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Making violence against women a policy priority – The importance of sub national institutions in shaping gender policy reform: A case study of the new Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales

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Abstract

Feminist scholarship concerned with understanding the policy process addressing gender equality, such as policy reform directed at the problem of violence against women and girls (VAWG), have stressed the importance of the activities of feminist advocates in international, national and local women's movements, female representatives and femocrats inside the state as crucial for ensuring policy change. More recent scholarship drawing on feminist institutionalism has argued for the need to appreciate the way in which institutions, understood to be rules in action, structure this advocacy and the processes of policy reform across a range of arenas. A focus therefore on both actors and institutions and the way in which actors operate in rule bound settings is necessary both for the analysis of gender equality policy reform and the instrumental desire in feminist scholarship to achieve policy reform directed towards gender equality. A focus on both actors and institutions has been most recently coupled with insights from public policy analyses stressing the heterogeneity of gender equality policy reforms and consequently different trajectories of policy reform. However the focus has hitherto been predominantly on actors and institutions at the national level.

We argue that for status based policies, where the advocacy of critical executive actors is key to getting issues on decision agendas such as those addressing violence against women, it is key to focus on the relevant decision making arena. It maybe that the agencies and actors charged with enacting and implementing policies on VAWG operate at the sub national level and we argue understanding the impact of institutional arrangements is key for those seeking to improve policy reforms to address VAWG. This paper draws on feminist institutionalism literature and uses a framework for considering how gendered institutions and gendered actors are implicated in gender equality policy reform. We investigate how local police and crime commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales responded to demands for policy action on VAWG presenting qualitative and quantitative findings from a mixed methods research design. We look at the interaction between the 41 elected commissioners and the new institutional arrangements for local policing governance introduced in 2012. Early findings suggest that variability in the prioritisation of VAWG policies at sub national level is linked to actors' own gender, but also to the ways in which they engage with elements of the institutional framework, notably gender equality duties, and are connected to interlinking and pre-existing institutional arrangements including political parties.

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Introduction

Feminist scholars of politics and gender have been concerned to examine the determinants of policy change to achieve gender equality (Lovenduski, 2005; Mazur and Pollack, 2009; Gains and Lowndes, 2014). The focus has often been on the importance of the activities of international, national and local women's movements as crucial for ensuring institutional change (Weldon, 2002; Montaya, 2009; Abrar, 1996; Htun and Weldon, 2012) more recently coupled with an analytical appreciation on the institutionalised basis of reform processes in feminist institutional scholarship (Krook and McKay, 2011; McKay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010; Waylen, 2014; Raymond, Weldon et al, 2014). The contribution of public policy analyses of differing reform trajectories in different policy domains stresses the importance of understanding the heterodoxy of gender equality policy reforms. This contribution has highlighted the need to understand the differences in reform processes for class based and status based gender equality policies (Htun and Weldon, 2010). The presence of critical actors in executive positions is found to be important in getting status based issues on government agendas for example (Annesley, Engeli and Gains, 2015). This paper contributes to this body of work in arguing that as well as recognising heterodoxy in policy type, also required is a fuller appreciation of where these critical actors with executive authority are located. Existing scholarship at the national level has not fully examined gender equality policy reforms at the sub-national level. The agencies and actors charged with implementing and overseeing gender equality policies (often adapting them in the process) generally operate at either the federal or sub national level; we argue understanding these institutional arrangements is key for those seeking to improve policy reforms to address gender equality.

To examine the institutional shaping of gender equality policy reform at the subnational level we examine the policy implementation processes aimed at the 'status based' policy issue of tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG) in English sub national government. We investigate how local police and crime commissioners in England and Wales responded to demands for policy action to tackle VAWG emanating from both national and local calls for reform.

Initially we discuss the literature on policy reforms directed towards gender equality and highlight the different reform paths identified for different policy types arguing that for status based policies, a key stage in the reform process is in gaining government attention for gender equality reform, and that this is linked to the presence of women in political executives. We then examine the implementation literature which suggests that implementation processes are often affected by institutional arrangements nearer the point of delivery and we argue that some 'critical actors' are located in sub national governments.

Drawing on feminist institutionalism (Krook and Mackay, 2011) we then set out a framework for considering how gender is implicated in institutional arrangements and gendered outcomes (Gains and Lowndes, 2014). We use this framework to examine the relative importance of equalities duties, established party membership (as opposed to independent representatives) and gender of the Police and Crime Commissioner in getting VAWG on local implementation agendas and present qualitative and quantitative findings from a mixed methods research design. In conclusion we argue for an appreciation of the way in which institutional arrangements at the local level shape gender equality policy reform. More specifically, our

analysis explores the way in which gendered actors interact with institutional rules about gender and with other rules that have gendered effects even though they appear gender-neutral.

The contribution of institutional analyses and public policy scholarship in understanding gender equality policy reform

Feminist scholarship on gender and politics has been keen to examine the circumstances in which policy reforms to achieve gender equality occur, with this body of work often combining a desire to explain, with a concern to influence and improve the mechanisms at work in order to achieve improved policy outcomes (Gains and Lowndes, 2014). Scholarship has often involved the study of particular policy areas, sometimes in single country case studies, sometimes cross nationally (Mazur and Pollack). Of particular analytical focus are the transmission of ideas for reform through international norms and agreements (Raymond, Weldon et al 2014; Friedman, 2013); the link between improved female political representation and substantive policy action (Celis, Childs et al, 2008; Annesley and Gains, 2010; Atchison and Down, 2009;) and the role of bureaucratic organisations and actors such as women policy agencies for supporting reform inside government (McBride and Mazur, 1995; Banaszak, 2010; Andrews and Miller, 2013). This focus therefore has foregrounded the political behaviour of civil society actors, political representatives and bureaucratic actors in particular settings. This literature has most recently seen several developments which address both the analysis of policy reform to achieve gender equality, and the normative and instrumental aspiration to improve policy outcomes.

Firstly the development of feminist institutionalism has foregrounded the focus of analytical attention from the actions of political actors in specific political settings (such as female representatives and advocates for gender equality) in civil society, legislatures, executives and inside the state, to a more abstract (and transferrable) consideration of the ways in which institutional arrangements constrain or empower political actors. As March and Olsen note ‘the organisation of political life makes a difference’ (1984). Institutions, understood as the formal and informal ‘rules of the game’, taken together in what Ostrom (1999) describes as the ‘rules in use’, structure the allocation of roles and resources, and convey embedded although not unchanging shared norms and rules about the possibilities for political action. Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the way in which these institutional arrangements are gendered (Krook and McKay, 2011; Waylen, 2011; Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Gains and Lowndes, 2014).

The development of feminist institutionalism has sparked renewed interest in the transferability of analytical insights into how gendered institutional rules are difficult to change, the conditions when change might occur and when new norms and rules in use can be made to stick (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013; Waylen, 2014). Applying a gendered lens to institutional understandings however is fraught with conceptual difficulties. As Beckworth highlights, gender is both a category and a process (2005). Gendered outcomes, such as an increase in policies encouraging female representation, can also be seen as political determining variables for the progress of policy reform. Gender therefore can be implicated in both the dependent and independent variable in the institutional arrangements under investigation when making and investigating

policy reform processes. Responding to this challenge, Gains and Lowndes' (2014) typology specifies four dimensions for research, arguing for a focus on: rules about gender, rules with gendered effects, gendered actors working with rules, and the policy outcomes of rule bound actions. The categorisation of these different types of gendered rules (and interactions) makes it easier to specify the iterative relationships between gendered institutions at play in examining the gender policy reform process.

A second strand of gender and politics scholarship contributing to the understanding of the determinants of gender equality policy reforms develops theorising about the heterogeneity of gender equality policy reform (Mazur, 2002). Policies designed to achieve gender equality encompass a range of policy types. Some policies are aimed at supporting women in the workplace, such as childcare and maternity benefits; a related group of policies ensure equal rights in the workplace in terms of pay and pension entitlements. Other policy areas directly address women's bodily integrity such as women's health issues like breast cancer, abortion rights and reproductive rights. Other policies addressing bodily integrity include those addressing violence against women in all its manifestations including domestic violence, trafficking and sexual harassment. Htun and Weldon (2010) suggest gender equality policies predominantly fall into two categories, policies to address the class basis of gender equality demands, policies that are designed to facilitate women's economic integration through support to balance paid and unpaid work in the domestic life and these policies predominantly ensure that all women, not just rich women, are able to access and benefit from paid work. Status policies alternatively address the subordinate status of women as a group and address legal and political subordination and matters of bodily integrity such as reproductive rights and violence against women. Status policies can provoke doctrinal resistance to policy change as these types of policies challenge religious and cultural norms.

Drawing on both Mazur's and Htun and Weldon's categorisations and the agenda setting literature (Baumgartner et al 2013), more recent work has examined the problem of when national governments 'pay serious attention' (Kindgon, 1984) to gender equality reforms in five European countries (Annesley, Gains and Engeli, 2015). Recognising that gender equality reform is not a core issue on governmental agendas, the authors investigate the determinants of gender equality reaching critical decision agendas. They find that for class based gender equality reform the presence of strong left parties is important – for those reforms which extend to women, rights already granted to male employees such as equal pay and pension rights. For other class based gender equality policies such as parental leave and childcare policies, the presence of women in legislatures is linked to governmental attention to policy issues. Getting status based issues such as violence against women on government decision agendas however is more likely when women are in executive roles suggesting for these policies the advocacy of critical actors is key for these measures which may provoke doctrinal resistance.

However, in a seventy country study of the adoption of VAWG reforms Htun and Weldon find that it is the feminist mobilisation in civil society which accounts for variation in policy development (2012) although they stress their study focuses on the adoption and not implementation of policy. Thus the current research agenda for feminist scholars seeking analytical and instrumental understandings of the adoption of gender equality policy reforms focuses on the way in which political (and gendered) actors in institutional settings act to

progress (or not) a heterogeneous set of policy issues. However, whether looking at single policy areas or a range of policy areas, such work has so far focussed on either the international or national level of analysis. Yet other insights from public policy literature show that the broad intentions of policy makers at national level are generally interpreted and applied very differently through local implementation processes (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). Indeed, policy is only really ‘made’ when it is brought to life by local actors, who are charged with adapting overarching policy statements to local contexts, resource bases, political sensibilities, and previous policy legacies. Such insights challenge the very distinction between *policy making* and *policy implementation* (Lipsky, 1980). In her seminal work on the adoption of reforms tackling violence against women, Weldon makes the following plea: “the analysis of gender policy should focus more on attention and variation in the structure of public administration” and “the study of state and local government and sub-government is critical to the complete understanding of gender and public policy” (2002, 5, 21).

In later work Weldon went on to examine how feminist social movements provoked policy change on violence against women in fifty US states highlighting the political and civic organisational activity of social movement actors in achieving policy reform (Weldon, 2004). But a gap remains in terms of research on the role of political actors working within institutional settings at levels below the national or international. This paper addresses that gap by examining actors, institutional arrangements, and their interaction, at the sub national level. Examining the ways in which critical actors with executive authority at the sub national level are constrained or empowered by their institutional settings is key to understanding how status issues such as violence against women reach implementation agendas.

To do this we examine the newly established institution of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners in the England and Wales. These new actors are charged with setting policing priorities in forty one regions including policies addressing violence against women. The next section introduces the new actors and institutionalised arrangements before we discuss how we examined the determinants of policies addressing violence against women on the decision agendas of these local actors.

Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales: An institution in formation

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were first elected in November 2012 following the enactment of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2012. Elections were held in 41 police force areas across England and Wales. The creation of a directly elected public official, overseeing the work of local policing, is not only new, but also unusual, in a UK political landscape which does not have a tradition of presidential or mayoral elections. The introduction of this new office was part of a more general commitment by the incoming Coalition Government for encouraging democratic engagement with local decision making (Green, 2012). PCCs are not able to directly interfere in operational policing decisions; rather, their key role is to set the police and crime priorities for the area they serve. These priorities, published annually in a Police and Crime Plan, must reflect consultation with the public and also take account of the national UK

Home Secretary's strategic policing requirements on issues deemed to have national significance or impact. To support the priorities identified in the Police and Crime Plan, PCCs can allocate funds for specific projects and also commission Crime and Disorder Partnerships (which include other elected local actors and the third sector) to provide ancillary services (e.g. research, good practice pilots, public consultations). It is these new PCCs who have executive authority therefore in deciding which policies to prioritise (Lister and Rowe, 2014).

The new role of a Police and Crime Commissioner replaced the previous oversight of local policing by indirectly elected local Police Committees whose (nominated) membership drew from locally elected councillors. Many of the new PCCs had served on Police Committees, and others had worked in police authorities or in the criminal justice system. Police Committees did not have the same agenda setting or resource allocation powers as the new PCCs or the political authority and legitimacy which flows from their separate electoral mandate. The work of the PCCs is subject to scrutiny by newly formed Police and Crime Panels drawn from the same pool of locally elected councillors, plus co-optees from (for example) the community and voluntary sectors, the magistracy and probation service. Membership includes many panellists who previously served on the old police committees. In summary the establishment of police and crime commissioners is an example of 'layered' institutional change (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010: 15-16). There are new institutional rules supporting the election and duties of the commissioners, their relationships with other criminal justice actors and scrutiny of their work. But these new institutional arrangements 'layer' in between the existing national oversight of the Home Secretary, who has responsibility for national police policy and strategy, the pre-existing local police forces, and the elected local authorities who are the source of partnership relationships and scrutiny roles. And the actors involved in the new arrangements may have had long standing engagement with these other institutions before the formation of the PCC arrangements. We suggest that actors adapting to these arrangements are therefore learning new rules but also 'borrowing' and 'remembering' old ones (Lowndes, 2005; Lowndes and Roberts, 2013: 181).

An examination of the institutional arrangements supporting the work of PCCs is highly relevant for an exploration of how the gendered organisation of political life makes a difference. First, policing is traditionally a very male environment (Westmarland, 2002); the great majority of actors with leadership roles in the police services are men (Tickle, 2012). Indeed, only six of the forty one new PCCs are women. Second, the incidence, experience, reporting of and impact of crime is highly gendered with longstanding gender differences in rates of criminal engagement, victimhood and arrest. Home Office statistics show that, in 2012, '1.2 million women suffered domestic abuse, over 400,000 women were sexually assaulted, 70,000 women were raped and thousands more were stalked' (Home Office, 2013a). Men and boys can and do also suffer gendered violence, but most gendered violence involved male perpetrators and female victims (Home Office 2011: 1). Third, reducing violence against women and girls is one of the policing areas considered to require a national strategy and a nationally coordinated operational response (Home Office, 2012).

Acknowledging the need for a localised response, PCCs are expected to respond to the national agenda while also having the power to set local priorities and disburse funds to support these priorities, for example by funding alternatives to criminal justice approaches, supporting victims, and demanding action on the level and funding of specialised VAWG officers. The guidance for

PCCs from the Home Secretary states: 'VAWG is not a problem that can be resolved with national action alone; it needs concerted, joined-up working at a local level' (Home Office 2013b). All the new PCCs were been prompted to consider how to tackle the gendered problem of violence against women and girls (VAWG) by the national Home Office. By the second year of their establishment top down pressure for action to be taken on violence against women was maintained through the publication of a critical national report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on police responses to domestic abuse (2014). In short a constant factor throughout the two years of our analysis was top down pressure for implementation of policies to address VAWG adopted at national level. As well as this 'top down' pressure, all PCC candidates were lobbied extensively in their localities by the Women's Aid Federation of England on behalf of a national network of domestic and sexual violence services (Women's Aid, 2012).

However, at the sub national level, examining how PCCs have responded to the problem of violence against women and girls presents an empirical and analytical puzzle. Our initial analysis of the policy priorities of the PCCs taken from their websites and manifesto statements at the time of their election shows that, despite pressure to address the problem of VAWG both from the National Home Secretary and from local campaigners, only 6 of the 41 Commissioners mention violence against women and girls and only 6 mention domestic violence as one of their priorities (Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, 2012a). We argue that an examination of these new actors working with new institutional rules is important for understanding this differentiated outcome.

The section that follows describes how we operationalise our research drawing on a framework which highlights three variables rules about gender, rules with gendered effects and gendered actors working with rules. We then use this framework to establish propositions about the relationship between institutional rules and the differentiated gendered outcomes of PCCs' work. In this paper we present quantitative analysis only however our research involved qualitative methods also in a mixed methods approach.

Operationalising a framework for investigating policy reform – initial propositions, data and methods

Elsewhere we have argued that a gendered institutional analysis involves examining three dimensions when examining the gendered outcomes of rule bound action (Gains and Lowndes 2014). Firstly *rules about gender* which set out particular roles, actions or benefits for women and men. These rules about gender can be both positive, for example recent commitments in the UK political parties for gender balanced cabinet representation (Annesley and Gains, 2014). Equally rules about gender can be negative such as historic rules about the ability of married women to continue in employment, or the penalties around pension entitlements.

Secondly *rules which have gendered effects* but which are not specifically about gender. Thus rules which appear to be neutral and not appear to be directly related to gender nevertheless do have gendered effects through their relationship with wider societal institutions. For example expectations about where and when meetings are held (for instance) may disadvantage those

with caring responsibilities, predominantly women; informal rules about the appropriate age for a specific role may have gendered effects because women are more likely than men to have taken career breaks and may be older than their male counterparts when competing for the same job. Informal rules about what makes a good leader - like their physical presence or capacity for adversarial debate – may disadvantage those women who favour more low-key or collaborative styles, and also those who wish to engage in traditional leadership roles but are deemed unsuitable because of embedded assumptions about how women should behave. Formal rules for example in welfare and pension entitlement rules may have wider gendered effects because of their interaction with rules about the sexual division of labour in the home and family (e.g. in relation to childcare). As with rules about gender, deliberative action to reform, nudge or incentivise new rules can have indirect positive gendered effects. Surfacing these interactions is crucial to understanding how politics is gendered.

Thirdly an examination of *gendered actors working with rules*. Political actors design and interpret institutional rules (Hay and Winnicott, 1998) and are gendered actors who reflect a range of intersectional identities and our framework suggests that the relationship between inevitably gendered actors and their enactment of institutional rules is important to consider. Thus scholars have examined the politics of presence and the relationship assumed between descriptive and substantive representation by female representative (Phillips, 1995), as well as the role that male critical actors might play (Childs and Krook, 2009). The collective activities of political actors in networks of activists (Weldon, 2004), in political parties (Allen and Childs, 2014) or velvet triangles of bureaucrats (Banaszak, 2010; Holli, 2008) or women in government (Annesley and Gains, 2010) are also important.

Our framework recognises the difficulty of tracing causal relationships between gendered processes and the outcomes of institutional design and change. Because gender can be considered as both a dependent and an independent variable, we argue that research strategies are needed which address questions of causation in a way that recognises iterative relationships and issues of sequencing. Clarifying these relationships is necessary to build an understanding of complex processes of gendered institutional change; it is also important for those who seek to manipulate institutional design in the direction of gender equality and feminist principles.

We use this framework to consider the relationship between institutional rules (about gender and with gendered effects) and gendered actors who work with rules to identify some propositions linking these different dimensions with gendered outcomes.

Propositions linking 'rules about gender' and gendered outcomes

The most relevant 'rules about gender' for our case are those promoting gender equality, embodied in the 2010 Equalities Act (Annesley and Gains 2014). These rules give all public sector bodies, including the new PCCs, an overarching duty to get rid of unlawful discrimination, harassment and to promote equal opportunities. To fulfil this duty, and as part of the arrangements for transparency and accountability, PCCs must make available details of their office staffing including data about equalities (APPC, 2012b). The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners advises a more expansive engagement with the equality duty, suggesting that PCCs should oversee the work of Chief Constables who are required to deliver more specific

duties, namely to publish equalities information, demonstrate they have considered equalities implications in making decisions and formulating policies and practices, and publish equality objectives. PCCs must explain to the Police and Crime Panel, through their Annual Report, how they are meeting their general equality duty (APCC, 2012b).

The ability of the PCCs to fulfil equalities duties is likely to be linked to the policy capacity of their PCC office. The potential importance of a policy capacity directed towards the achievement of policies to benefit women and gender equality is highlighted by Stetson and Mazur (2011), who examine the role of women's policy agencies in the provision of policy advice and research. Women's policy agencies can provide research capacity, organise internal lobbying efforts, and provide costings and other operational information to assist with the passage of legislative and institutional change. In the UK context, Annesley and Gains (2010) show how the establishment of a women's policy agency, and the employment of special advisers, over time increased the effectiveness of feminist ministers. PCCs inherited staffing arrangements from the former police authorities but have the potential to adapt these arrangements and/or employ staff with specific policy briefs.

We anticipate that variations in how each PCC responds to their equalities duties will be linked to the likelihood of prioritising policy actions aimed at reducing VAWG. At a most basic level the equality duty can be met by reporting on the number and gender of staff in the PCCs office. Our proposition here is

- where the PCC office has a gender policy capacity through the employment of an equalities adviser then it is more likely that the plan will contain VAWG as a policy priority.

Additionally we expect that if a more expansive oversight of the Chief Constable's specific equalities duties has been undertaken (which may or may not rely on the PCC's own policy capacity), steps are more likely to be put forward to address gendered inequalities in crime, including a focus on VAWG. Therefore our second proposition is that

- where a full equalities assessment has been undertaken, and reported, PCCs are more likely to prioritise violence against women and girls in the annual police and crime plan.

Propositions linking 'rules with gendered effects' and gendered outcomes

Taking action on the problem of VAWG can challenge social norms around male privilege; as Htun and Weldon (2012, 553) note, 'it is difficult for legislators to take on social change issues without the political support of broader mobilisation'. In our case we anticipate that the arrangements for the election (and exercise of authority once in office) associated with the role of PCC are likely to have gendered consequences. In particular we anticipate that the direct election of the PCCs will have implications for deciding which policy outcomes are prioritised, due to the informal rules associated with party policies and electoral mandates. We envisage that PCCs from the established political parties are more likely to select priorities (expressed in their Police Crime Plan) which reflect their party's policy commitments, because of their relatively strong party affiliation and adherence to central policy mandates. These factors may provide the broader political support and mobilisation necessary to take on the problem of VAWG.

We propose that both the Labour and Conservative PCCs have a stronger motivation than the independent PCCs to prioritise VAWG. For Conservative PCCs this policy problem is one that is highlighted by the current Conservative Home Secretary (May, 2011). Labour PCCs are likely to be aware of a commitment by the national party hierarchy to make VAWG a policy priority and were asked to adopt a five point plan on women's safety (Baroness Royall, 8 November 2012). In contrast, the independent PCCs will not have to consider informal rules associated with partisan platforms and party loyalty when making either their manifesto promises or when forming the priorities in their Police and Crime Plan; hence they may be less likely to take on the problem of VAWG. Our proposition here is that

- independent PCCs who are not tied into national policy pledges are less likely than party candidates to prioritise violence against women and girls in the annual police and crime plan.

We also anticipate that the operational and apparently gender neutral rules which support the day to day running of the PCC office may reflect institutional arrangements from the pre PCC era (given that staff and offices, for instance, have been automatically 'inherited'). It is also likely that such the ongoing development of such rules will reflect wider social and cultural gendered institutions. These arrangements may share characteristics with the exercise of leadership in other organisations, political or otherwise, for example associated with gendered decision-making styles or networking expectations (Annesley and Gains, 2010). Qualitative research, over a longer time period, is more appropriate for investigating such rules (Gains, 2011; 2013,). Hence we are not able, in this article, to test any proposition emerging from these considerations; rather, they provide part of our future research agenda.

Propositions linking 'gendered actors working with rules' and gendered outcomes

The nature of the relationship between the gender of political actors and the achievement of improvements in the representation of women, and policies for gender quality, has been a central concern of the gender and politics literature (Lovenduski, 2005). Drawing on Pitkin's (1972) notion of substantive representation, recent scholarship has moved away from assuming an automatic link between policies to benefit women or gender equality and increases in the descriptive representation of women (for example increased numbers of women to a 'critical mass' in legislatures). The assumption that women will automatically act for women is problematized, with an acknowledgement that not all women will take this route and that male actors can also advocate for policies aimed at women or to improve gender equality. Recent literature focuses on the activities of 'critical actors' rather than assuming women will advocate for policy change (Childs and Krook, 2009). However, research findings consistently show improved outcomes for women where descriptive representation is improved, suggesting it is likely that at least some women political actors will seek to act for women either in pressurising decision makers in executives or directly through legislative activity (Annesley, Engeli and Gains, 2011). In parliamentary settings, Annesley and Gains (2010) argue for a focus on female executive actors, as these actors can access power resources to achieve policy change.

The new Police and Crime Commissioners, like other executive actors in the UK, are able to access power resources to direct at achieving policy change. They are able to claim political authority by being individually elected (albeit on a very small turnout); they control a sizeable

budget and have the ability to set local priorities. The logic of the gender and representation literature leads us to a proposition that

- female PCCs are more likely to prioritise violence against women and girls in their annual Police and Crime Plan.

The literature on executive actors also suggests that there are several factors which can enhance the capacity of executive actors to achieve their goals, notably working with other actors sharing their goals in a network of other critical actors (Holli, 2008). In the UK, research shows the importance of New Labour feminist ministers networking with other female cabinet ministers and advisers to achieve their policy goals (Annesley and Gains, 2010; and Annesley, 2010). Examining the way in which local domestic violence policies were developed in three localities, Abrar (1996) draws attention to the importance of political support and also a strong local network of advocates, including support from women's officers in local authorities and the ability to bid for funding.

PCCs have two particularly close relationships in developing and achieving their policy priorities: with the Chief Constable for their locality, and with their Deputy PCC (whom they are empowered to appoint). The evidence in the literature that the gender of key actors is important leads us to a second proposition that,

- where actors in the close network of the PCC, (like the Chief Constable or the Deputy PCC) are female, PCCs are more likely to prioritise violence against women and girls in the annual police and crime plan.

Data and Methods

To examine these propositions we drew on the publically available information on the background, activities and decisions of the PCCs' first and second year in office and the production of their first two Police and Crime Plan and Annual Reports. Biographical information was available through a data set compiled by the Police Federation (http://www.polfed.org/fedatwork/police_and_crime_commissioners.aspx) which showed gender, party, employment background and any previous political or civic experience. The 'Who's my PCC' website (sponsored by the Home Office) offered all 193 candidates, in each of the 41 areas holding elections, the chance to post a short 200 word manifesto setting out their priorities (<http://www.choosemypcc.org.uk>, accessed 25 January 2014). Once elected, the 41 successful PCCs all hosted websites providing details of their office arrangements and staffing, their consultation arrangements, and (once published) their Police and Crime Plan and Annual Report. Data on the local Chief Constable and the organisation of the Police and Crime Panels in each area (in terms of staffing and appointments) were taken from the websites for each organisation respectively.

Our concern was to examine the relationship between the institutional rules which have emerged since the creation of the PCCs and the gendered outcome of whether PCCs prioritised the issue of VAWG in their Police and Crime Plan. Each PCC faces competing demands for what

issues to prioritise in the plan for the locality as well as how to respond given the resources available. A prioritisation of the issue of VAWG in the plan not only gives a political signal to the Chief Constable that this is an issue of concern, but might also involve targeted funding for related projects and partnerships offering support for victims, or alternative treatments for offenders¹. The first Police and Crime Plans were very varied in the way in which information was presented and, in order to develop a robust indicator, different measures of what constituted a strong focus on VAWG were needed. Some Commissioners had a specific section on VAWG and mentions of VAWG were restricted to this section; this meant that they often only had a small number of 'mentions', but a clear focus on VAWG. Others did not split the Plan into sections but mentioned VAWG a large number of times throughout the Plan. To capture these differences and identify this outcome, we create a binary variable by examining three separate measures. First, for each locality we looked at whether VAWG was mentioned in the Plan; second, whether the number of mentions was above the average number of mentions; and third, whether there was a specific section on VAWG in the Plan (or one of the associated crimes covered under this heading, such as domestic violence). This compound indicator led to a possible score of 0 – 3 and those PCC Plans which scored 2 or 3 were coded 1, whilst those with a score of 0 or 1 were coded 0 to create a variable 'VAWG a priority focus'. We found that by this measure 36 of the 82 or 44% had a focus on VAWG as a priority.

To identify the influence of 'rules about gender' we created a second compound indicator which examined three separate measures to assess the extent to which PCCs exercised their equalities duties. First, we noted (yes/no) whether each PCC mentioned their equalities duties in their plan. Second, we drew on information presented on PCC websites about their office staffing arrangements in order to identify whether the PCC employed an equalities adviser (or a dedicated domestic violence adviser whom we included in this group), and therefore had a gender policy capacity. Finally, we examined whether the Annual Report commented on the incidence, or the performance of the police, in relation to the gendered nature of crime. Scoring of these measures allowed us to create a binary variable where PCCs scoring 2 or 3 were coded as 'strongly' meeting their equalities duties and PCCs scoring 0 or 1 were coded as 'weakly' meeting their equalities duties. According to this measure, 33 of the PCCs (40%) provided full equalities reporting. Party affiliation and gender of elite actors were taken from the Police Federation and PCC websites mentioned above.

Research findings

In reporting our findings we note that our small N (82) means we are not seeking to identify statistical significance in our results at this stage; rather we present descriptive statistics and

¹ In order to control for our dependent variable (having a priority focus on VAWG) being influenced by the level of VAWG in each PCC area, we created a control variable derived from Crown Prosecution Service statistics on the number of VAWG convictions (CPS, 2013) per 1,000 population in each Police and Crime Commissioner area (Office of National Statistics, Dec 2013). This showed that 17 (42%) PCC areas had a VAWG conviction rate below 1 per 1,000 population and 24 (59%) had a rate above 1 per 1,000 population. From this we created a binary variable of above 1/1,000 and below 1/1,000 and added this to the binary logistical regression model reported in findings below.

report on the relative odds of support for our propositions. We consider how we might further develop our analysis of these relationships in our conclusions.

Rules about gender

Just over half of PCCs (58%) mentioned their specific responsibilities toward promoting gender equality under the Equalities Act. However only 17% of PCCs employed either an equality policy adviser (or an adviser on VAWG), providing a gender policy capacity. Nearly a half (46%) of PCCs specifically reported on either incidence or performance in relation to VAWG in their Annual Reports. We then scored whether the PCCs were performing their gender equality duties in either a strong or weak way, which showed that 40% of PCCs had a strong focus on their equalities duties. We next examined whether the operation of these rules about gender was associated with the prioritisation of VAWG in the PCC policy priorities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Cross tabulation of PCCs with a Strong Focus on Gender Equality Duties with PCCs giving VAWG Priority in Police and Crime Plan

		VAWG priority Police and Crime Plan		Total
		No	Yes	
Strong focus on gender equality?	No	Count 32	17	49
		% 65.3%	34.7%	100.0%
equality?	Yes	Count 14	19	33
		% 42.4%	57.6%	100.0%
Total		Count 46	36	82
		% 56.1%	43.9%	100.0%

Table 1 shows that, where PCCs had a weak gender equality focus, just over a third prioritised VAWG in their Plan; in contrast, over half of the PCCs with a strong gender equality focus, had VAWG as a priority. While our small N means we are not looking to establish the statistical significance of this relationship, we note that the odds of a PCC without a strong gender equality focus prioritising VAWGs is .5 whereas the odds of a PCC with a strong gender equality focus prioritising VAWGs is 1.4. Therefore the relative odds are 5.8, meaning that PCCs with a strong gender equality focus are nearly six times as likely to prioritise VAWGs.

Rules with gendered effects

To examine the way in which the party rules and the rules of political conduct may relate to gendered outcomes we examined both the party affiliations of the PCCs and their manifesto promises. Sixteen PCCs represented the Conservative Party, 13 were Labour Party candidates and 12 (30%) stood as Independents. In the second year of our data collection there were no changes in the PCCs and the party affiliation remained the same. Examining initially whether the rules associated with party affiliation are associated with prioritising VAWG, Table 2 shows a cross tabulation of party affiliation and focus on VAWG.

Table 2: Cross tabulation of PCC Party Affiliation with PCCs giving VAWG Priority in Police and Crime Plan

		VAWG priority Police and Crime Plan		Total	
		No	Yes		
Party	Conservative	Count	17	15	32
		%	53.1%	46.9%	100.0%
	Independent	Count	15	9	24
		%	62.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	Labour	Count	14	12	26
		%	53.8%	46.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	46	36	82	
	%	56.1%	43.9%	100.0%	

Table 2 shows that only a just over a third of Independent PCCs had a priority on VAWG, a smaller percentage than either the Labour or Conservative PCCs. As our proposition is that independent PCCs would be less likely than the established party candidates to make VAWG a priority, we combined Conservative and Labour PCCs and worked out the relative odds of this binary measure (established party PCCs versus independent PCCs). Once the established party candidates are considered together, the odds of an independent PCC prioritising VAWGs is .6 whereas the odds of a PCC from the established parties prioritising VAWGs is .9. Therefore the relative odds are 1.5, indicating that party candidates are 1.5 (slightly higher than evens) as likely to make this a focus in their plan (see Table 3).

Table 3: Cross tabulation of PCCs from Established Parties and PCCs giving VAWG Priority in the Police and Crime Plan

				VAWG priority Police and Crime Plan		Total
				No	Yes	
Established Independent candidate	Count		15	9	24	
	%		62.5%	37.5%	100.0%	
party Candidate? Established party candidate	Count		31	27	58	
	%		53.4%	46.6%	100.0%	
Total	Count		46	36	82	
	%		56.1%	43.9%	100.0%	

Gendered actors working with rules

Finally we can examine whether female PCCs and other female actors in the PCCs' elite network are more likely to focus on the gendered nature of crime. Here the highly gendered nature of policing is apparent. Only 6 PCCs (14%) are female, 16 of the 39 appointed deputies (%) are female and 17 out of the 82 Chief Constables (21%) are female. Despite the number of female PCCs being so small, it is possible to see a difference in how female PCCs prioritised VAWG in Table 4.

Table 4: Cross tabulation of Gender of PCCs with PCCs giving VAWG priority in Police and Crime Plan

			VAWG priority Police and Crime Plan		Total
			No	Yes	
Female PCCs	Count		5	7	12
	%		41.7%	58.3%	100.0%
Males PCCs	Count		41	29	70
	%		58.6%	41.4%	100.0%
All	Count		46	36	82
	%		56.1%	43.9%	100.0%

The findings in Table 4 show that the odds of female PCCs prioritising a focus on domestic violence in their Police and Crime Plan was 1.4, compared with the odds of male PCCs prioritising a focus on this area of .7. The relative odds (female:male) are 2 suggesting that female PCCs were twice as likely to make this issue as a priority.

An examination of whether having a female actor in the PCC elite network (made up of the PCC, the Deputy or the Chief Constable) might help in giving a priority focus to VAWG shows that nearly half (49%) of PCC areas had a female in one of these senior roles over the two year period.

However, demonstrating the highly gendered nature of the policing arena, only 3 of the 82 areas had more than one female actor in the elite network of the PCC, making it impossible to examine the proposition at this early stage.

Assessing the relative strengths of institutional relationships

Following on from the analysis of each of the institutional variables above, we used binary logistical analysis to examine the relative likelihood of a PCC having prioritised VAWG in relation to a number of the most appropriate variables: the existence of a strong focus on equalities duties, whether the PCC is from an established party, and the gender of the PCC (Table 5 below).

Table 5: Factors associated with VAWG priority focus in Police and Crime Plan

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Strong Gender Equality Focus	.992	.473	4.395	1	.036	2.696
Established Party Candidate	.505	.521	.941	1	.332	1.657
Female PCC	.735	.655	1.257	1	.262	2.085
Constant	-1.124	.518	4.709	1	.030	.325

This analysis suggests that where gender equality duties are fully exploited the PCC is 2.7 times as likely to prioritise gendered crime in the Plan (exemplified here by a focus on VAWG), all other factors being held constant. Commissioners from established parties which have a policy commitment towards the reduction of VAWG are 1.7 times as likely as independent Commissioners (who have no such party discipline) to prioritise VAWG (holding gender equality focus and the gender of PCC constant). And female Commissioners are twice as likely as their male counterparts to make VAWG a policy priority, even holding party affiliation and gender equality capacity constant. We also checked the strength of these associations whilst controlling for the VAWG conviction rate in each PCC area. However, including this control did not change the direction of the effect of the institutional associations we identified in our analysis.

Conclusions

This paper claims that the understanding of how and when gender equality reform gets enacted is enhanced through examination of actors and institutions at the sub national level. We suggest this is particularly key when looking at status based policies where the role played by critical actors with executive powers is likely to be key in prioritising policy reforms on implementation agendas. Our analysis explores the way in which gendered actors interact with institutional rules about gender and with other rules that have gendered effects even though they appear gender-neutral.

The findings presented here are based on the analysis of the policy prioritisation of violence against women and girls by forty one police and crime commissioners over a two year period. These findings suggest variability in the prioritisation of VAWG policies at this sub national level despite the uniform pressure for reform at the national level. We find that the likelihood of this prioritisation is linked to actors' own gender with female PCCs being twice as likely to prioritise VAWG. Prioritising VAWG policies on implementation agendas is also linked to the ways in which PCCs engage with elements of the institutional framework, notably institutional rules associated with gender equality duties with those PCCs who strongly engage with gender equality duties 2.7 times more likely to prioritise VAWG in their annual policy plan. We also find policy prioritisation is connected to interlinking and pre-existing institutional arrangements such as membership of political parties with PCCs from established parties 1.7 times more likely than independent PCCs to make VAWG a policy priority.

Our future research will record data for the third year of the PCCs' operation (the final one before re-election) to test further the robustness of these relationships. Moving on from establishing the importance of local institutional factors per se, a new round of qualitative work with a sample of PCCs will enable us to look at how these factors play out in specific localities. Qualitative methods will also be of particular utility in better understanding the ways in which informal rules in use and apparently gender-neutral institutional rules shape political behaviour in gendered ways.

In conclusion we argue for a greater appreciation of the way in which institutional arrangements at the local level shape gender equality policy reform. This focus on the local level is important from a feminist institutionalist perspective for three reasons: first, because public policy involves institutional frameworks at multiple levels, which are nested together in different ways ('higher' levels may shape 'lower' levels to varying degrees); second, because it is at the local level that individual actors interpret institutional rules, adapting them to fit 'cases' and contexts; and, third, because this interpretive process is a key source of institutional change, which may operate to secure gender equality reform (through local adaptations or elaborations) or to undermine it (through the neglect or dilution of new rules). In short, a focus on the local level can extend and deepen our analysis of why gender equality reforms succeed or fail in gaining traction. Such a focus can also inform feminist strategies to support gender equality reform, illuminating the importance of local level interventions not just in civil society but also within the institutions of governance and public administration.

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