

Appendix C. News coverage code scheme

Data

News items that mention party and/or candidates of Feministinen Puolue, Feministiskt Initiativ and the Women's Equality Party in the year before the 2019 European Parliament election and 6 months preceding a local election in each country.

Unit of coding

Unit of coding is the **specific and explicit issue mention** in relation to feminist party and/or candidate.

If a news item mentions more than one issue in reference to a feminist party/candidate, **code each new issue mention in a new row of the spreadsheet**.

V1 **Story ID no:**

V3 **Party:** WEP, FI, FP

V4 **Date: (DD/MM/YYYY)**

V5 **News Outlet:**

V6 **Headline:**

V7a **Author 1 Name**

V7b **Author 1 Role**

- Journalist
- Feminist Party candidate
- Feminist Party leader
- Feminist party member (e.g. spokesperson or general party member)
- Other party candidate
- Other party leader
- Other party spokesperson/other member
- Member of public
- Other e.g. celebrity/public figure, expert (specify)

V7c **Author 1 Role- other** (write in)

V7d **Author 1 Gender:** Female/Male

V8 REPEAT ABOVE FOR AUTHOR 2

V9 REPEAT ABOVE FOR AUTHOR 3

V10 Type of news item:

- News story
 - Factual news report, report of events, etc., of what has happened.
- Editorial/column
 - Typically, explicitly marked as editorial, opinion-piece, and article of its own, clearly defined to give evaluations. It clearly expresses a standpoint of the editorial who speaks for his/her newspaper. Column: clearly marked as special column, distinct from regular coverage, re-occurring item on a regular basis as fixed part of newspaper coverage, can be written in very personal style.)
- Commentary/opinion piece/letter to the editor
 - Often not written by a journalist but by an external source such as an expert, politicians, etc., often the official position of the author is given as well; often explicitly marked as “commentary”, e.g., by guest author.)
- Debate
 - An issue is presented and opinions from multiple source (i.e. party candidates or spokespeople) present their opinion on the issue.
- Interview/portrait
 - Portrait: e.g. of person, group, institution – and nothing more than that. Otherwise, it is likely to be a news story. Interview: the article is an interview – there have to be at least two interview questions; interview sections which are part of a general news story are not meant here.)
- Feature article
 - A feature story is a detailed report of an event or incident or a person. It shares a general perspective on a subject, instead of reporting news about a particular situation. May be written in third person.
- Reader’s views
 - Letters/tweets/commentary from the general public.

V11a What is the primary focus of the news story in which a feminist party/candidate is mentioned?

i.e. to what extent is the article focused on the feminist party, in comparison to other parties or a general news event?

- Feminist party
 - Article is focused predominantly on discussing the feminist party e.g. their campaign activities, manifesto content, issue positions
- Feminist party candidate

- Article is focused on a specific candidate i.e. a profile of them, an interview with them, discussing their positions and activities
- Feminist party leader
 - Article is predominantly discussing party leader e.g. a profile or interview piece
- Other party
 - Article is predominantly focused on a non-feminist party e.g. their campaign activities, manifesto content, issue positions
- Other party candidate
 - Article is focused on a specific candidate i.e. a profile of them, an interview with them, discussing their positions and activities
- Other party leader
 - Article is predominantly discussing party leader e.g. a profile or interview piece
- Multiple parties
 - The article focuses on multiple party's activities (e.g. campaign activities), issue positions (e.g. manifesto or campaign communication or candidate debate on a specific issue) or on profiles of candidates from multiple parties
- Hustings/televised debate
 - Article provides overview of hustings event or televised debate.
- Factual election information
 - Article is providing information about the election e.g. candidate lists or election results
- Other news event (specify)
 - Article is about a separate news event not related to an election, feminist party, or other party

V11b Other write-in

ISSUE COVERAGE

V12a Does the item mention an issue in reference to either the feminist party or candidate?

An issue is mentioned 'in reference' to a feminist party/candidate when it is **specifically** and **explicitly** linked to party/candidate e.g. when a direct connection is made to a party's position, manifesto, campaign activities or other activities, or a quote from a party member/leader. Issues mentioned in the story but not explicitly in reference to feminist party/candidate should not be coded.

- Yes
- No

⇒ If no, skip to the next item

V12b If yes, what political issue is mentioned? (For each new issue mention, code a new entry)

1. Abortion and reproductive rights
 - Abortion rights; abortion provision; contraception
2. Childcare/Parental leave
 - Childcare services; provision of childcare; parental leave; maternity leave; discussion of unequal childcare burden on women
3. Culture and media
 - Provision of culture and leisure facilities e.g., libraries; sports; mass and news media.
4. Democratic values/anti-extremism
 - Commitment to democratic values; protection of democracy; support for democratic institutions; explicit opposition to far right or extremist politics
5. Economic policies and goals
 - Economic structure; long-term economic plans/goals; tax policies; economic productivity; redistribution of wealth; trade policies.
6. Education
 - Education services and programmes; expenditure on education; schools; curriculum content; employment, training and working conditions for teachers
7. Employment and labour
 - Employment practices; Working conditions; Labour policies; Unemployment; **(Check against: Equal pay)**
8. Environment
 - Global warming; climate change; green issues; renewable energy; fossil fuels; preservation of natural resources; environmental improvement; animal rights; organic food.
9. Equal pay
 - Equal pay for men and women; Gender pay gap
10. European Union
 - European Union processes and institutions; European Union membership; Brexit. **(Do not code if reference to EP election)**
11. Foreign policy/security
 - Foreign policy; relationships with specific countries; international conflict; military and weapons; international security; terrorism; international diplomacy; need for peace; defence policy; general references to human security **(Does not include reference to refugees/asylum seekers/undocumented persons)**
12. Gender equality/gender discrimination
 - General references to gender equality, gender discrimination, sexism, misogyny, patriarchy **(Only use this code if no other issue is specified in relation to gender inequality)**
13. Healthcare and Nursing service
 - Healthcare provision and specific programs; medical research and knowledge; employment; training and working conditions for doctors, nurses and medical staff. **(Check against: Women's specific healthcare. Check against: Abortion and reproductive rights)**
14. Housing/infrastructure
 - Housing; social housing; renting and landlords; infrastructure and city planning

15. Human rights

- Explicit reference to human rights, the need to protect human rights or protect all people; Freedom of speech (**Check against: Underprivileged minority groups**).

16. Immigration

- Labour immigration/foreign workers; economic impact of immigration; cultural impact of immigration; policies relating to settlement or employment of immigrants; policies on emigration (**Check against: Refugees**)

17. Law and order

- Enforcement of laws, actions against crime, policing, prisons and treatment of prisoners (**Check against: Violence against women. Check against: Sexual violence against women**)

18. Refugees

- Mention of and policies relating to refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented persons (**Check against: Immigration**)

19. Sexual violence against women

- Sexual harassment (including #MeToo); sexual abuse; rape; FGM. (**Check against: Human trafficking**)

20. Social care

- Social care services and programmes; Professional and domestic care provision for people with physical and/or mental disabilities; Professional and domestic care provision for the elderly; employment, training and working conditions of carers; discussion of unequal care burden on women (non-childcare)

21. Transport

- Transport and infrastructure; public transport, air travel, rail, buses (**Check against: Environment**)

22. Underprivileged minority groups (other than women)

- Support for and policies relating to LGBTQ+, ethnic minorities, racial minorities, disabled people, immigrants and foreigners. References to anti-racism. (**Check against: Immigration. Check against: Refugees. Check against: Human rights.**)

23. Violence against women

- Domestic and intimate partner violence; physical assault of women; verbal abuse towards women; online abuse of women. (**Does not include sexual violence against women**).

24. Welfare (excluding childcare, healthcare, and social care)

- General reference to social welfare/social security or need for social welfare improvement; Reference to pensions, benefits, income support.

25. Women's descriptive representation

- Information/statistics about women's representation; Need for equal political representation for men and women; gender quotas; all-women shortlists. **If discussing women's representation in media or sport use Culture/Media category. If referring to women's representation in another field e.g., business, code as 'other' and write in.**

26. Other (specify)

V12c Other write-in

V13a Who mentions the issue?

Where party candidate and leader are same person, code as the role best fitting the subject of the story.

- Journalist
- Feminist Party candidate
- Feminist Party leader
- Feminist party member (e.g. spokesperson or general party member)
- Other party candidate
- Other party leader
- Other party spokesperson/other member
- Member of public
- Other e.g. celebrity/public figure, expert (specify)

V13b Other (write-in)

V14 If no issue is mentioned, what is the focus of feminist party coverage?

(Write in)

Appendix D. News coverage coding inter-coder agreement

Table. D. 1 Percent agreement and K alpha for news item coding

Variable	Percent agreement	K alpha
Issue mention(Y/N)	98	0.96
Actor	87	0.78
Abortion and reproductive rights	100	1
Childcare/parental leave	99.0	0.95
Culture/media	98.5	0.74
Democratic values/anti-extremism	97.3	0.94
Economics	98.2	0.92
Education	99.1	0.93
Employment/labour	97.5	.79
Environment	99.1	0.9
Equal pay	96.9	0.87
European Union	97.3	0.64
Foreign policy/security	99.1	0.93
Gender equality	91.7	0.70
Healthcare	96.9	0.51
Housing/infrastructure	96.4	0.54
Human rights	97.5	0.80
Immigration	100	0.80
Law and order	99.6	0.94
Minoritised groups	95.1	0.84
Refugees	99.6	0.95
Sexual violence	98.2	0.93
Social care	98.2	0.77
Transport	100	1
Violence against women	98.7	0.95
Welfare	96.0	0.78
Women's descriptive representation	97.3	0.45
Other	94.6	0.61

Appendix E. Tweet code scheme

Data

Tweets by party and candidate accounts of Feministinen Puolue, Feministiskt Initiativ and the Women's Equality Party in the year before the 2019 European Parliament election and 6 months preceding a local election in each country.

Unit of coding

Unit of coding is the mention of a political issue.

If a tweet mentions more than one political issue, **code each new mention of a political issue using the additional columns**.

Variables

V1 Type of tweet

Personal – Tweets that have no connection to politics/election campaign. Tweets that refer to candidate's personal life and activities or work outside of politics. Even where tweets do not contain specific mention of candidate's personal life, if the tweet is clearly not about political issues/activities then code under this category.

Example: “Proud of my sister mandykdhami for passing her CBT accreditation x #CBT #therapy #sisters #proud... https://t.co/jtBmKjnrYv”

Example: “Astonishing that #Chelsea have remembered how to play football #COYS”

Political- Tweet refers to any aspect of politics/elections including mentioning political issues, political parties or candidates, elections/campaigns.

Other- Tweets with no substantive content e.g. links, emojis or tweets where content is unclear (try and assign another code where possible).

Example: “@NimkoAli ❤️❤️❤️👍😊”

- ⇒ **If personal or other, skip to the next tweet.**
- ⇒ **If political, answer V2.**

V2 Type of political tweet

Political issue- Expressing an opinion on a political issue or political institutions.

Example: “Brexit is a feminist issue https://t.co/YoK5B9FTr3”

Example: “As a municipal decision-maker, Pia Brandt is committed to promoting human rights: https://t.co/t7dOj8zhcV #minunkuntani #kuntavaalit”

Campaign- Tweets that inform the public about campaign activities of the candidate e.g. interviews, tv appearances or hustings events. Tweets that encourage citizens to vote either in general or for a specific party. Tweets providing election information, location or timings. Tweets plainly reporting election results.

Example: “RT @greycoatlaw: Here's how to find your polling station via @londonselects and give @WEP_UK your #2ndVote on 5th May... <https://t.co/Ld7Fii...>”

Example: “RT @UngaFeminister: This year's delegation to Almedalen has now arrived! We will color Almedalen pink at debates, panel discussions and seminars...”

Other - Refers to political events or actors, but does not discuss campaign activities, or any substantive political issues.

Example: “I'm surprised Boris hasn't blamed them just for being women. <https://t.co/Rsci3COPkl>”

- ⇒ **If campaign or other, skip to the next tweet.**
- ⇒ **If political, answer V3**

V3a **What political issue is mentioned?**

1. Abortion and reproductive rights
 - Abortion rights; abortion provision; contraception
2. Childcare/Parental leave
 - Childcare services; provision of childcare; parental leave; maternity leave; discussion of unequal childcare burden on women
3. Culture and media
 - Provision of culture and leisure facilities e.g., libraries; sports; mass and news media.
4. Democratic values/anti-extremism
 - Commitment to democratic values; protection of democracy; support for democratic institutions; explicit opposition to far right or extremist politics
5. Economic policies and goals
 - Economic structure; long-term economic plans/goals; tax policies; economic productivity; redistribution of wealth; trade policies.
6. Education
 - Education services and programmes; expenditure on education; schools; curriculum content; employment, training and working conditions for teachers
7. Employment and labour
 - Employment practices; Working conditions; Labour policies; Unemployment; **(Check against: Equal pay)**
8. Environment
 - Global warming; climate change; green issues; renewable energy; fossil fuels; preservation of natural resources; environmental improvement; animal rights; organic food.
9. Equal pay
 - Equal pay for men and women; Gender pay gap
10. European Union
 - European Union processes and institutions; European Union membership; Brexit. **(Do not code if reference to EP election)**
11. Foreign policy/security

- Foreign policy; relationships with specific countries; international conflict; military and weapons; international security; terrorism; international diplomacy; need for peace; defence policy; general references to human security (**Does not include reference to refugees/asylum seekers/undocumented persons**)

12. Gender equality/gender discrimination

- General references to gender equality, gender discrimination, sexism, misogyny, patriarchy (**Only use this code if no other issue is specified in relation to gender inequality**)

13. Healthcare and Nursing service

- Healthcare provision and specific programs; medical research and knowledge; employment; training and working conditions for doctors, nurses and medical staff. (**Check against: Women's specific healthcare. Check against: Abortion and reproductive rights**)

14. Housing/infrastructure

- Housing; social housing; renting and landlords; infrastructure and city planning

15. Human rights

- Explicit reference to human rights, the need to protect human rights or protect all people; Freedom of speech (**Check against: Underprivileged minority groups**).

16. Immigration

- Labour immigration/foreign workers; economic impact of immigration; cultural impact of immigration; policies relating to settlement or employment of immigrants; policies on emigration (**Check against: Refugees**)

17. Law and order

- Enforcement of laws, actions against crime, policing, prisons and treatment of prisoners (**Check against: Violence against women. Check against: Sexual violence against women**)

18. Refugees

- Mention of and policies relating to refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented persons (**Check against: Immigration**)

19. Sexual violence against women

- Sexual harassment (including #MeToo); sexual abuse; rape; FGM. (**Check against: Human trafficking**)

20. Social care

- Social care services and programmes; Professional and domestic care provision for people with physical and/or mental disabilities; Professional and domestic care provision for the elderly; employment, training and working conditions of carers; discussion of unequal care burden on women (non-childcare)

21. Transport

- Transport and infrastructure; public transport, air travel, rail, buses (**Check against: Environment**)

22. Underprivileged minority groups (other than women)

- Support for and policies relating to LGTBQ+, ethnic minorities, racial minorities, disabled people, immigrants and foreigners. References to anti-

racism. (Check against: Immigration. Check against: Refugees. Check against: Human rights.)

23. Violence against women

- Domestic and intimate partner violence; physical assault of women; verbal abuse towards women; online abuse of women. (Does not include sexual violence against women).

24. Welfare (excluding childcare, healthcare, and social care)

- General reference to social welfare/social security or need for social welfare improvement; Reference to pensions, benefits, income support.

25. Women's descriptive representation

- Information/statistics about women's representation; Need for equal political representation for men and women; gender quotas; all-women shortlists. **If discussing women's representation in media or sport use Culture/Media category. If referring to women's representation in another field e.g., business, code as 'other' and write in.**

26. Other (specify)

If more than one political issue is mentioned in a tweet, add each political issue in V3b, V3c, V3d etc.

Example: "Recital #56 Because human security is not about increased appropriations for the defense of territories. Feminism is the force that can best meet the biggest challenges the world is currently facing: environmental threats, inequality, war, and populism  <https://t.co/tRnht9fQBj> <https://t.co/XJCLt4SjB0>"

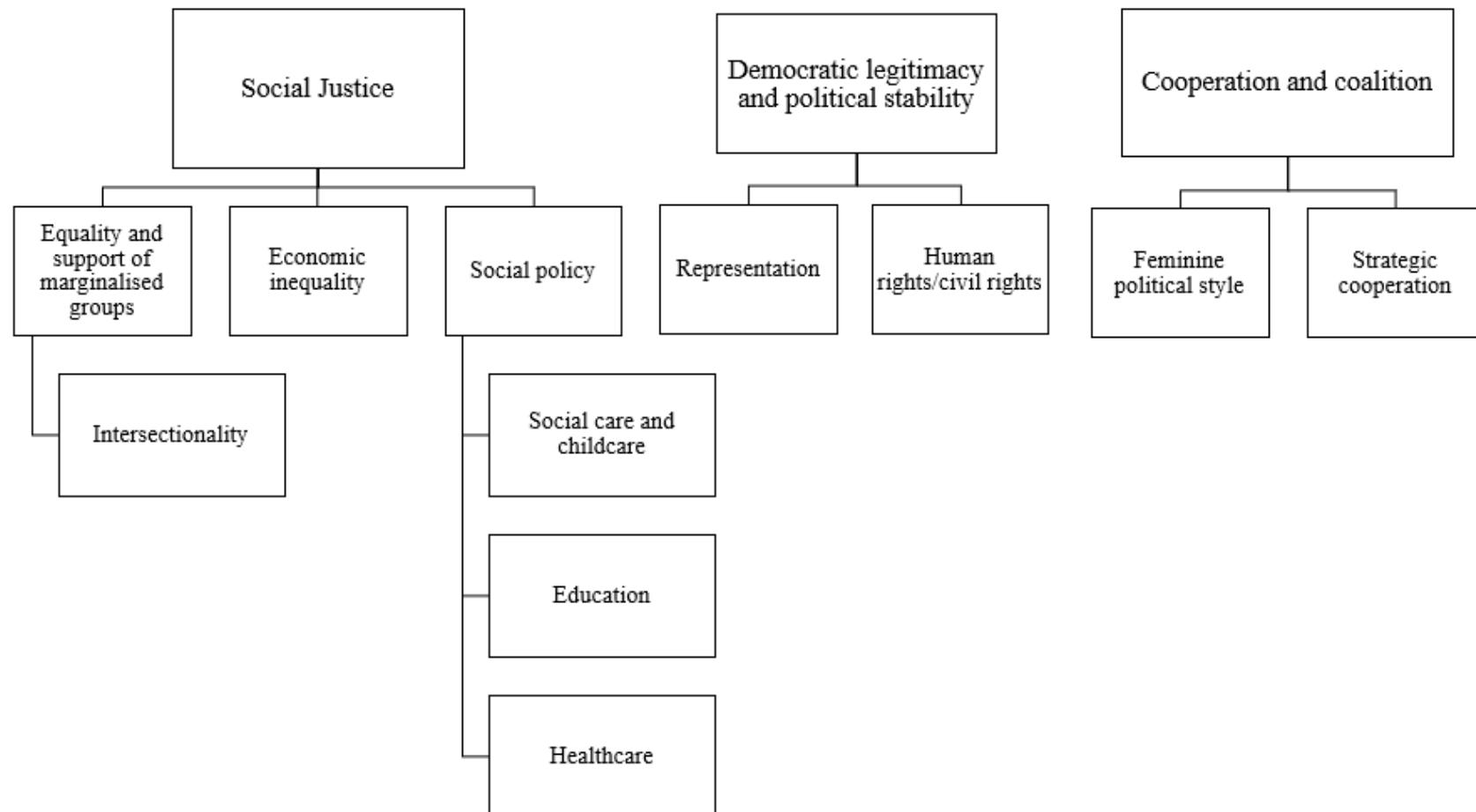
⇒ If you have completed all the relevant categories, move to the next tweet

Appendix F. Tweet coding inter-coder agreement

Table F. 1 Percent agreement and K alpha for tweet coding

Variable	Percent agreement	K alpha
Type of tweet	91.1	0.81
Type of political tweet	88.4	0.74
Abortion and reproductive rights	99.7	0.83
Childcare/parental leave	99.4	0.79
Culture/media	98.6	0.70
Democratic values/anti-extremism	98.1	0.61
Economics	98.7	0.67
Education	99.2	0.71
Employment/labour	99.1	0.83
Environment	99.2	0.82
Equal pay	99.7	0.91
European Union	99.7	0.94
Foreign policy/security	99.4	0.77
Gender equality	95.7	0.54
Healthcare	99.3	0.71
Housing/infrastructure	99.7	0.73
Human rights	99.3	0.80
Immigration	99.6	0.77
Law and order	98.7	0.46
Minoritised groups	98.0	0.77
Refugees	99.7	0.87
Sexual violence	99.3	0.82
Social care	99.6	0.69
Transport	99.5	0.76
Violence against women	98.6	0.69
Welfare	99.1	0.52
Women's descriptive representation	99.6	0.67
Women's specific healthcare	99.8	0.82
Other	95.2	0.5

Appendix G. Thematic Map



Appendix H. Issue concerns in FI, FP and WEP's European Parliament and municipal manifestos

Table H. 1 Top 30 relatively frequent terms in FI, FP and WEP European Parliament and Municipal manifestos

Feature	Frequency	Document Frequency
women	12.30	6
eu	9.59	6
right	8.68	6
work	7.41	5
violenc	7.05	6
peopl	6.20	6
equal	6.13	6
live	5.59	6
support	4.80	5
citi	4.67	3
europ	4.58	4
need	4.42	6
school	4.27	4
everyon	4.09	5
human_right	4.01	6
gender	3.92	6
social	3.88	6
servic	3.86	5
children	3.79	5
make	3.60	5
chang	3.57	6
care	3.42	5
life	3.35	6
increas	3.12	5
climat	2.98	3
protect	2.91	5
secur	2.89	6
european	2.89	4
build	2.84	5
access	2.83	5

Notes: *Manifestos: Feministinen Puolue (2017, 2019), Feministiskt Initiativ (2018b; 2019), Women's Equality Party (2016, 2019). The presented terms have undergone stemming as part of the document preprocessing steps*

Table H.1 presents evidence that terms relating to *feminist party priority issues: gender equality and minority rights, human security, gendered violence, and care* are emphasised in FI, FP and WEP manifestos produced for the EP and municipal campaigns under study in Chapters 5 and 6. In addition to the word frequency analysis, I provide a brief review of the main themes in each manifesto, to offer evidence that the parties in my sample do emphasise the issues that I identified in Chapter 4, as priorities of contemporary European *feminist parties*.

FP's 2019 European Parliament (FP, 2019) manifesto was based on three key themes: 'A Europe of Human Rights'; 'An open Europe for all' (focused on human security and asylum); and 'A Europe of Climate Change'. Similarly, FI's 2019 European Parliament (FI, 2019) manifesto was split into three sections dedicated to: 'A life free from violence', focused on gendered violence; 'A just world', focused predominantly on *human security* including asylum; and 'For a living planet', focused on the environment. Finally, WEP's 2019 European Parliament manifesto (WEP, 2019) understandably devoted a fair amount of attention to the UK's exit from the European Union, however it still prioritised the *feminist party* priority issue areas across seven chapters:

1. Equal pay and opportunity
2. Free movement of services
3. A feminist foreign policy
4. Fair and compassionate immigration policies [focused on asylum]
5. Women at the heart of avoiding a climate catastrophe
6. A New Social Deal
7. Ending violence against women across the EU

In the municipal campaign each parties' manifestos did mention some local level issues, such as transport. However, the priority issues from the broader sample of *feminist party* manifestos were also heavily emphasised. Thus, FP dedicate one third of their municipal manifesto to a section titled 'The City knows no borders', which is focused on support for asylum seekers (FP, 2017). The remainder of their policies were oriented toward support for intersectionally minoritised communities.

FI's 2018 (FI, 2018b) municipal manifesto focused on the following key areas:

1. Human safety is the key to security for all
2. Open borders and human rights for all
3. Life and working life
4. Sustainable development for the environment and climate
5. Finance as a tool

Thus, *human security*, including asylum and environmental issues are clearly prioritised. Within the 'human safety' section there are also policies dedicated to *gendered violence*. Finally, the 'Life and working life' section is focused on gendered discrimination within employment and the unequal burden of care placed on women.

Finally, WEP's platform for the 2016 London Mayoral and Assembly elections is the least aligned with the core *feminist party* priority issues that I outlined in Chapter 4 (WEP, 2016). However, it does emphasise several of these issues across six sections of the manifesto:

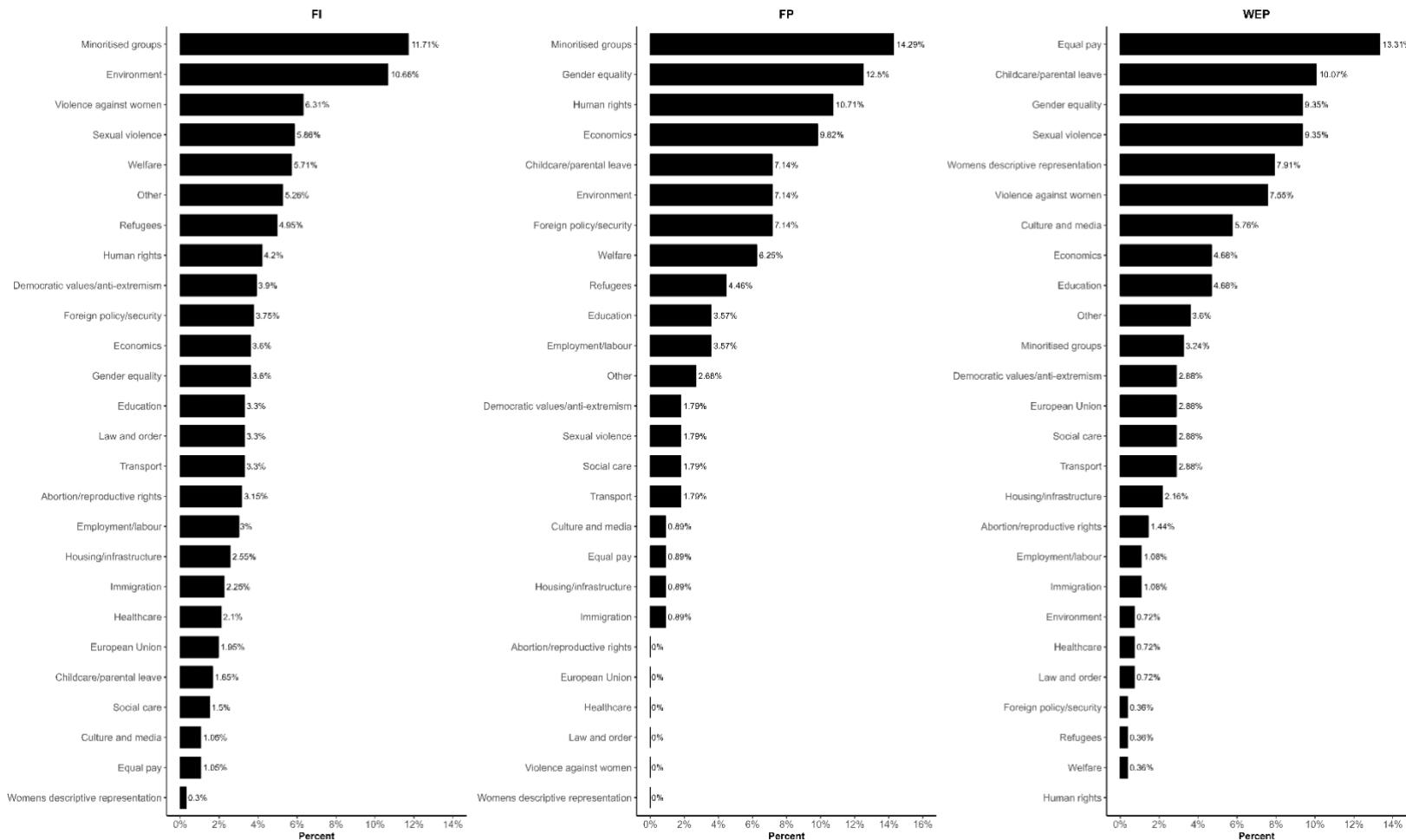
1. Equal pay and opportunity at work and in our economy.
2. Equal parenting and caregiving so that everyone has the same opportunity in family life.
3. An end to violence against women.
4. Equal representation in politics, business and industry.
5. Equal treatment of women by and in the media.
6. An equal education system that creates the same opportunities for all children.

This platform represents a more liberal feminist approach focused on equality of opportunity and women's descriptive representation. Priority *feminist party* issues such as *care, and gendered violence* are emphasised but there is less representation of other issue areas such as *human security*. As further reflection on this, the London Mayoral and Assembly election in 2016 was the first election that WEP contested. The party strategically adopted a non-partisan approach at this time, believing this would allow them to better influence the political agenda through cooperation with parties across the political spectrum (Cowell-Meyers, et al., 2020; Evans and Kenny, 2020). The party has since moved away from this strategy. For example, Evans and Kenny (2020) reflect that the party originally did not take a position on Brexit to remain non-partisan, but received heavy criticism from party members, resulting in a change of policy.

Changes in party leadership have also corresponded with a shift in the party's platform toward the positions of *feminist parties* elsewhere in Europe, such as FI and FP. WEP advocate an explicitly intersectional feminist approach in their 2019 EP manifesto and focus on issues such as *human security* and *gendered violence*. Additionally, in 2019 the party joined the Feminists United Network (FUN) coordinating a joint platform of issues for the 2019 EP campaign alongside FP and FI. Thus, in general, WEP's policy concerns correspond with those that I identify in the broader sample of manifestos in Chapter 4. Moreover, the party's 2016 manifesto does emphasise several *feminist party* priority issue areas including *equal rights for women and minoritised groups, childcare, and gendered violence*.

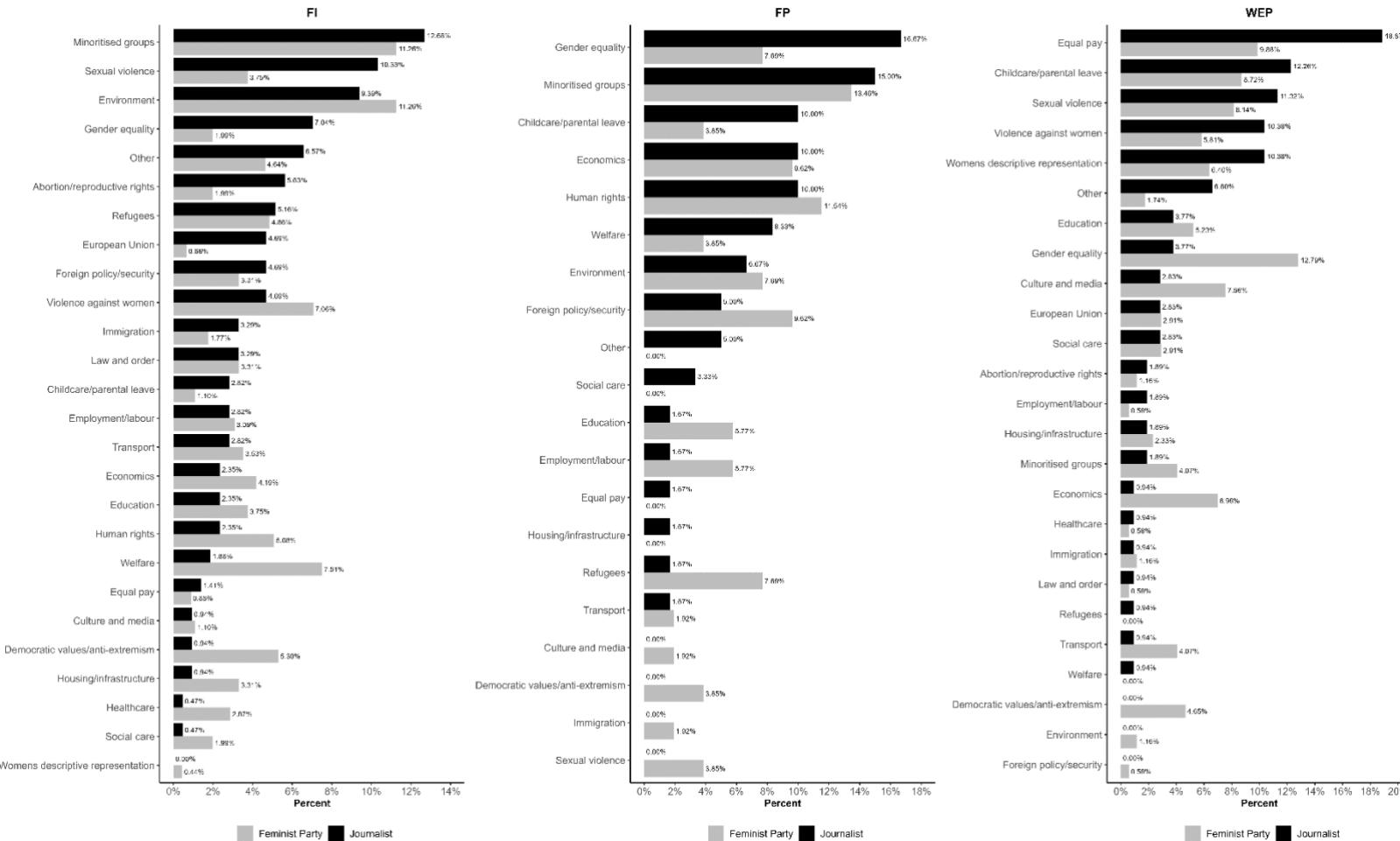
Appendix I. Party-level differences in news coverage, descriptive statistics

Figure I. 1 Relative frequency of issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP news coverage



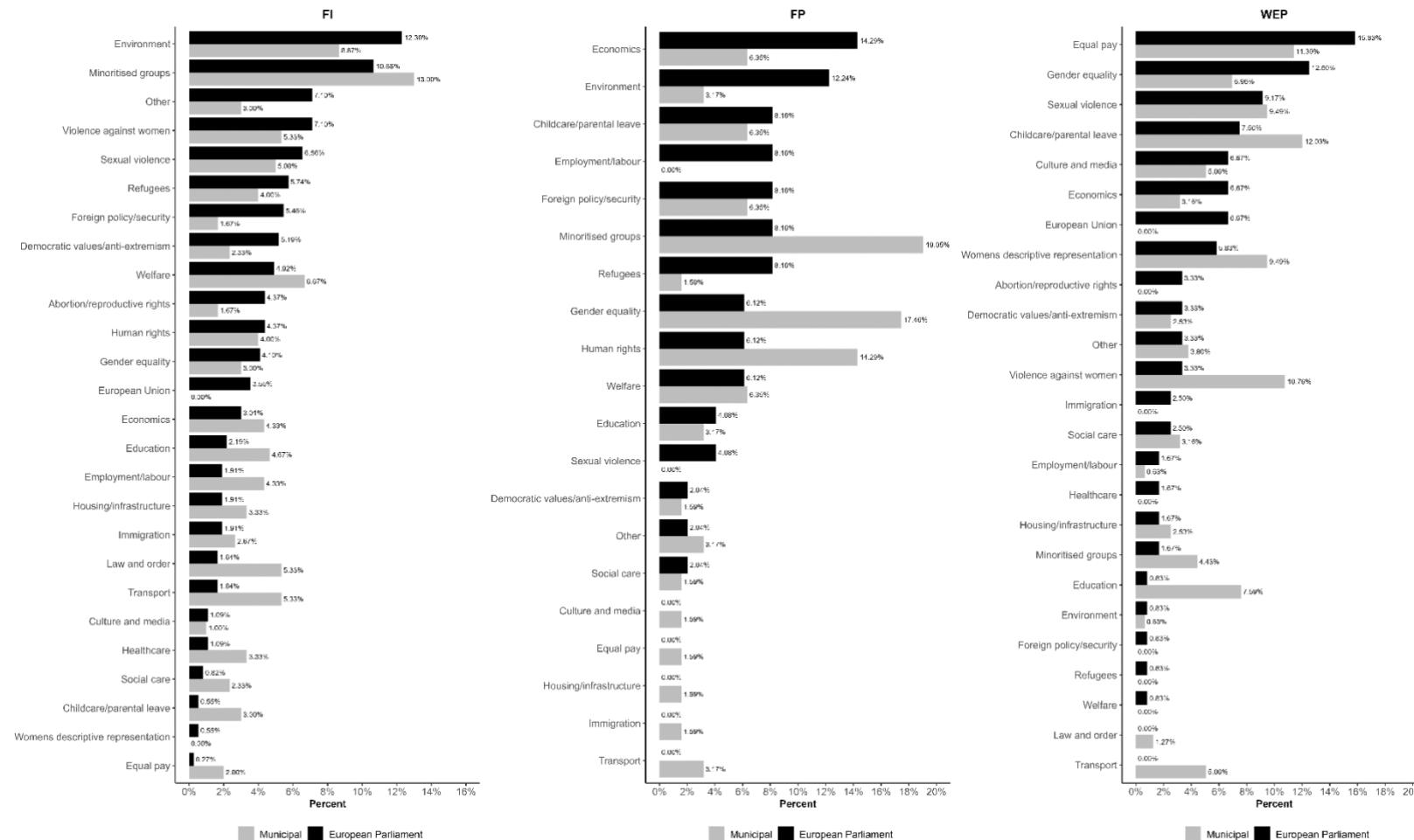
Notes: FI (n = 666); FP (n = 112); WEP (n = 278)

Figure I. 2 Relative frequency of issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in FI, FP and WEP news coverage



Notes: FI: Journalist (n = 213), Feminist Party (n = 453); FP: Journalist (n = 60), Feminist Party (n = 52); WEP: Journalist (n = 106), Feminist Party (n = 172)

Figure I. 3 Relative frequency of issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP news coverage in European Parliament and Municipal campaigns



Notes: FI: Municipal ($n = 300$), European Parliament ($n = 366$); FP: Municipal ($n = 63$), European Parliament ($n = 49$); WEP: Municipal ($n = 158$), European Parliament ($n = 128$)

Table I. 1 Party-level issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in European Parliament campaign

	FI				FP				WEP			
	Journalist		Feminist Party		Journalist		Feminist Party		Journalist		Feminist Party	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Abortion/reproductive rights	8	6.72	8	3.24	0	0	0	0	2	6.9	2	2.2
Childcare/parental leave	2	1.68	0	0	2	11.76	2	5.71	1	3.45	8	8.79
Culture and media	1	0.84	3	1.21	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8.79
Democratic values/anti-extremism	1	0.84	18	7.29	0	0	1	2.86	0	0	4	4.4
Economics	0	0	11	4.45	3	17.65	4	11.43	0	0	8	8.79
Education	2	1.68	6	2.43	0	0	2	5.71	0	0	1	1.1
Employment/labour	4	3.36	3	1.21	1	5.88	3	8.57	1	3.45	1	1.1
Environment	13	10.92	32	12.96	3	17.65	3	8.57	0	0	1	1.1
Equal pay	0	0	1	0.4	0	0	0	0	8	27.59	11	12.09
European Union	10	8.4	3	1.21	0	0	0	0	3	10.34	5	5.49
Foreign policy/security	7	5.88	13	5.26	1	5.88	3	8.57	0	0	1	1.1
Gender equality	9	7.56	6	2.43	2	11.76	1	2.86	0	0	15	16.48
Healthcare	0	0	4	1.62	0	0	0	0	1	3.45	1	1.1
Housing/infrastructure	1	0.84	6	2.43	0	0	0	0	1	3.45	1	1.1
Human Rights	4	3.36	12	4.86	1	5.88	2	5.71	0	0	0	0
Immigration	1	0.84	6	2.43	0	0	3	8.57	1	3.45	2	2.2
Law and order	2	1.68	4	1.62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Minoritised groups	16	13.45	23	9.31	1	5.88	3	8.57	0	0	2	2.2
Other	9	7.56	17	6.88	1	5.88	0	0	2	6.9	2	2.2
Refugees	7	5.88	14	5.67	0	0	4	11.43	1	3.45	0	0
Sexual violence	15	12.61	9	3.64	0	0	2	5.71	4	13.79	7	7.69
Social care	1	0.84	2	0.81	1	5.88	0	0	1	3.45	2	2.2
Transport	0	0	6	2.43	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violence against women	5	4.2	21	8.50	0	0	0	0	2	6.9	2	2.2
Welfare	1	0.84	17	6.88	1	5.88	2	5.71	1	3.45	0	0
Women's descriptive representation	0	0	2	0.81	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	7.69
Total	119	100	247	100	17	100	35	100	29	100	91	100

Table I. 2 Party-level issue mentions by journalists and *feminist party* actors in municipal campaigns

	FI				FP				WEP			
	Journalist		Feminist Party		Journalist		Feminist Party		Journalist		Feminist Party	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Abortion/reproductive rights	4	4.26	1	0.49	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Childcare/parental leave	4	4.26	5	2.43	4	9.3	1	5	12	15.58	7	8.64
Culture and media	1	1.06	2	0.97	0	0	0	0	3	3.9	5	6.17
Democratic values/anti-extremism	1	1.06	6	2.91	0	0	1	5	0	0	4	4.94
Economics	5	5.32	8	3.88	3	6.98	1	5	1	1.3	4	4.94
Education	3	3.19	11	5.34	1	2.33	1	5	4	5.19	8	9.88
Employment/labour	2	2.13	11	5.34	0	0	0	0	1	1.3	0	0
Environment	7	7.45	19	9.22	1	2.33	1	5	0	0	1	1.23
Equal pay	3	3.19	3	1.46	1	2.33	0	0	12	15.58	6	7.41
European Union	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign policy/security	3	3.19	2	0.97	2	4.65	2	10	0	0	0	0
Gender equality	6	6.38	3	1.46	8	18.6	3	15	4	5.19	7	8.64
Healthcare	1	1.06	9	4.37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Housing/infrastructure	1	1.06	9	4.37	1	2.33	0	0	1	1.3	3	3.7
Human Rights	1	1.06	11	5.34	5	11.63	4	20	0	0	0	0
Immigration	6	6.38	2	0.97	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0
Law and order	5	5.32	11	5.34	0	0	0	0	1	1.3	1	1.23
Minoritised groups	11	11.7	28	13.59	8	18.6	4	20	2	2.6	5	6.17
Other	5	5.32	4	1.94	2	4.65	0	0	5	6.49	1	1.23
Refugees	4	4.26	8	3.88	1	2.33	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sexual violence	7	7.45	8	3.88	0	0	0	0	8	10.39	7	8.64
Social care	0	0	7	3.4	1	2.33	0	0	2	2.6	3	3.7
Transport	6	6.38	10	4.85	1	2.33	1	5	1	1.3	7	8.64
Violence against women	5	5.32	11	5.34	0	0	0	0	9	11.69	8	9.88
Welfare	3	3.19	17	8.25	4	9.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women's descriptive representation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	14.29	4	4.94
Total	94	100	206	100	43	100	20	100	77	100	81	100

Appendix J. Focus of news item and number of issue mentions per news item

Table J. 1 Number of issue mentions in different types of news items

Article main focus (%)	Number of issues per news item											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12	13
Factual election information	1.40	1.20	0.00	0.00	4.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Feminist party	10	32.35	38.56	30.91	50.42	37.23	27.27	28.36	100	100	100	100
Feminist party candidate	5.00	8.20	7.80	14.50	16.00	11.70	27.30	35.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Feminist party leader	2.30	5.30	2.00	0.00	0.00	12.80	9.10	11.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hustings/televised debate	6.80	4.70	7.80	8.20	4.20	0.00	9.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Multiple parties	19.10	18.80	20.30	18.20	12.60	12.80	9.10	23.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other news event/other issue (specify)	49.10	24.70	15.70	21.80	8.40	25.50	18.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other party	2.70	4.70	3.90	3.60	4.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other party candidate	2.70	0.00	2.00	2.70	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other party leader	0.90	0.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	20.80	16.10	14.50	10.40	11.30	8.90	7.30	6.30	0.90	1.00	1.10	1.20

Appendix K. Multinomial logit model with issue mentions per article as binary variable, full results

Table K. 1. Multinomial logistic regression model predicting likelihood of gender-stereotypic issue mention by actor

	Model 1		Model 2	
DV: Stereotypically gendered issue mention (Baseline = neutral)	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine	Stereotypically feminine	Stereotypically masculine
Journalist	0.48* (0.22)	0.19 (0.27)	0.59+ (0.32)	0.12 (0.39)
4+ issue mentions per news item	0.21 (0.20)	-0.04 (0.24)	0.27 (0.27)	-0.09 (0.29)
Journalist*4+issues per news item	-	-	-0.21 (0.43)	0.14 (0.54)
European Parliament	-0.45* (0.20)	-0.54* (0.25)	-0.45* (0.20)	-0.54* (0.25)
Newspaper (Left)	0.24 (0.27)	-0.36 (0.25)	0.24 (0.27)	-0.36 (0.35)
WEP	-0.29 (0.26)	-0.55 (0.35)	-0.28 (0.26)	-0.55 (0.35)
FP	0.37 (0.42)	0.88+ (0.48)	0.38 (0.42)	0.87+ (0.48)
Constant	1.66** (0.20)	0.56* (0.24)	1.63** (0.21)	0.58* (0.24)
AIC	1599.798		1602.805	
Deviance	1571.798		1570.805	
N	1056		1056	

**p<.01., *p<.05, +p<.1; Standard error in parentheses.

Appendix L Issue area multinomial logistic regression full results

Table L. 1 Multinomial logistic regression of issue area mention by actor (Model 1) and extent of issue coverage (Model 2), full results.

	Model 1	Model 2
Abortion relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	0.81* (0.43)	0.90* (0.44)
Issue mention per article	-	-1.27+ (0.69)
European Parliament	1.46** (0.53)	1.60** (0.53)
Newspaper (Left)	0.28 (0.57)	0.08 (0.58)
WEP	-1.47* (0.65)	-1.29* (0.67)
FP	-13.10 (269.31)	-13.41 (311.44)
Constant	-3.07** (0.55)	-2.59** (0.60)
Culture relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-1.03* (0.53)	-1.02+ (0.53)
Issue mention per article	-	0.13 (0.64)
European Parliament	0.07 (0.44)	-0.01 (0.46)
Newspaper (Left)	0.04 (0.52)	0.16 (0.53)
WEP	1.03+ (0.57)	0.92+ (0.57)
FP	-0.44 (1.14)	-0.53 (1.14)
Constant	-2.53** (0.48)	-2.56** (0.55)
Democratic values relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-2.39** 0.74	-2.23** (0.74)
Issue mention per article	-	-0.49 (0.56)
European Parliament	0.63+ (0.38)	0.71+ (0.39)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.26 (0.54)	-0.37 (0.53)
WEP	-0.77 (0.53)	-0.71 (0.53)
FP	-0.74 (0.82)	-0.73 (0.82)
Constant	-1.40** (0.34)	-1.18** (0.40)
Economics relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.90* -0.77*	-0.77*

	Model 1	Model 2
Issue mention per article	(0.37) -	(0.38) -2.10** (0.63)
European Parliament	0.19 (0.33)	0.41 (0.33)
Newspaper (Left)	0.16 (0.42)	-0.13 (0.44)
WEP	-0.48 (0.45)	-0.20 (0.48)
FP	0.63 (0.49)	0.63 (0.50)
Constant	-1.40** (0.31)	-0.68+ (0.36)
Employment and labour relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.37 (0.44)	-0.24 (0.45)
Issue mention per article	-	-1.76* (0.79)
European Parliament	-0.02 (0.41)	0.15 (0.42)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.43 (0.63)	-0.64 (0.65)
WEP	-1.48* (0.71)	-1.26 (0.74)
FP	0.00 (0.68)	-0.05+ (0.68)
Constant	-1.56** (0.35)	-0.92* (0.43)
Environment relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.43 (0.29)	-0.45 (0.29)
Issue mention per article	-	-0.07 (0.40)
European Parliament	0.58 (0.28)	0.65* (0.28)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.16 (0.42)	-0.34 (0.41)
WEP	-3.24** (0.77)	-3.19** (0.76)
FP	-0.66 (0.49)	-0.56 (0.49)
Constant	-0.63** (0.25)	-0.60* (0.30)
European Union relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	1.28** (0.49)	1.46** (0.50)
Issue mention per article	-	-3.11** (1.01)
European Parliament	14.07 (209.63)	14.71 (232.89)
Newspaper (Left)	0.62 (0.55)	0.13 (0.61)
WEP	-0.22 (0.56)	0.33 (0.63)
	290	

	Model 1	Model 2
FP	-12.39 (234.03)	-12.20 (219.63)
Constant	-16.33 (209.63)	-15.71 (232.89)
Gendered violence relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	0.12 (0.23)	0.19 (0.23)
Issue mention per article	- (0.35)	-0.99** (0.35)
European Parliament	0.21 (0.23)	0.34 (0.23)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.17 (0.30)	-0.35 (0.30)
WEP	-0.27 (0.28)	-0.12 (0.29)
FP	-2.33** (0.77)	-2.24** (0.77)
Constant	-0.46* (0.22)	-0.08 (0.25)
Human rights/refugees relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.56+ (0.29)	-0.48 (0.30)
Issue mention per article	- (0.46)	-1.12* (0.46)
European Parliament	0.26 (0.27)	0.39 (0.28)
Newspaper (Left)	0.31 (0.38)	0.16 (0.38)
WEP	-4.08** (1.04)	-3.94** (1.05)
FP	-0.03 (0.42)	-0.06 (0.43)
Constant	-0.60** (0.24)	-0.17 (0.30)
Immigration relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	0.12 (0.49)	0.31 (0.50)
Issue mention per article	- (1.05)	-2.68** (1.05)
European Parliament	0.19 (0.49)	0.42 (0.49)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.48 (0.77)	-0.85 (0.82)
WEP	-1.18 (0.75)	-0.82 (0.81)
FP	-1.18 (1.13)	-1.19 (1.13)
Constant	-2.12** (0.44)	-1.24* (0.52)
Infrastructure relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.91** (0.35)	-0.81* (0.36)
Issue mention per article	- (0.54)	-1.47** (0.54)

	Model 1	Model 2
European Parliament	0.94** (0.34)	-0.77* (0.34)
Newspaper (Left)	-1.15* (0.50)	-1.44** (0.51)
WEP	-0.31 (0.40)	-0.06 (0.42)
FP	-0.53 (0.67)	-0.53 (0.68)
Constant	-0.38 (0.24)	0.16 (0.30)
Other relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	0.44 (0.33)	0.51 (0.33)
Issue mention per article	-	-1.02* (0.51)
European Parliament	0.61+ (0.34)	0.74* (0.35)
Newspaper (Left)	1.00** (0.41)	0.84* (0.41)
WEP	-1.62** (0.47)	-1.48** (0.47)
FP	-1.82** (0.70)	-1.83** (0.70)
Constant	-1.86** (0.35)	-1.46** (0.4)
Security relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.18 (0.32)	-0.12 (0.32)
Issue mention per article	-	-0.9+ (0.49)
European Parliament	0.21 (0.30)	0.32 (0.31)
Newspaper (Left)	-0.82 (0.51)	-0.98* (0.51)
WEP	-2.15** (0.65)	-2.01** (0.65)
FP	0.00 (0.50)	-0.02 (0.50)
Constant	-0.86** (0.27)	-0.5 (0.33)
Social policy relative to Equal rights		
Journalist	-0.57** (0.22)	-0.46* (0.22)
Issue mention per article	-	-1.68** (0.36)
European Parliament	-0.53** (0.21)	-0.33 (0.22)
Newspaper (Left)	0.35 (0.27)	0.09 (0.28)
WEP	-0.66* (0.28)	0.45 (0.29)
FP	-0.35 (0.37)	-0.34 (0.37)
Constant	0.23	0.84**

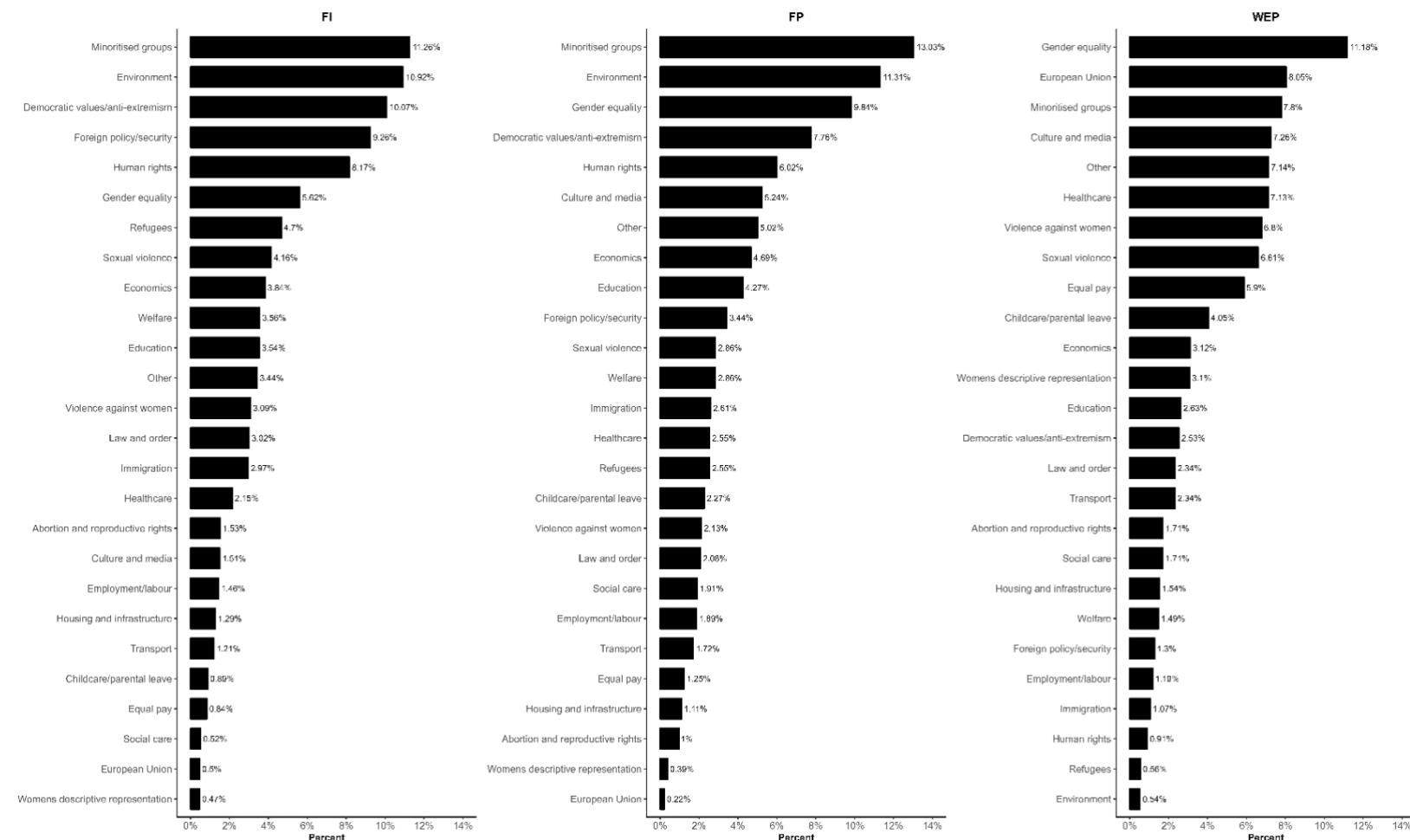
	Model 1	Model 2
	(0.19)	(0.23)
<i>Deviance</i>	4721.078	4665.516
<i>AIC</i>	4889.078	4861.556
<i>N</i>	1056	1056

**p < 0.01; *p < 0.05; +< 0.1. Standard error in parentheses.

Notes: Reference category = 'Equal rights' Issue mention per article scaled as 1/number of issue mentions per article.

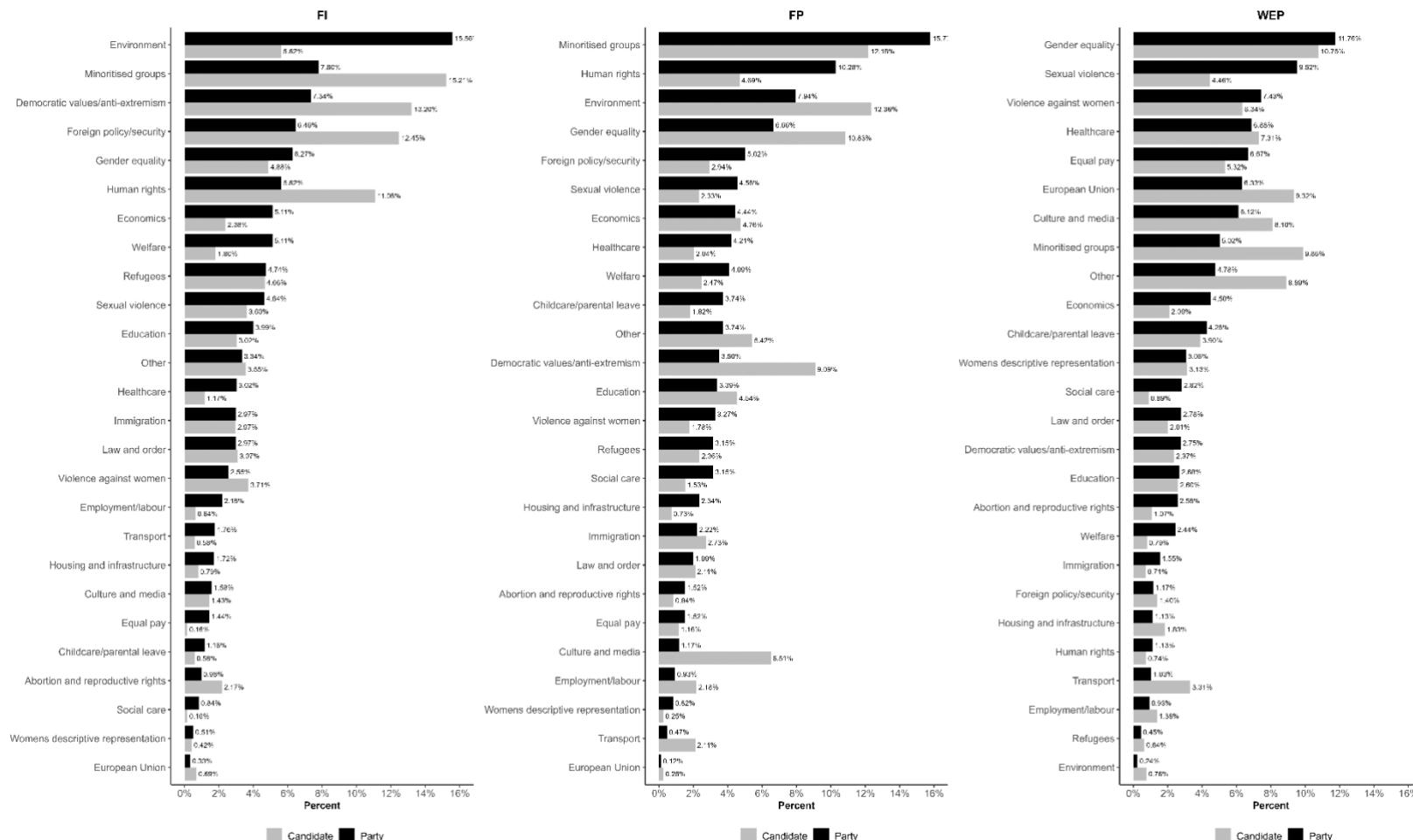
Appendix M. Party-level differences in issue mentions in tweets, descriptive statistics

Figure M. 1 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP tweets



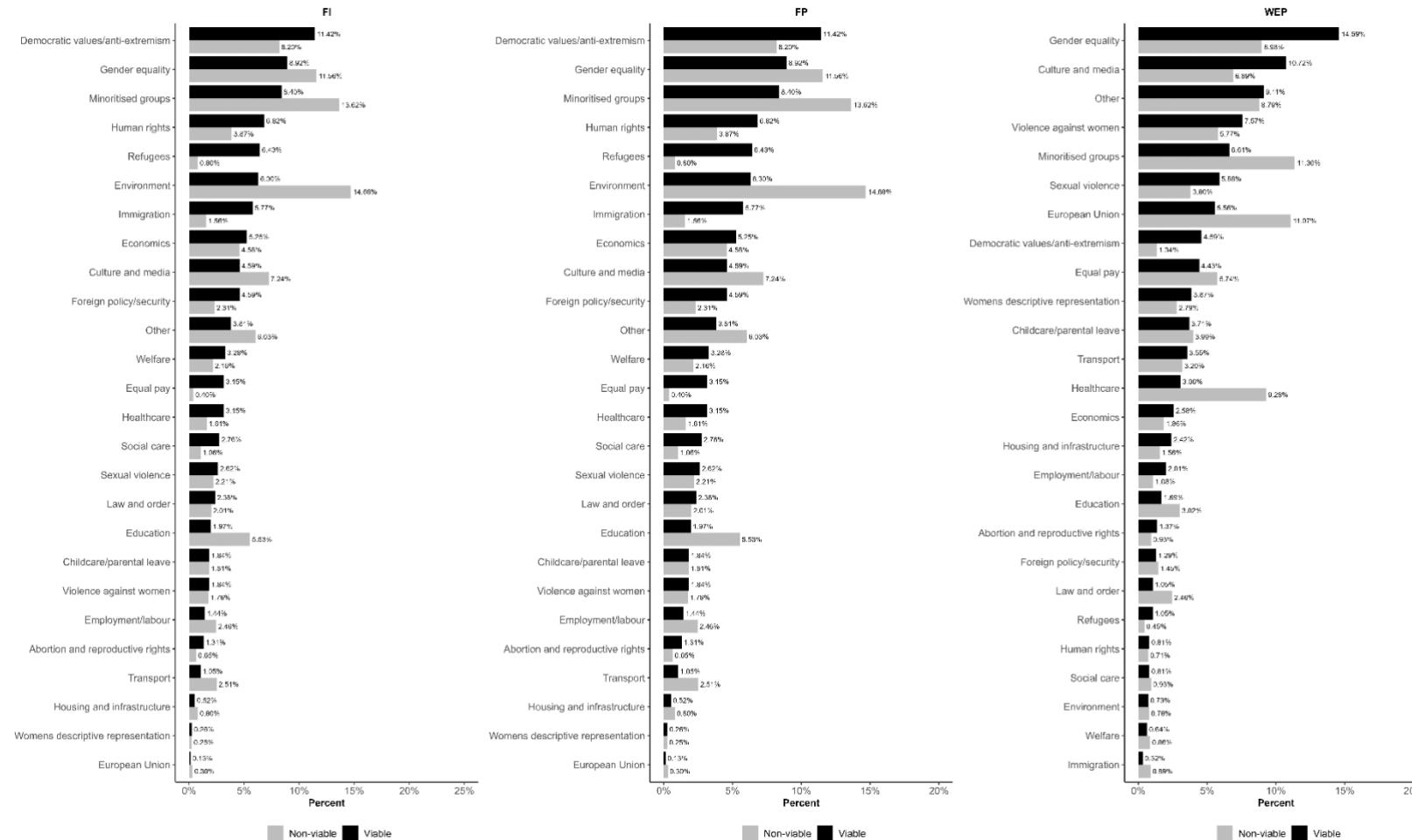
Notes: FI (n = 3360); FP (n = 3079); WEP (n = 5744)

Figure M. 2 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP party and candidate tweets



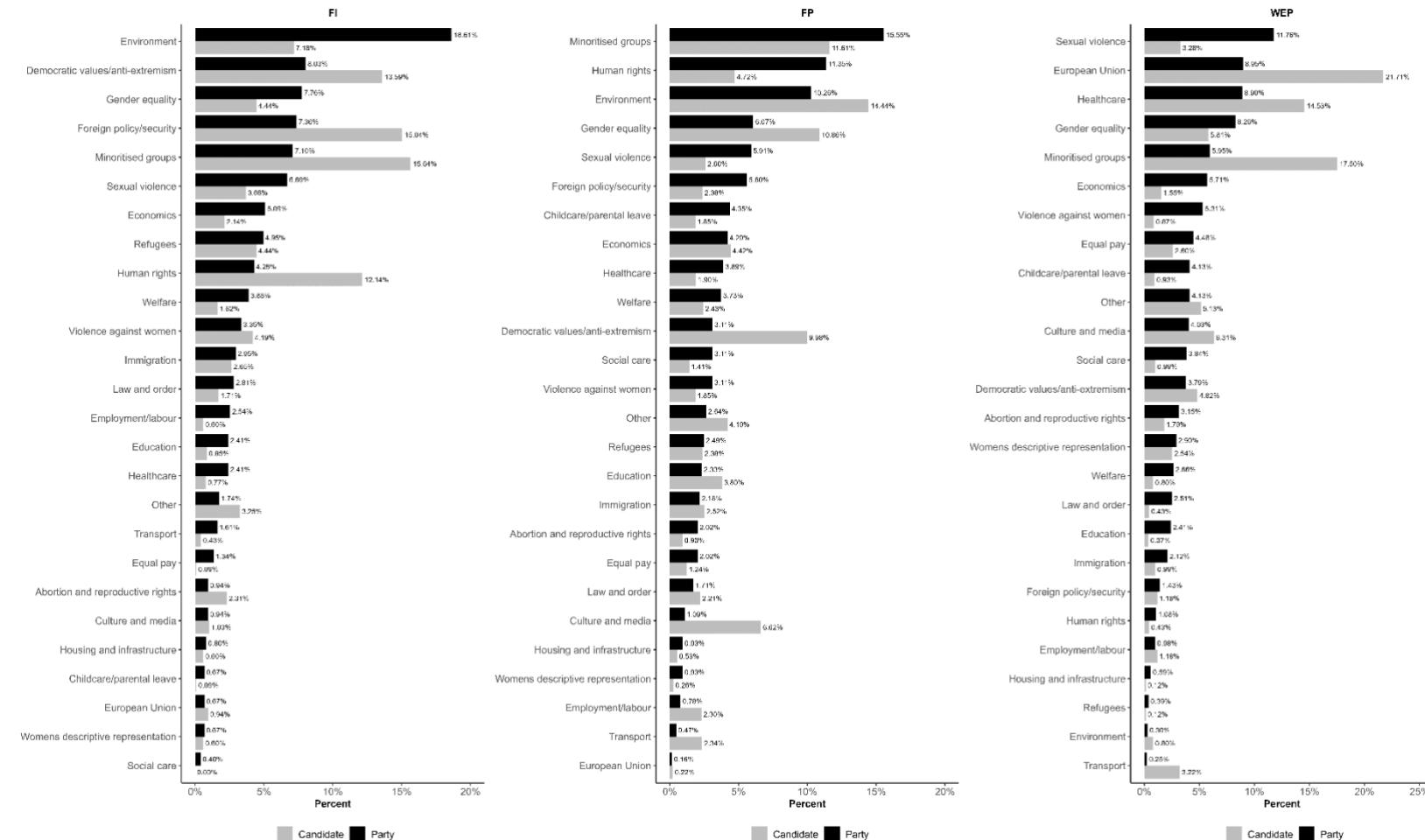
Notes: FI: Candidate (n = 1587), Party (n = 1773); FP: Candidate (n = 2404), Party (n = 675); WEP: Candidate (n = 3404), Party (n = 2340)

Figure M. 3 Issue mentions in FI, FP, and WEP viable and non-viable candidate tweets



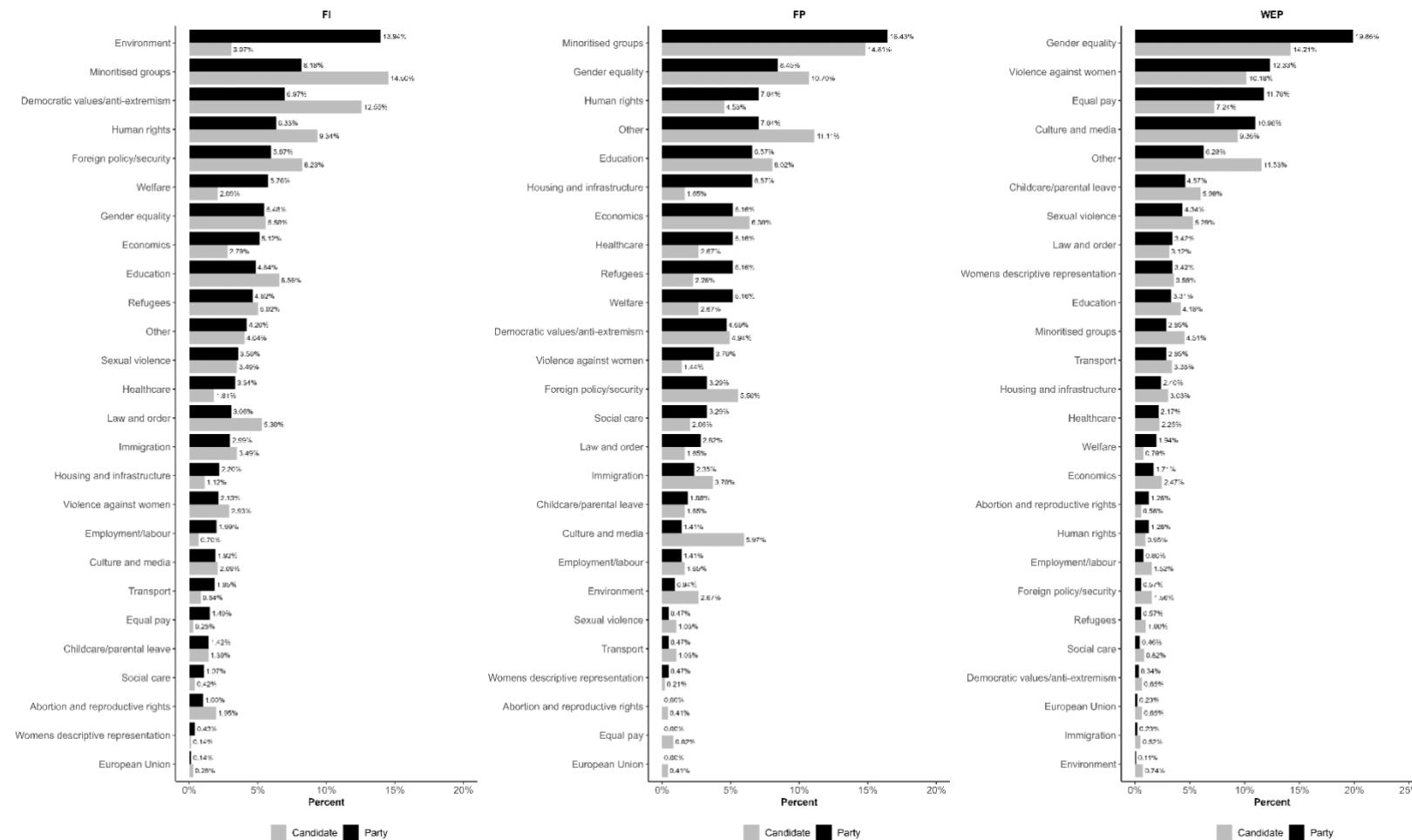
Notes: FI: Non-viable ($n = 864$), Viable ($n = 723$); FP: Non-viable ($n = 1785$), Viable ($n = 619$); WEP: Non-viable ($n = 2355$), Viable ($n = 1049$)

Figure M. 4 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP party and candidate tweets in European Parliament election campaign



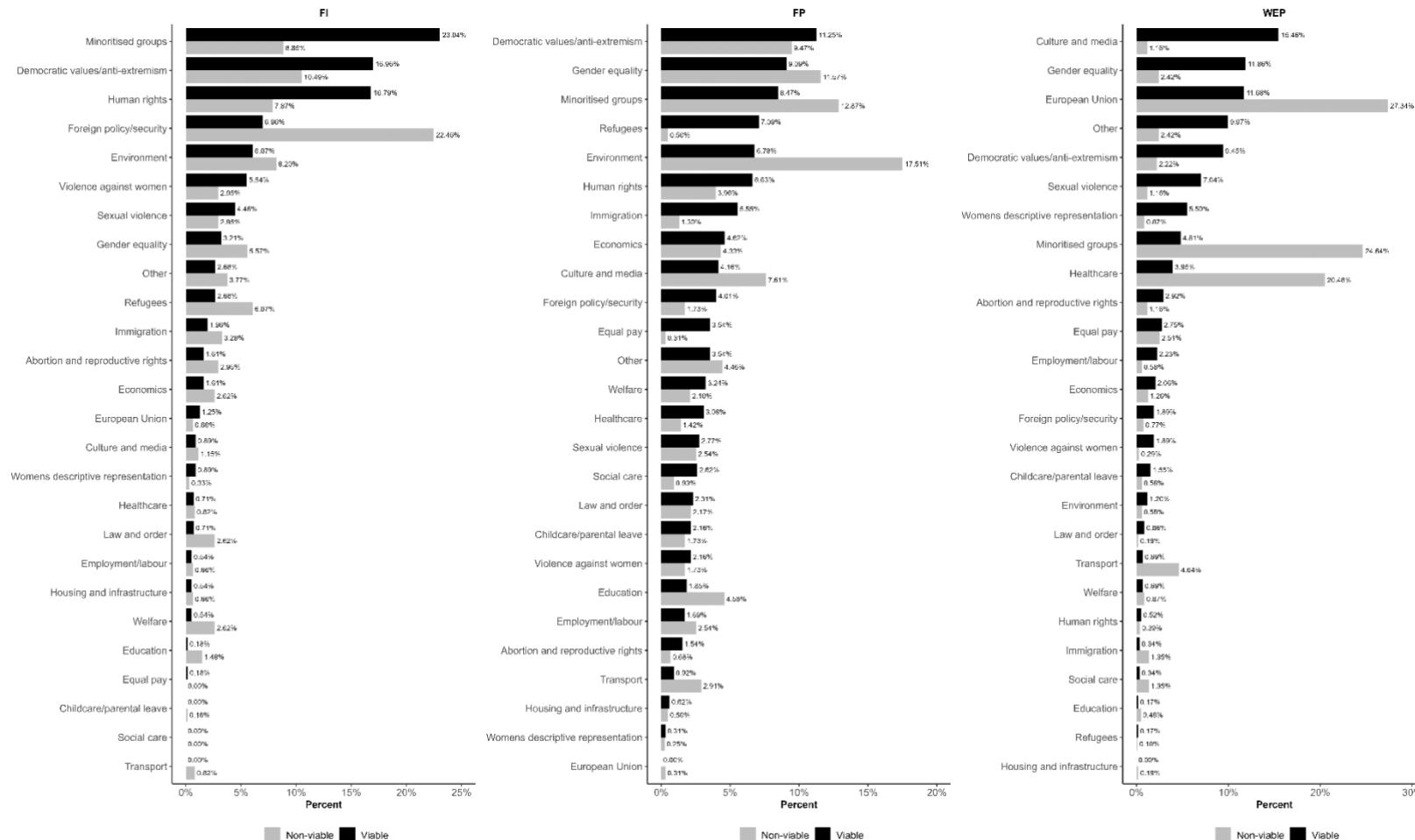
Notes: FI: Candidate (n = 1010), Party (n = 669); FP: Candidate (n = 1958), Party (n = 488); WEP: Candidate (n = 1423), Party (n = 1592)

Figure M. 5 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP party and candidate tweets in the municipal election campaigns



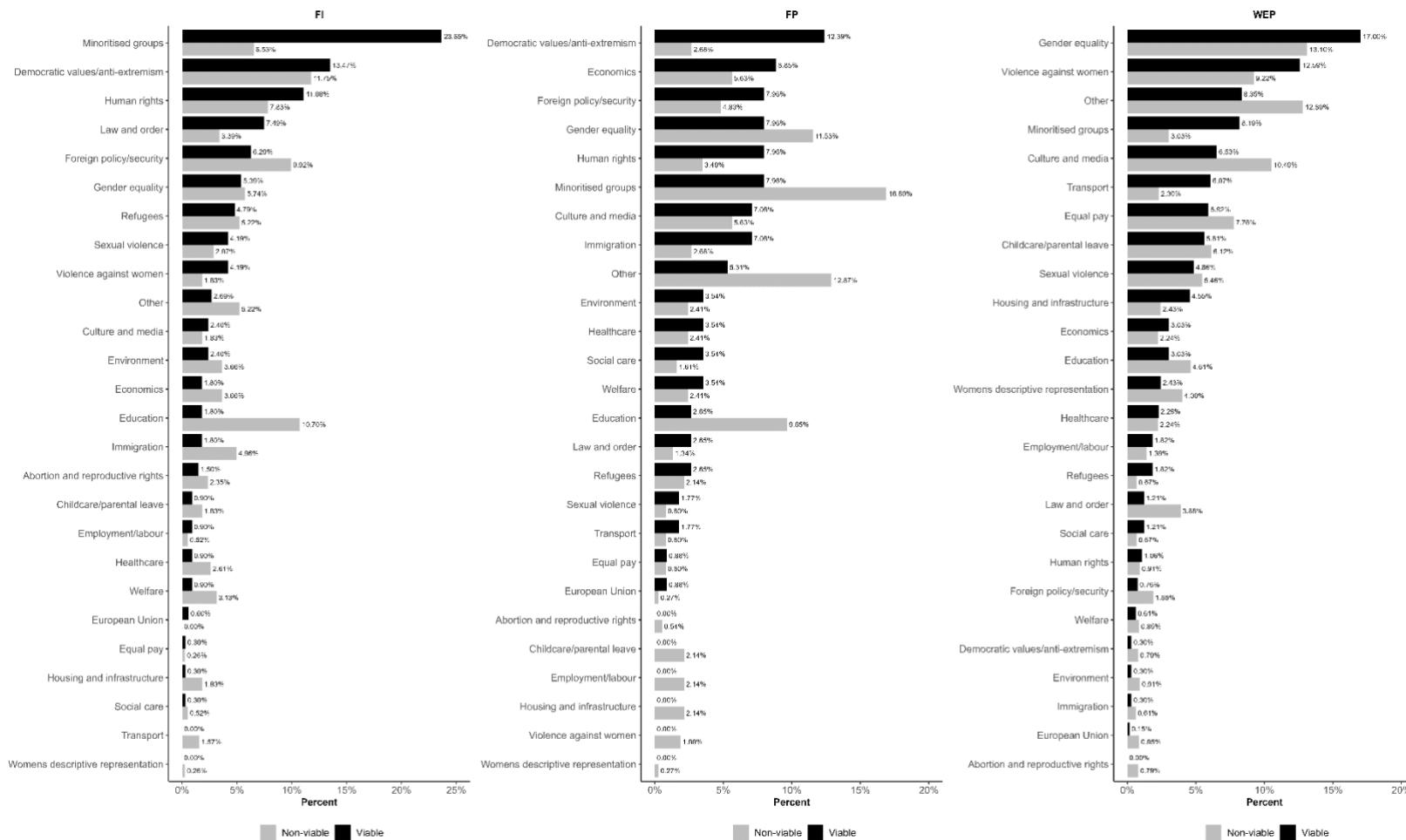
Notes: FI: Candidate (n = 577), Party (n = 1104); FP: Candidate (n = 446), Party (n = 187); WEP: Candidate (n = 1981), Party (n = 748)

Figure M. 6 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP viable and non-viable candidate tweets in the European Parliament election campaign



Notes: FI: Non-viable (n = 551), Viable (n = 459); FP: Non-viable (n = 1440), Viable (n = 518); WEP: Non-viable (n = 903), Viable (n = 520)

Figure M. 7 Issue mentions in FI, FP and WEP viable and non-viable candidate tweets in the municipal election campaign



Notes: FI: Non-viable (n = 313), Viable (n = 264); FP: Non-viable (n = 345), Viable (n = 101); WEP: Non-viable (n = 1452), Viable (n = 529)

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