

**Gender Differences in Political Participation:  
Comparing Street Demonstrators in Sweden and the United Kingdom**

**Abstract**

Research on gender and politics has primarily focused on women's participation in women's movements and institutional politics separately. Our paper is innovative in multiple respects: First, employing a comparative perspective we analyse what impact gender regimes have on participation in street protests. Second, we study the relationship between participation in electoral and protest politics and how this relationship is gendered. Third, we compare the participation of men and women in social movements. We are able to do this by drawing on nuanced survey data of five street demonstrations in the UK and Sweden which we benchmark against the more widely used European Social Survey. Our comparative research demonstrates that involvement in protest and institutional politics varies by gender, country and context. Our findings have important implications for gender equality in terms of social inclusion and political representation and contribute to political sociology, sociology of gender, and social movement research.

**Keywords**

comparative research, demonstrations, gender regimes, political participation, social movements, survey, Sweden, United Kingdom

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## **Introduction**

Given extensive research on women's movements and women's (under)representation in institutional politics (Paxton et al., 2006), it is surprising how little we know about gender differences in mixed-sex movements. Our paper contributes to closing this gap by analysing how participation in street protest varies by gender<sup>1</sup>, country and context and how it is related to involvement in institutional politics. Non-conventional forms of political participation, including social movement participation, do not necessarily compensate for declining rates of electoral participation (Norris, 2001), rather many protesters are a sub-set of those who participate in electoral politics (Saunders, 2014). While the relationship between demonstrating and participating in institutional politics in general is now established as mutually co-constitutive, little is known about how this might be gendered. Our comparative approach takes into consideration that the (gendered) socio-political context shapes and reflects motivations to participate in demonstrations (Peterson et al., 2012) and demonstrators' participation in institutional politics. We examine the role that gender regimes (Walby 2009) and protest context play in shaping gender differences in demonstration participation and demonstrators' involvement in institutional politics. This is an important contribution to political sociology, sociology of gender, and social movement research.

Walby (2009) distinguishes domestic gender regimes from two types of public gender regimes: neoliberal public gender regimes and social democratic public gender regimes which represent a continuum. Indicators of gender regimes include gendered inequality in employment, equality legislation and women in parliament (Walby, 2009: 303). Public gender regimes are characterised by high involvement of women in the paid labour force and institutional politics, and social democratic public gender regimes have a high state expenditure for public day care and strong equal opportunity laws that are lacking in neoliberal public gender regimes. Social democratic public gender regimes with a strong inclusion of women in decision-making bodies and gender equality offices can also be referred to as femocracies (Hobson, 2003). In this paper, we compare Sweden, a social democratic gender regime and femocracy, with the United Kingdom, a more neoliberal public gender regime. These gender regimes also have different patterns of gendered political participation. In Sweden

women are more highly represented in the public sphere and on demonstrations than in the UK. In the UK, in 2010, 1.9% women had participated in a legal public demonstration in the past 12 months, compared to 2.9% of men. In Sweden, in 2010, 5.5% of women and 4.2% of men had done so (ESS, 2010).

Using protest survey data, we are pursuing a positivist ‘woman approach’ (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017), which provides “evidence-based data on the disparity between women and men that can persuade analysts and policy makers of the need for gender equality policies” (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017: 197) and can be combined with gender and intersectionality approaches. Rather than focusing on women’s movements, we consider mixed-sex social movements – labour and anti-racism – which afford us the best opportunity to capture mobilization against multiple forms of subordination (gender, class and race) or ‘complex inequalities’ (Walby, 2009). Women have always been included in labour and anti-racism movements (for a survey see McCammon et. al, 2017). We provide a novel comparative quantitative study that assesses to what extent this varies across two gender regimes. Our work advances existing cross-national studies. Our protest survey data allows us to delve into differences across protests on different issues, whereas conventional cross-national studies only tell us in aggregate whether someone has participated in a demonstration or not. Thus, we deploy a quantitative analysis to assess gender differences in protest across two issues (labour, anti-racism) and two countries (UK, Sweden), examining a) gendered patterns of demonstration participation and b) gendered patterns of demonstrator’s participation in institutional politics.<sup>2</sup>

We proceed with a brief literature review on gender and political participation. We then compare and contrast our two country cases – the UK and Sweden – developing hypotheses regarding gender differences in political participation. After introducing our methods and presenting descriptive statistics, we test our hypotheses using survey data systematically collected at five street demonstrations on two contrasting issues (labour [May Day] and anti-racism) in Sweden and the UK in 2010. This is followed by a discussion of what our findings contribute to political sociology, sociology of gender, and social movement research.

### **Gender differences in institutional and non-institutional political participation**

Political organisations such as parties, parliaments and social movement organisations are gendered organisations (Acker, 1990; Einwohner et. al., 2000; Kuumba, 2001), which are simultaneously shaped by and shaping gender relations. Political parties are potential feminist allies and strategic partners of women's movements (Evans, 2016). Women's movements have successfully fought for women's political rights and measures to increase women's political participation after these rights had been secured but did not result in equal participation (Paxton et. al., 2006). Women's involvement in mixed-sex social movements (for example labour, anti-racism, peace, environmental and LGBT movements) is also well-documented (see surveys in McCammon et. al., 2017). Although women play important roles in mixed-sex social movements, they are overall underrepresented in the more visible positions of spokesperson or leader, and more likely to be found behind the scenes, doing the (invisible) 'housework' of the movement (Barnett, 1993). Social movements are gendered in multiple ways including their composition, goals, tactics, identities and attributions (Einwohner et al., 2000; Bagguley, 2010) and in their importance to activists and organisations. Gendered political opportunity structures, differential experiences and structural location as well as the gendered division of labour within movements result in gender-independent, gender-parallel and gender-integrated movement patterns (Kuumba, 2001). These gendered processes have been primarily investigated using qualitative methods.

There are only a few quantitative studies on gender differences in movement participation compared to a larger number on institutionalised political participation. A rare cross-national study of protest activity (Dodson, 2015) indicates that women are more likely to participate in non-confrontational activities whereas men are overrepresented in confrontational activities. These gender differences are more pronounced in less gender egalitarian contexts (Dodson, 2015). Compared to other social movements, more quantitative data are available for the labour movement. In many countries, there has been an increase in the number of women in union membership and leadership. This development reflects the increasing labour force participation of women, the restructuring of labour markets as well

as conscious efforts of women and the unions to bring more women into leadership positions (Ledwith, 2012; Kirton and Healy, 2013; Roth, 2003; Stuart et al., 2013). By 2015 a higher proportion of female employees (27.7 %) than male employees (21.7 %) in the UK were trade union members (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016).

Some recent studies address the consequences of the differential inclusion of men and women in social movements. Eschle (2017) found that a decline of women's participation in anti-nuclear activism in Scotland was associated with reinstating hierarchical gender norms and reflected in a shift from gender-equal peace activists to gender-differentiated 'peace warriors' and 'earth goddesses'. Maiguashca et.al. (2016) argue that feminism is crucial for the revitalisation and reconfiguration of left politics in Britain and found that the three sites of activism (left Unity, the People's Assembly and Occupy) they studied varied significantly concerning the politics of presence, ideology and political practices. Left Unity and Occupy made more efforts to integrate women and feminist issues than the People's Assembly.

A study of gender differences in protest participation contributes to a better understanding of gendered political participation and how it is shaped by and reflects gender regimes. Quantitative studies of social movement participation mostly have deployed gender as 'only' a control variable. Systematic and specific analyses of gender differences in protest participation and of street demonstrators' engagement in institutional politics are still missing. Our analysis explores the 'activism gap' by comparing and contrasting demonstrators' participation in institutional politics in two different gender regimes. The UK and Sweden represent two different gender regimes which vary significantly with respect to women's integration in the public sphere, in parliament and in paid employment. We expect to find that these state-level differences are associated with gender differences in demonstrators' participation in institutional politics.

## **Gender and Politics in Sweden and the UK**

Sweden is a social democratic public gender regime whereas the UK represents a more neoliberal public gender regime. Both regime types are associated with a high proportion of women in the paid labour force but vary with respect to women's inclusion in decision making and legislation addressing gender inequality (Walby, 2009). In 2016, women's employment rate in Sweden was 74.8 % compared to 68.8% in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in Sweden the proportion of women working part-time was lower (34.2%) and the proportion of men was higher (11.8%) than in the UK (39.5% for women, 9.8% for men). Moreover, in 2015, the unadjusted gender pay gap was below the EU average (16.3%) in Sweden (14.0%) and above it in the UK (20.8%).<sup>4</sup>

In Sweden and the UK, women's representation in government also varies widely. In October 2017, women represented 43.6% of Members of Parliament (Lower House) in Sweden, compared to only 32% of the House of Commons in the UK and 29% in the House of Lords.<sup>5</sup> The strong representation of women in the public sphere in Sweden assures that women's interests are articulated in political parties, parliament and government agencies. The social democratic public gender regime in Sweden thus represents a 'femocracy' in which feminism is institutionalised and gender inequalities are articulated in gender neutral frames – as workers' rights, parents' rights or citizens' rights (Hobson, 2003). This emphasis on universalism, solidarity and equality made it difficult to address issues of gendered power relations (Sandberg and Rönnblom, 2013) and has impeded development of an autonomous women's movement. However, since the 1990s a change in discourse can be noted and Swedish gender politics now acknowledges that gender relations are structural relations of power issues. The issues of abortion and prostitution are now framed as women's bodily rights (Freidenvall, 2015). In addition, in 2006, the Feminist Initiative, a women's political party which considers itself a social movement, was founded. It has participated in several Swedish and European elections (2006, 2010, 2014) and in 2014, won a seat in the European parliament (Thorin, 2015:1).

In the UK, due to frustration about the lack of inclusion of women and women's issues in politics, the Women's Equality Party was founded in 2015. Within a year 45,000 members joined and the party participated in the 2016 London mayoral elections (Evans and Kenny, 2016). After the referendum

concerning European Union membership in June 2016, and David Cameron's subsequent resignation, Theresa May became prime minister of the Conservative government. May called an election in June 2017 in which the Conservatives lost votes and the highest number of women ever was elected to parliament: 208 women representing 32% of the MPs. Significant differences between Labour and Conservatives remain: 45% of the Labour MPs are women, whereas only 21% of the Conservative MPs are female. In September 2017, the Conservative government rejected proposals giving parliament more equal female representation (Elgot 2017). Although gender issues have become important in government due to the UK's membership in the European Union, there is a greater distance between the women's movement and the state in the UK compared to Sweden (Walby, 2009). Thus, Swedish and the UK gender regimes differ with respect to the character and development of women's movements and their relationship to the state and we expect that these differences are reflected in contrasting participation in institutional politics among male and female demonstrators.

### *Hypotheses*

Despite the high(er) integration of women in the public sphere in Sweden, women remain disadvantaged compared to men (Harrebye and Ejrnaes, 2015). The access to universal welfare in Nordic countries results in a high participation rate in both institutional and non-institutional politics (Harrebye and Ejnaes, 2015: 159). In contrast, in the more neoliberal gender regime in the UK women are overall more disadvantaged than men compared to Sweden. To recapitulate our summary of Dodson's (2015) research, gendered differences in protest participation *diminish* in more gender egalitarian countries. We therefore expect a higher proportion of women than men among Swedish labour and anti-racism demonstrators compared to their counterpart demonstrators in the UK. This leads to our first hypothesis:

*H1. A higher proportion of labour and anti-racism demonstrators in Sweden are female compared to the UK.*

In contrast to Sweden, women are more marginalised in UK politics although the proportion of women in parliament varies by party and government. As noted above, in 2017, the proportion of women in the UK Labour Party remained much higher than in the Conservative Party and this is reflected in parliament. In addition, during Blair's and Brown's Labour governments, the proportion of women in the Cabinet was significantly higher than under the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberals (Campbell and Childs, 2015). We expect a lower proportion of women than men among demonstrators on UK street demonstrations to be active in institutional politics for two reasons. First, women are underrepresented in government in the UK despite the premierships of Thatcher and May. Moreover, Thatcher and May both pursued neo-liberal austerity projects which negatively impact on women and undermined women's political participation. Second, there is much better integration of women in the public sphere (e.g. political organisations, labour market) in Sweden compared to the UK who were able to support social democratic politics which underpin gender equality. This leads to our second hypothesis:

*H2. Participation in institutional politics is more common among female labour and anti-racism demonstrators in Sweden than female demonstrators in the UK.*

The relationship between women and trade unions is long, complex and varies across nations. However, in general, trade unions have re-framed their identities in order to mobilise previously excluded or ignored women and ethnic minorities (Ledwith, 2012; Mustchin, 2012). Fundamentally, unions are more institutionally similar to parties than are social movement organisations. Unions might therefore act as a bridge to encourage women's participation in institutional politics (Roth, 2003). This contrasts with anti-racist movements, which, similar to women's movements, are more likely to use horizontal organisational structures (Polletta, 2002), and which, consequently might make institutional politics appear alien. We therefore anticipate:

*H3. Women on labour demonstrations are more likely to be involved in institutional politics than women on anti-racism demonstrations.*



In addition, we added some control variables to our model that are known predictors of institutional political participation including interest in politics and trust in political parties (Saunders, 2014). We now introduce our research methodology, before presenting findings and discussing their significance.

## **Methodology**

### *Case selection and protest events analysed*

We analyse data collected from protest surveys as part of the pan-European Caught in the Act of Protest project (Klandermans et al 2009). This data has a huge advantage over cross-national surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS) and European Values Survey (EVS) because it allows us to analyse finer-grained patterns of protest participation – in this case, nuanced by demonstration issue. Moreover, protest survey data yields a larger sample size (n=843 for the five demonstrations we analyse) facilitating statistical analysis. In comparison, the ESS (2010) has only 57 street demonstrators for the UK and 70 for Sweden (although the figures rose to 121 and 194, respectively, for 2014).

Gender regimes reflect complex inequality (Walby, 2009) meaning that gender intersects with other systems of privilege and discrimination such as class and race. We therefore analyse data from demonstrations focused on labour (two 1 May 2010 marches in Stockholm – one organised by each of the Left Party and another by the Social Democratic Party – and one in London – organised by multiple left-wing organisations) and anti-racism (Unite Against Fascism in London, 6 November 2010; and Against Racist Politics in Stockholm, 4 October 2010). All five demonstrations were marches in the capital cities. Most were one to two hours in duration, except for May Day London, which lasted around four hours. They were largely peaceful and perceived as relaxed, cheerful and accommodating by researchers and participants. The demonstrations took place in weather that was overcast or partly sunny.

All surveyed demonstrations involved slogans and leaflet distribution, but the individual events also

varied in character. The May Day 2010 event in London highlighted international solidarity and exchange and was characterised by a high turnout of Kurdish-Turkish Groups. Typical for British May Day marches, the event combined a mix of trade unionists and a variety of left groups including immigrant, youth and student organisations (Peterson, 2016: 179). In Stockholm, two separate events took place, reflecting the division between the Left Party and the Social Democratic Party (Peterson, 2016: 174). The May Day event in Stockholm, organised by the Left Party, was explicitly opposed to ‘bourgeoisie, patriarchy, imperialism and racism’ focusing on “so-called social movement issues i.e. feminism, LGBT rights, environmentalism, peace and human rights” and attracting white collar workers, professionals and “highly educated radicals” (Peterson, 2016: 175). Samba drumming contributed to the festive atmosphere of this march in which a range of generations, including many younger people, women and immigrant groups, participated. In contrast, the Social Democratic Party organised May Day Demonstration in Stockholm, opposed the conservative party-led government and criticised welfare cuts. The participants tended to be more middle-aged and older and included more men and less immigrant groups than the event organised by the Left Party. The Social Democrat march included six brass marching bands and also had a festive atmosphere. In contrast to the march of the Left Party, it was extremely orderly with distinctive sections.

‘Unite Against Fascism’ supported by the campaign ‘Love Music, Hate Racism’, the Trade Union Congress, the Muslim Council of Britain and others organised the November 2010 march in London to counter the rise of the English Defence League and the British National Party, which had made some gains in local elections. In contrast, the march ‘Against Racist Politics’ in Stockholm, October 2010 was organised as a Facebook event rather than by an organising coalition. It was a more general rallying cry against Islamophobia and the persecution of migrants than its counterpart in the UK.

### *Protest survey methodology*

The protest survey methodology involves a team of researchers deploying state-of-the-art techniques to ensure random distribution of face-to-face and mail back surveys on the streets during large-scale demonstrations (see Walgrave and Verhulst, 2011 for specification). Our tests of representativeness of

the mail back surveys reveal a difference on only one variable: protest novices were significantly much *less* inclined to respond to the mail back survey.<sup>6</sup> These representativity tests *and* the impossibility of distributing surveys *entirely* randomly suggest the need for very slight caution in the interpretation of results. Nevertheless, we feel obliged to point out that no survey instrument is perfect.

### *Hypotheses testing and variables included in the models*

To test H1, which anticipates more female protest participants in Swedish labour and anti-racism demonstrations than in the UK, we produce a cross-tabulation of male against female protesters in the two countries and look for statistical significance of differences using a Chi2 test.

To test H2 and H3, we use the mail back survey data and binary logistic regression. We weighted the data by demonstration issue to prevent the occurrence of pooling errors.<sup>7</sup> Our dependent variable is a score (0-4) that represents the extent to which respondents participate in institutional politics. The score is comprised of political party membership, political party activity, contacting a politician and voting in the most recent national election. Our key independent variable is gender (female=1, male=0). Note that our gender variable represents women rather than men as the norm in contrast to the usual practices in quantitative studies. Other independent variables are protest issue (anti-racism=0, labour=1), and country (Sweden=0, UK=1) as well as interaction terms (country\*issue; and gender\*issue). We add some standard predictors of political participation as control variables, particularly: age (formal political participation is known to have tailed off among youth in Western Europe)<sup>8</sup>; trust in political parties, and political interest (a known key-predictor of political participation; see, for example, Norris, 2001; Dalton, 1996). In addition to the regression models, we present descriptive statistics to show the frequencies of participation in each act of institutional politics across countries, gender and demonstration issues. Please see the appendix for a copy of the original survey questions and their coding.

## **Results**

Our Chi2 analysis confirms H1: that there proportionately more female demonstrators at Swedish demonstrations compared to the UK. In fact, on Sweden demonstrations, women (57.4%) outnumber men significantly. This pattern was reversed in the UK, where only 37.1% were female. The difference in the gender composition of demonstrators in the two countries is statistically significant.<sup>8</sup> Table 1 shows the distribution of female demonstrators among the entire sample and across the two issues. The proportion of women is slightly higher for anti-racism demonstrations than labour demonstrations in both countries.

**Table 1 about here**

Table 2 shows the distribution of our dependent variable – involvement in institutional politics – by country and gender. In both countries, male demonstrators have marginally higher scores, although the differences are not statistically significant across countries (tested using kendalls tau b for ordinal data).

**Table 2 about here**

In Table 3 we present the mean score for the dependent variable – involvement in institutional politics – across gender, issues and countries. The mean score is equal for women and men in the UK, but lower for women in Sweden. Most notable is the extent of engagement in institutional politics among British anti-racism demonstrators for both women and men, although Swedish female labour demonstrators are more engaged in institutional politics than their UK counterparts. Female demonstrators’ engagement in institutional politics is, overall, similar to male demonstrators’.

**Table 3 about here**

Table 4 shows some descriptive statistics comparing female and male demonstrators' participation in different types of institutional politics across issues and countries. Female demonstrators engage in voting to a greater extent than male demonstrators in both countries whereas men participate to a greater extent in the other forms of institutionalised political participation (contacting a politician, party membership and active participation in a political party). The differences between male and female demonstrators' participation in institutional politics are the lowest for contacting a politician.

Rates of voting are higher in Sweden than the UK among demonstrators of both genders. However, for UK demonstrators, the percentages (80.5% for women and 72.2% for men) are markedly higher than average turnout, which was only 65.1% in the UK general election of 2010 (64% of women, 67% of men) and even lower in 2005: 61.4%. In Sweden, 90.8% of the female demonstrators we surveyed claimed to have voted in the 2010 national election, compared to 88% of men. This compares to the 2010 election turnout of 84.6%. Anti-racism demonstrators in both countries are more likely to vote than labour demonstrators. The gender differences in voting are most marked for UK labour demonstrators: 17.9% more UK female labour demonstrators claimed to have voted in the previous national election compared to male labour demonstrators.

Contacting a politician is less common among demonstrators in Sweden compared to the UK. In Sweden 38.7% of male demonstrators and 41.9% of female demonstrators claimed to have contacted a politician in the past 12 months, compared to 60.3% of women and 62.3% of men in the UK. Gender differences in contacting a politician are by-and-large small across both countries, never larger than 4.3%, and are hardly noticeable among anti-racism demonstrators.

Overall, demonstrators' party membership rates are similar in both countries at around 40%, with circa 10% more male than female demonstrators joining parties. However, there are some notable differences in party membership across issues and between countries. In Sweden, female anti-racism demonstrators have similar rates of party membership to their male counterparts (around one-third, with a female to male difference of just -3.7%). In the UK, political party membership is more

common among demonstrators in general (over 50%) and the gender difference is also more marked, especially among anti-racism demonstrators. Whereas 49.4% of women anti-racism demonstrators in the UK were members of a party, 61.7% of men anti-demonstrators were (difference -12.3).

As with party membership more generally, active participation in political parties is more common among UK demonstrators than Swedish ones, but the distinction is less dramatic than for political party membership. 33.1% of women demonstrators in the UK were active in a political party and 37.7% of men. The gender difference is -4.6. The figures in Sweden are 23.7% and 30.7% respectively, with a gender difference of -7. Gender differences in active participation in political parties are not higher than 10% for any of the sub-samples and are smallest among anti-racist demonstrators.

Although (active) party membership rates are generally lower among demonstrators in Sweden compared to the UK, it is important to point out a nuance across the issues. The Swedish demonstrators' with party membership or active participation in parties are very concentrated in labour demonstrations and in this regard their proportion is higher than among UK labour demonstrators. This is true of both women and men. Focusing particularly on the women, it can be seen in Table 4 that 33.3% of female UK labour demonstrators are party members and 24.5% have been active in a party in the past 12 months. This compares to 45.9% of female Swedish labour demonstrators being party members and 30.1% with recent active participation in a political party. In this sense, Swedish female labour demonstrators seem quite remarkable, even though Swedish male labour demonstrators are even more strongly connected to political parties.

Table 5 presents the result of our linear regression models predicting the extent of participation in institutional politics. We show three models: UK only, Sweden only and combined. In the combined country model being female (alone) is not a significant predictor of demonstrators' degree of participation in institutional politics. The negative but significant co-efficient for the interaction term of being on a labour march and being from the UK suggests that (regardless of gender) those from the

UK on labour marches are more likely to disengage from institutional politics. This is corroborated by the descriptive statistics shown in Table 4. In the ‘UK only’ model, being female (regardless of which issue) *and* being on a labour march have negative and significant coefficients. And yet the overall effect of gender and issue as an interaction term in the combined country model is positive, suggesting that when we control for country (in the interaction term of issue\*country), women on labour marches *do* disproportionately engage in institutional politics – but this must refer particularly to Sweden (see descriptive statistics). In the ‘Sweden only’ model, neither gender nor the issue of the protest march have a significant relationship with participation in institutional politics. Across all models, the control variables are significant and work in the expected direction: those demonstrators who are more politically interested, more trusting in politics and older are more likely to engage in a higher number of institutionally-oriented political acts.

#### **Table 5 about here**

Our analysis offers some support for each of our hypotheses. Table 1 supports H1 and indicates that more women attend labour and anti-racism demonstrations in Sweden compared to the UK. To see if these results are generalisable across protest issues we compare them to ESS data on demonstrators aggregated across protest issues. In 2010 (the year of the protest surveys) 57.1% of Swedish demonstrators across all issues were women, whereas only 43.4% of UK demonstrators were women (ESS, 2010).

H2, postulated that women in Sweden would participate to a greater extent in institutional politics than women in the UK. Our descriptive statistics and modelling seems to indicate that this is the case only for Swedish women in labour marches. Perhaps surprisingly, UK anti-racism demonstrators are more likely to have a high institutional politics score. H2 therefore finds some support but only among labour demonstrators.

H3, which anticipated that women involved in labour protests would be more likely to engage in institutional political participation than those in anti-racism demonstrations, finds support in the

combined-country model. Swedish female labour marchers are more engaged in institutional politics than their British counterparts, but a gender gap persists. To recap from Table 4, the gender difference between Swedish women and men labour demonstrators for party participation was -12.2, and for active participation political parties it was -8.7.

## **Discussion**

Our comparison between the participation of men and women in demonstrations and institutional politics in the two gender regimes confirms that different aspects of being involved in the public sphere are closely connected. The Swedish social democratic public gender regime is characterised by a higher participation of women in the public sphere – including in employment, in government, and in institutional politics as well as demonstrations. In contrast, in the more neoliberal British public gender regime the public sphere is still male dominated and this is replicated in demonstrations. We found that women in Sweden are more prevalent at demonstrations than women in the UK regardless of the demonstration issue – this holds for our data as well as coinciding (2010) and recent (2014) ESS data. As Walby (2009) notes, gender regimes are constituted by inter-related gendered institutions which can vary with respect to gender inequality, but are often coherent. Our analysis demonstrates that the Swedish social democratic public gender regime does not only represent a femocracy, but that that female dominated demonstrations indicate strong involvement of women in civil society. For Swedish women, representation in government and participation in demonstrations go hand-in-hand. In contrast, in the more neoliberal British public gender regime the underrepresentation of women in institutional politics is replicated in rather than compensated by protest events such as demonstrations.

Despite differences in protest participation, we also found some similarities in the two gender regimes. In both countries, male demonstrators were more likely to be highly engaged in institutional politics. Yet country and demonstration interaction effects suggest the need to reveal nuances to this general storyline. Swedish female May Day demonstrators are more likely to be involved in institutional political acts compared to their British counterparts, and the British labour march



participants were generally more disconnected from institutional politics. This is consistent with the characteristics of the two gender regimes. First, given the higher inclusion of women in the Swedish public sphere, it is not surprising that women who participated in the Swedish May Day were more likely to be involved in institutional politics. Relatedly, the Feminist Initiative strengthens and revitalises gender politics and mobilisation in Sweden. Second, women who participated in labour protests in the UK appear to be still marginalised in male-dominated organisations. Despite being led by a female PM, representing a higher proportion of union members than male unionists and their almost equal participation in the Labour Party, women in the UK remain more invisible in both formal and informal politics compared to Sweden. Third, the disconnect of the UK labour marchers from institutional politics might be a particular feature of the demonstration surveyed, which seemed to place emphasis on the rights of Kurdish Turks. This contrasts with the Swedish demonstrations which were organised by political parties.

Walby (2009) notes that Sweden experienced “spiralling social change” (p. 380) in the 1970s, when state policy further facilitated the employment of women which in turn bolstered women’s inclusion in political institutions and civil society. The involvement in different institutions reinforces each other. Given this interconnection, it is therefore important to learn more about to gender differentiated mobilisation. This requires more attention to the impact of organisational structures on the participation of men and women. The fact that the Swedish trade union confederation explicitly addresses gender interests, while British unions still are perceived as male-dominated<sup>9</sup> might, for example, go some way towards explaining why Swedish women participate in greater numbers than British women in May Day demonstrations. As noted earlier in the paper, the character of the five protest events that were included in this analysis differed. Whereas the May Day organisations organised by both the Social Democratic Party in Stockholm and the trade unions in London were more orderly, the march organised by the Left Party brought together a broad coalition of leftist groups targeting ‘bourgeoisie, patriarchy, imperialism and racism’. In contrast to the march organised by the Swedish Left Party, none of the UK demonstration platforms explicitly mentioned patriarchy. Thus, the mobilisation context for the Left Party May Day demonstration was much more open to

women and particularly to feminists. In contrast, it remains to be seen whether the British Left is able to reconfigure itself and to what extent this depends on a ‘feminist turn’ (see Maiguashca et. al., 2016). Furthermore, we observed a high proportion of non-UK citizens at the UK May Day demonstrations, for example Kurdish-Turkish groups representing societies which are characterised by more gender inequality than the UK.<sup>10</sup> We lack accurate data on the gender attitudes of these participants, but it is likely that they are less inclusive of women than British labour organisations. Thus, we also need to take into consideration that within the two gender regimes, individuals and communities vary in their attitudes towards gender relations.

Overall, the two UK demonstrations were more male-dominated than the Swedish demonstrations. Women might have been discouraged from attending the London anti-racism march that was specifically counter-posed to the English Defence League and British National Party, which are known to be violent. Furthermore, there were differences in the mobilisation of anti-racist demonstrations – the London one was organised by a broad coalition of organisations in contrast to the Facebook-based mobilisation of the Stockholm event. Facebook has played a crucial role for feminist mobilisation (Dean and Aune, 2015). Thus, we demonstrated that not only gender regimes, but also mobilising context matters and how. But this is not to say that formal organisations are always hostile towards women. Indeed, feminist organisations have employed a whole range of organisational forms (Martin, 1990) and women have always been involved in male-dominated structures such as the labour movement (Fonow, 2003; Roth, 2003). However, feminist issues were not part of the call to action of the May Day demonstration in the UK. This could explain women’s lower rates of participation in these demonstrations compared to Sweden. In the UK, the Women’s Equality Party entered the scene too late to affect female demonstrators in 2010 (the year of our data). We anticipate changes over time because the formation of women’s parties has impacts on the discourse, behaviour and policy in other parties (Cowell-Meyers, 2016: 4). The latest elections in the UK, in June 2017, which resulted in the highest ever number and proportion of female MPs suggest that the WEP made a difference even though none of their seven candidates won a seat.

## **Conclusion**

Using a positivist ‘woman approach’ we are able to quantify the differential political involvement of male and female demonstrators across gender regimes and issues. Our analysis facilitates better understanding of gender differences in demonstration participation and demonstrators’ participation in institutional politics. We show that both the inclusion of women in the public sphere and the type of organisations involved in staging a demonstration influence gendered patterns of political involvement.

In contrast to qualitative studies that describe different forms of involvement, based on our analysis we are able to quantify different patterns of engagement. Our paper demonstrates that gender inequality in politics and society is reflected in differential participation of demonstrators in various forms of political participation. In the Swedish social democratic public gender regime, women are well represented in the workplace, in institutional politics and in civil society which is reflected across demonstrations generally (see ESS data), and on anti-racism and labour more particularly (protest survey data). Overall, the Swedish women who participated in labour demonstrations were more involved in institutional politics than the women who participated in UK demonstrations. Our emphasis on comparison across protest issues makes a significant contribution to the literature. Most studies on the intersection of protest and institutional political participation draw on the ESS, which lacks the nuance to be able to address the difference that protest issue makes to participation. We find that both the gender regime and the issue are important in understanding gender differences in demonstrators’ political participation. UK women labour demonstrators tend to be more inclined to vote in a general election than their Swedish partners, but Swedish women Labour demonstrators were far more likely than their British counterparts to make deeper connections to institutional politics through joining or being active in a political party. Swedish labour demonstrators experience fewer obstacles for getting involved in institutional and non-institutional forms of politics and through their involvement in politics they shape and create gender-inclusive environments which further attracts women’s participation.

Unexpectedly, we found that female UK anti-racism demonstrators are *more* likely than their Swedish counterparts to be involved in political parties. We argue that this is due to mobilisation context.

There is a close link between unions and the Labour Party, which has a higher proportion of women and black and minority ethnic members than the Conservative Party, and a number of major trade unions are affiliated with United Against Fascism thus mobilizing members. In contrast, the Swedish anti-racism demonstration was mobilised via Facebook through horizontal networks. This represents an instance of connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012) which relies on mobilisation through social media rather than organisationally grounded networks and helps to explain the lower involvement in political parties of the Swedish demonstrators.

Our comparative study of women's and men's involvement in labour and anti-racism demonstrations in a social democratic and a more neoliberal public gender regime makes an important contribution to political sociology, sociology of gender and social movement research. Acknowledging complex inequalities, i.e. that gender intersects with race and class, we studied the conditions under which women and men are over- or underrepresented in labour and anti-racism protests. Involvement in different institutions in the public sphere are mutually enforcing and contribute to more gender equality whereas a lack of involvement in institutional politics is replicated in an underrepresentation in civil society. Given that EU legislation played an important role for the adoption of gender equality legislation in the UK, Brexit might undermine gender equality in the more neoliberal public gender regime in Britain even further. Moreover, further research should address how exactly gender differences in demonstration participation are impacted by addressing gender issues through demonstration organisers, by gender attitudes of demonstrators, and by the (expected) level of violence at demonstrations.

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### **Endnotes**

1. We refer to the self-identification of the demonstrators as men and women.
2. Our study acknowledges and seeks to avoid ‘political racelessness’ (Bassel and Emejulu, 2017) as much as possible, but unfortunately the survey instrument does not detail individuals’ socio-demographics at a fine enough grain to enable us to measure our respondents’ minority status.
3. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment\\_statistics](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Employment_statistics) last accessed 15 September 2018.
4. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tesem180&language=en> last accessed 15 September 2018.
5. Sweden does not have an Upper House. Data from Sweden are from <https://beta.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2017-03/women-in-politics-2017>, data for the latest UK elections are from House of Commons Library (2017). Last accessed 15 September 2018.
6.  $\chi^2$  10.71\*, 95% confidence interval 0.00 lower bound, 0.00 upper bound.
7. Data was weighted equally for each demonstration issue to ensure that there were no pooling errors. In preliminary analysis, regression models were run separately for each of the five demonstrations. These revealed that different predictors were significant depending on the

protest issue. Furthermore, the Chow test (Chow, 1960) found many significant interaction effects. Both of these robustness tests suggest that pooling without corrections/weightings may have been problematic. The regression analysis we perform is conducted on the weighted data sets.

8. Fisher's Exact test significant at the 0.00 level.
9. This is despite the fact that in 2014 a higher proportion of female employees than male employees was unionised in the UK which can be explained with gender segregated labour markets.
10. Several waves of Turkish feminism can be distinguished and women have been active in the Kurdish movement (Diner and Toktas, 2010). Nevertheless, gender issues tend to be subordinated in transnational migrant activism (Mügge, 2013).

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## Tables

**Table 1: Proportion of women at demonstrations in the UK and Sweden aggregated and by issue**

	<b>Whole sample (%)</b>	<b>Labour demonstrations (%)</b>	<b>Anti-racism demonstrations (%)</b>
<b>UK</b>	37.1	33.0	40.7
<b>Sweden</b>	54.8	53.4	57.4

Notes: percentages are in rows. This table uses unweighted data.

**Table 2: Distribution of institutional politics score by country and gender**

<b>Institutional politics score</b>	<b>UK</b>		<b>Sweden</b>	
	<b>Female (%)</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Female (%)</b>	<b>Male (%)</b>
0	9.8	10.9	7.2	6.2
1	21.1	21.7	41.8	34.0
2	31.6	24.4	20.6	23.7
3	15.8	19.1	12.3	15.8
4	21.8	23.9	18.2	20.3
Totals (n)	292	241	113	230

Notes: percentages are in columns. This table uses unweighted data.

**Table 3. Mean scores for the dependent variable across country, issues and gender**

Country	Gender	Whole sample	Labour demonstrations	Anti-racism demonstrations
UK	Women	2.2	2.0	2.3
	Men	2.2	2.0	2.5
Sweden	Women	1.9	2.1	1.6
	Men	2.1	2.3	1.7

Notes: This table uses unweighted data

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics for demonstrators' participation in institutional politics across countries, with gender differences**

Country	Demonstration issue (%)	Gender	Voted (%)	Contacted politician (%)	Party membership (%)	Active in a political party (%)
UK	Whole sample	Women	80.5	60.3	42.7	33.1
		Men	72.2	62.3	52.0	37.7
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>+8.3</b>	<b>-20.0</b>	<b>-9.3</b>	<b>-4.6</b>
	Labour	Women	79.6	59.7	33.3	24.5
		Men	61.7	62.9	42.2	30.2
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>+17.9</b>	<b>-3.2</b>	<b>-8.9</b>	<b>-5.7</b>
	Anti-racism	Women	81.0	60.8	49.4	39.2
		Men	82.6	61.7	61.7	45.2
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>-1.6</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>-12.3</b>	<b>-6.0</b>
Sweden	Whole sample	Women	90.8	38.7	40.4	23.7
		Men	88.0	41.9	49.4	30.7
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>+2.8</b>	<b>-3.2</b>	<b>-9.0</b>	<b>-7.0</b>
	Labour	Women	92.9	43.2	45.9	30.1
		Men	88.1	47.5	58.1	38.8
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>+4.8</b>	<b>-4.3</b>	<b>-12.2</b>	<b>-8.7</b>
	Anti-racism	Women	87.2	31.2	28.4	12.8
		Men	87.7	30.9	32.1	14.8
		<i>% difference women to men</i>	<b>-0.5</b>	<b>+0.3</b>	<b>-3.7</b>	<b>-2.0</b>

Notes: This table uses unweighted data

**Table 5. Linear regression predicting participation in institutional politics (0-4) for combined sample and UK and Sweden separately**

	All	UK	Sweden
	Co-eff (SE)	Co-eff (SE)	Co-eff (SE)
<b>Female</b>	-0.20 (0.11)	-0.35 (0.17)*	-0.06 (0.16)
<b>Labour</b>	0.14 (0.14)	-0.64 (0.16)***	0.28 (0.16)
<b>UK</b>	0.73 (0.12)		
<b>Female*Labour</b>	0.20(0.16)***	0.34 (0.26)	0.03 (0.20)
<b>UK*Labour</b>	-0.71 (0.16)***		
<b>Controls</b>			
<b>Political interest</b>	0.73 (0.08)**	0.80 (0.13)***	0.67 (0.09)***
<b>Trust parties</b>	0.23 (.05)***	0.24 (0.07) ***	0.22 (0.06)***
<b>Age</b>	0.02 (0.00)***	0.02 (0.00)***	0.01 (0.00)***
Constant	-2.10 (0.32)***	-1.74 (0.55)***	-1.85 (0.36)***
N	844	330	844
Adj R2	0.25	0.25	0.25

Notes: we also included an interaction term of gender and country, but it was insignificant.

\* $\leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $\leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $\leq 0.001$

**APPENDIX: Variables included in the analysis, survey questions and coding**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Survey question</b>	<b>Coding</b>
<b>Dependent variable</b>		
<i>Voted in general election</i>	<i>Did you vote in the last national / general election? (May 2005 or 2010 depending on the timing of the protest)</i>	1=Yes 0=No
<i>Contacted a politician</i>	<i>There are many things people can do to prevent or promote change. Have you, <u>in the past 12 months</u> ...? Contacted a politician, government, or local government official?</i>	1=Yes 0=No
<i>Member of political party</i>	<i>If you have been involved in any of the following types of organizations <u>in the past 12 months</u>, please indicate whether you are a passive member or an active member? If you are a member of several organizations of the same type, tick the highest or most 'active' category.</i>	Originally coded: 0=not a member 1=passive 2= active. Recoded so that: 1=1 (yes) 2=1 (yes) 0=0 (no)
<i>Active in political party</i>	See cell immediately above	Recoded so that: 1=0 (yes) 2=1 (yes) 0=0 (no)
<i>Participation in institutional politics</i>	No direct survey question, computed variable.	Computed as a score of the four variables above. Range 0-4.
<b>Independent variables</b>		
<i>Female</i>	<i>Are you ...?</i>	Original coding: Male = 1 Female =2 Recoded so that: Male =0 Female =1
<i>Labour</i>	No survey question	1=Labour demonstration 0=Anti-racism demonstration
<i>UK</i>	No survey question	1= UK demonstrator 0 = Swedish demonstrator
<b>Controls</b>		
<i>Political interest</i>	<i>How interested are you in politics?</i>	Four point scale where: 1=Not at all 4=Very

***Trust parties***

*Below is a list of institutions. Please indicate, in general, how much you would say that you trust each of the following (type of) institutions...*

Five-point scale where:

1=Not at all  
5=Very much

***Age***

*Political parties.  
In which year were you born?*

Computed by subtracting year born from year of demonstration.