The impact of parental status on parliamentary candidate behaviour and evaluations

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Abstract

In increasingly personalised electoral contests voters use evaluations of candidates' characteristics in their vote decisions, and candidates deploy personal information about themselves which they believe convey a positive message in their communications with voters. We expand the study of candidate characteristics to include parental status, examining both the public's view of politicians with and without children and the behaviour of politicians in their communications with those they represent. We find a clear preference for candidates who are parents over those who are childless, as well as some evidence of a gendered impact of parental status on both candidate evaluations and politicians' behaviour.

Introduction

There is an increasingly large body of research examining the impact that various candidate characteristics have on voters. This literature is partial, focussing predominantly on the US and predominantly on a relatively small number of characteristics, most obviously candidate sex (Cook 1998; Dolan 1998; Dolan 2001; Dolan 2004; Paolino 1995; Plutzer and Zipp 1996; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sigelman et al. 1995; Sigelman and Welch 1984; Trent et al. 2001) and race/ethnicity (Barreto, Villarreal and Woods 2005; Brouard and Tiberj 2010; Kaufmann 2003; McDermot 1998; Sigelman et al. 1995; Sigelman and Welch 1984; Stokes-Brown 2006; Terkildsen 1992). But more recent research has begun to extend the study of candidate characteristics further, both geographically and in terms of subject area, finding other significant characteristics, including visual image (Banducci et al. 2008; Mattes and Milazzo 2014), occupation (Campbell and Cowley 2014a; McDermot 2005), age (Campbell and Cowley 2014b; Trent et al. 2010) and residency (Arzheimer and Evans 2012; Arzheimer and Evans 2014).

There is, however, little research that considers the impact that candidates' parental status may have on voter evaluations. The dearth of literature on this topic is perhaps surprising given that politicians routinely use images of themselves in domestic family settings, and the subject manifests itself in political discussion. Langer argues that politicians increasingly use aspects of their personal lives in their campaigns in order to "offer a 'human' persona" (Langer 2009: 61). The growth in politicians' deployment of their private persona to secure votes most likely results from partisan dealignment and the rise of valence politics, where candidates can place less confidence in their party label to secure their election (Holtz-Bacha 2004; Langer 2009).

The absence of work on the topic is even more surprising given the potentially significant gender dimension to how voters might respond to candidates' parental status and how the issue is often discussed in explicitly gendered terms. The Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, for example, was variously described by some of her opponents as 'deliberately barren' and 'an unproductive old cow' - phraseology that, for obvious reasons, would never be ascribed to a man - along with the claim that because she had 'chosen not to be a parent', she was 'very much a one-dimensional person'. In the UK, it was similarly reported that allies of the Prime Minister were critical of the Home Secretary, Theresa May, because she had no children, and 'her lack of family makes her look "obsessed" by politics' (*Daily Mirror*, 4 August 2014). Or, most recently of all, this example, from a would-be Scottish candidate:

> In a video pitch to local members in Stirling, she [Sarah-Jane Walls] said:
> "From a strategic point, you should also think about who we are up against.
> Johanna Boyd is 37, she lives in Dunblane, she is a mother of three, she is
> the head of Stirling Council.
> "Now, I don't want you to vote for me just because I am a woman, but from
> a strategic point of view, it will be better to have a woman up against her
> than a man.
> "We also have the fact that she is a mother, because that always looks good
> with the voters, but so am I. I have a two-year-old and I have a four-year-
> old, so I can play her on that one too" (*Sunday Herald*, 4 January 2015).

In all of these examples, being a parent is considered an electoral asset, in which women who are childless would be punished by voters. In one of the few studies to investigate the topic,

Britany Stalsburg similarly found that her respondents rated childless female candidates substantially lower than childless male candidates, mother candidates, and father candidates (Stalsburg 2010). Conversely, however, it could equally be argued that women with children would receive an electoral penalty, based on the assumption that mothers should prioritise giving childcare over paid work (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Although attitudes to traditional gender roles have changed markedly in western democracies over the last half century, women continue to make up the overwhelming majority of carers of young children and there remains a minority of the public who believe that women's place is in the home not the workplace (Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2000). It is not unknown, for example, for women candidates for office to be asked how they will combine elected office with family life, questions that are rarely, if ever, asked of male candidates (Dolan 2014: 2). From this perspective, having children may have a reverse effect on support for women candidates compared with men: for men fatherhood may be a valuable electoral asset; for women motherhood may operate as a constraint on their electability.

Such attitudes may well be mediated through party. One study analysing candidates' chances of winning in elections in the US found that Republicans were less likely to vote for women who were the mothers of young children than men who were the fathers of young children, but the reverse was true of Democratic candidates (Pew Research Center 2008). This suggests that, to the extent that attitudes to traditional gender roles are correlated with partisanship, voters' reactions to candidates' parental status may vary according to voters' party identification and candidate's party membership.

In turn, a real, or perceived, reaction of voters to candidates' parental status should influence the behaviour of politicians as they seek electoral support. In their study of political

communications in Canada, Melanee Thomas and Lisa Lambert argue that 'displays of parental status are deliberate, strategic decisions designed to simultaneously cue a candidate's party's brand and to shape their own image' (Thomas and Lambert 2013: 1). They too see parenthood as a positive electoral asset, but one in which the extent to which politicians who are parents will make reference to their children in campaign materials will vary. Those who are fathers will make prominent use of their parental status in their campaign material, viewing it as a resource to be utilised for self-promotion, but mothers will refrain from making direct reference to their children to avoid receiving a penalty for deviating from traditional gender roles. Again, however, this is mediated by party. Thomas and Lambert hypothesise that a candidate's decision to promote their parental status will also be influenced by their party membership. Male candidates from conservative parties that espouse a traditional ideological position on gender roles may be more likely to display their parental status in a bid to align themselves with the traditional family. On the other hand, conservative women politicians may be less likely to draw attention to their parental status, particularly when they are the mothers of young children for fear of violating gender norms. Thomas and Lambert found that 'the only women MPs who display pictures of their children are Conservatives with adult children, while men with young children across parties display photos and detailed information about their offspring' (Ibid: 11).

More broadly, we might expect contextual variation in the extent to which candidates' gender influences their willingness to reveal their parental status. In countries with a dominant norm that the mothers of young children should be at home (such as Germany) women politicians who are mothers may be more inclined to hide their parental status than in countries where the traditional view has subsided (Kürschner 2011). This paper draws on data from Great Britain, where there has been a considerable shift in public attitudes to mothers and paid

employment in recent years (Park et al. 2013: 115). Few of the major parties now hold explicitly traditional positions on gender roles. Since the election of David Cameron as leader of the Conservative party in 2005 five of the six main UK political parties now espouse a liberal gender ideology, and almost all are committed to seeing an increase in the number of women MPs, even if they differ in the seriousness with which they take the issue.[1] The 2010 election saw a record-high number of women elected to the House of Commons, but they still constitute a minority, at some 21%.

This paper reports two studies that examine the relationship between parenthood and politicians. We assess both whether the public view politicians differently if they have children and which MPs are more or less likely to hide details of their families from the public. We find a clear preference for candidates who are parents over those who are childless, as well as some evidence of a gendered impact of parental status on both candidate evaluations and politicians' behaviour.

Hypotheses

We report two studies examining the relationship between parenthood and politicians. In Study 1, we use experimental survey data to assess whether the public view politicians differently if they have children. In study 2, we then use observational data to examine which MPs are more or less likely to hide details of their families from the public. We test six hypotheses, drawn from the above discussion, three relating to voters, three relating to politicians.[2]

Voters

H1: Voters will react positively to politicians with children

H2. Voters will react negatively to women politicians without children

H3: Supporters of conservative parties will have a preference for women politicians without children.

Politicians

H4: Politicians with children will make reference to them in material for external consumption.

H5: Male politicians with children will be more likely to make references to their children than women politicians with children.

H6: Women politicians with young children will be less likely to make references to their children than women politicians with older children.

Study 1: Voters on politicians

In our first study, we examined the public's reaction to politicians with or without children (hypotheses H1 to H3). We used a survey experiment to create a low-information environment where respondents had to compare two politicians and choose which one they would prefer to be their representative. Experimental methods are becoming increasingly popular in political science (Birch and Allen 2011; Druckman et al. 2006; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; Rosenberg and McCafferty 1987; Sanbonmatsu 2002). They offer the opportunity to model hypothetical scenarios giving us insights into the priorities of citizens not possible with conventional survey or observational data.

We ran a split-sample internet survey with YouGov. All the respondents were drawn from the YouGov Plc UK panel of some 350,000+ adults who have agreed to take part in such surveys, with respondents weighted by the polling company to be a representative cross-sample of the country. Each survey involved respondents reading two short profiles about

hypothetical politicians, and then deciding which of the two politicians they preferred. The context was pared back to one where biographical information about the politician was the only material available to respondents. We sought to give each characteristic the maximum chance of having an impact on preference without introducing another layer of complexity by interacting with political party. As Mutz noted: 'Needless complexity seldom makes for better experimental research' (Mutz 2011, 125). Following Sanbonmatsu, our research design included profiles of two politicians (Sanbonmatsu, 2002), initially described as follows:

> Please read these two short profiles of potential parliamentary candidates.

> John Burns is 48 years old, and was born and brought up in your area, before going to University to study for a degree in Physics. After university John trained as an accountant, and set up a company ten years ago; it now employs seven people. John has interests in the health service and the environment. He is married.

> George Mountford is 45 years old. He lives in the constituency and studied English at University. He is a solicitor and runs a busy local practice. George is passionate about education and pensions. He is married.

In addition to asking which candidate the participants would prefer as their MP we asked them to compare the candidates on three traits. There are a very large number of candidate traits used in the academic literature that might be included, including (but not limited to): 'competence', 'experience', 'strength', 'leadership ability', 'effectiveness', 'integrity', 'honesty', 'morality' 'trustworthiness', 'compassion', 'warmth', 'approachability' and

'likeableness' (Bartels 2002; Johns and Shephard 2008; McDermot 1998; Miller, Wattenberg and Malanchuk 1966; Miller and Shanks 1996; Peterson 2005; Rosenberg and McCafferty 1987). We examined the impact of cues on three candidate traits: approachability, experience, effectiveness.[3]

Each screen concluded with the following questions:

Without knowing which party they stand for, which of them do you think would be:

More approachable as an MP: [Response options: John Neither George]

More experienced as an MP: [Response options: John Neither George]

More effective as an MP: [Response options: John Neither George]

Which would you prefer as your MP: [Response options: John Neither George]

We then manipulated the biographical information in two ways, changing both the sex and the number of children involved for both candidates; this resulted in eight variations in total. Approximately half of respondents saw 'John' and 'George' (as above); in the remainder George became 'Sarah'. The change in name (and consequential changes, such as pronouns) aside, the profiles remained otherwise identical. We also changed the number of children that each of our hypothetical candidates had. The four variants were: no mention of children; both with two children; John with no mention of children and George/Sarah with two children; John with two children and George/Sarah with no mention of children. The experiment is thus constructed to allow us to compare gender effects, parenting effects, and the interaction between the two.

Respondents were polled on 8-11 June 2014. Randomisation was conducted by the survey company. Total sample size, across the four days, was 5816, with sub-sample splits as listed in Table One below. Sub-samples ranged in size from 700 to 758 respondents. Any comparison of two sub-samples thus draws on a sample of more than 1400, easily large enough to draw robust conclusions.

TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE

TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE

Table two (below) shows the scores from the question about which candidate respondents preferred overall. The percentage selecting John varied between 29 and 41%, depending on the biographical information shown, with the percentage selecting George/Sarah ranging between 23 and 34%. Whatever the variant, there were a sizeable number who were unable to choose (of between 36 and 41%). In general, John was the more popular of the candidates, usually being preferred to George/Sarah, but not always, and the size of the lead varied from 18 percentage points down to one scenario where Sarah was the favoured candidate by five points. We are not interested in why John is broadly the more popular candidate; what matters to us are the variations that occur when we alter the biographical information shown to respondents.

In each of the four scenarios above, John's lead was smaller when facing Sarah than when facing George (that is, comparing variants 1 v 5, 2 v 6, 3 v 7, and 4 v 8), but the effect on that lead of any or all of the candidates having children was mostly not statistically significant. The net effect of having children on candidate preference is calculated by using the scenario where neither candidate has children as the baseline; for example when George is described as having two children and John no children (variant 3) George gains eight percentage points

when compared to the scenario where neither have children (variant 1). Using this method, and averaging across the four scenarios with children, the average net gain from having children is a non-trivial seven percentage points. The biggest change from the baseline - and the only statistically significant effect - occurred when the male candidate had children and the female candidate did not.

We now turn to the three underlying traits: approachability, experience, effectiveness. Table Three shows the results from the question about how approachable the candidates seem.

TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE

These results show a similar pattern of findings to Table 2. The total net effect of having children on approachability was 9 percentage points. This time, however, there were two statistically significant differences -- in both cases where one candidate had children and the other did not. And again, the biggest single effect was when John has children and was facing a female candidate (variant 8).

TABLE FOUR ABOUT HERE

Respondents clearly found it harder to choose which of the candidates was more experienced: for all eight variants (in table four above) the majority selected the 'neither' option. Yet of those who were able to select a candidate, the pattern was broadly similar, if smaller in magnitude, to that seen in Table 3 and 4. The point at which John did best was when he had children and his rival did not. Sarah did best when she had two children and John did not. The average net effect of having children was four and a half percentage points, just more than half the average net effect on approachability. And again, the largest deviation from the

baseline comes with variant 8, when the male candidate with children was facing a female candidate without children. Note that for each variant John was considered more experienced when compared to Sarah than when compared to George, in the same way (in table three above) that John is considered less approachable when compared to Sarah rather than George. This is an identical pattern to that noted by Campbell and Cowley (2014b), in which otherwise identical candidates are considered less experienced but more approachable if they are women than if they are men.

Next we consider effectiveness (Table 5). We again find high levels of respondents who selected neither candidate, with a net effect of approximately three and a half percentage points. And there is not a statistically significant difference between several of the sub-samples. Again, however, the largest net effect is when the male candidate had children and was facing a female candidate without children.

TABLE FIVE ABOUT HERE

We thus find clear evidence that voters think more highly of politicians with children when compared to politicians who do not (H1). Of the 16 results testing a candidate with children against one without, there is a positive effect in 14 cases, which was statistically significant in six cases. But we also find some evidence that women without children are less attractive when compared to a male candidate with children (thus providing some confirmation to H2).[4] In all four tables - measuring approachability, experience, effectiveness, and overall preference - the result for the male candidate with children v the female candidate without - shows a statistically significant advantage for the man.

Finally, we examine whether these findings vary by the respondent's ideological position. We split respondents into two broad groups: those who intend to vote for parties seen as being on the left of the mean point on the ideological spectrum, and those on the right. We exclude non-GB wide parties as well as those on the ideological extremes. Our left group therefore includes voters who support Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens, whilst our right group includes those who support either the Conservatives or UKIP. This creates two broadly equal-sized groups, of just over 2000 respondents each.[5] As is clear from Table 6, these two groups behave differently to one another. For one thing, all four of the 'Sarah' options are more popular with those on the left than those on the right. Indeed, although Sarah often led John amongst the full sample, amongst those on the right she is behind in all four variants of the profiles. Women candidates do less well with voters on the right, whatever their parental status. Of more interest to us here, however, are the variants within each group. We find no evidence that voters on the right are less likely to prefer women politicians without children than voters on the left. The net positive effect of having children is slightly smaller for the woman candidate among both left and right leaning voters. When George has children he gains five percentage points over John and when Sarah has children she gains one percentage point over John among left leaning voters- a difference of four percentage points. Among the right-leaning voters George gains six percentage points over John when he has children and Sarah gains three percentage points; a difference of three percentage points.

TABLE SIX ABOUT HERE

Study 2: MPs on their families

Our second study examines how British MPs present themselves, and the extent to which they do or do not present information about their children. For data, we utilise British MPs'

websites. The days when it was 'weird to be wired' are now long gone. The vast majority of British MPs now have their own website, and almost all of these have a section entitled 'About' or 'Biography' or similar, in which the MP provides information about themselves, their background, their beliefs and so on. There is no standard format to this material. Some MPs provide only very cursory information, others are much more detailed. Some talk solely about their political beliefs or careers, some focus on their personal background; most talk about some mix of the two. Importantly for our purposes, some talk about their families, others do not; some utilise photographs of their families, others do not. The most important point about such websites is that the MP can choose how they present this information. Subject to almost no constraints, they can choose what to reveal and what to omit. Their websites therefore present the MP as they want you to see them.

We have chosen to compare MPs' rather than candidates' websites because candidates are only in place during election campaigns and vary considerably in quality based on seat marginality and the likelihood of the candidate winning the seat as more resources tend to be expended by parties in its target seats. Moreover, women candidates are also more often placed in unwinnable seats which would introduce bias into our data. By comparing existing MPs we are therefore considering a more homogenous group.

Of the 650 MPs in the House of Commons, in April 2014 we found 604 (that is, 93%) who had their own websites.[6] We include in this group MPs who do not have a personal site but where there was a considerable section about the MP on a local party site (and where in many such cases, it is fairly obvious the site is essentially focussed on the MP).[7] In another 27 (4%) cases, we found MPs who had no individual or local website, but where there was a profile hosted on a national or regional party website.[8] Such profiles still seemed to exhibit

considerable variation in content, but because it is possible that MPs have less freedom over the content of such sites (and certainly less control over issues of presentation) we analysed these separately (although, in practice, the differences appear to be negligible). Below we report findings from the 97% of MPs with some web presence, but the difference between the 97% group and the 94% was never larger than 1% in any of the statistics reported below. This leaves just 19 MPs (3%) who have no web presence. Most of these are older MPs, nearing retirement (although even in this group a handful use some other form of web-based media, such as Twitter or Facebook).

It is worth reiterating that we are not interested in biographical information per se. We can find biographical data on these MPs from other sources – such as the *Times Guide to the House of Commons*, or similar. We are not interested in the data themselves or how MPs are portrayed in reference works with standardised formats. The focus here is on how the MP has *chosen* to be portrayed in information he or she has provided and where he or she has control over its content. Of the 631 MPs with some web presence, 292 (46%) make some reference to their own children, 339 (54%) do not. Another 13 have some additional reference to parenthood, but with no explicit reference to children. To give some indicative examples:

John and his wife Susan live in his Lincolnshire constituency and have two young sons.

Heather has lived in Bretby for the last 22 years with her husband and daughter

Elizabeth is married with two daughters

He is married to Michelle and is the proud father of three daughters.

I live in South Devon with my husband Adrian and we have 3 children, all at university.

Photographs, however, are much less common: just 27 (4%) have pictures of their children (where their identity is either explicitly labelled or obvious).

A basic descriptive analysis of the data shows that of those MPs with websites, 34% of women and 50% of men mention their children in their personal website, and 1% of women compared with 5% of men include pictures of their children. This apparent sex gap may occur because women disproportionately 'hide' their children but it is equally plausible that women MPs simply have fewer children. Indeed, recent British research has demonstrated that women members of Parliament are more often childless than their male colleagues: 45% of women sitting in the House of Commons in 2013 had no children compared to 28% of men (Campbell and Childs Online first).

In order to control for this, we draw on a 2013 survey of MPs which identified 426 MPs with children of which 403 had their own website.[9] We merged these data with the data on websites and re-examined the self-presentation of MPs, this time focussing just on those MPs that we knew had children. Of those MPs who we know have children 66% have some mention of those children on their website (Supporting H4), but there is now no statistically significant difference between men (67%) and women MPs (62%) (counter to H5).[10] There is, however, a difference in the proportion of men and women of putting up a picture of their children. Of those MPs with children, some 6% had a photograph of one or more of their children on their website. Of women MPs, the figure was 1%, of men MPs it was 8%, a statistically significant difference (p<0.05) (providing some weak support for H5).[11] Even this difference, however, still means that whilst male MPs more often used a photograph of their children on their website, very few did so.[12]

We can now move to consider hypothesis six: that women representatives with young children will be less likely to make references to their children than women representatives with older children. The 2013 survey gave us the date of birth of the eldest child of 201 MPs, which serves as a proxy for having young children (albeit with some error where there is a substantial age gap between an MP's children). Table Seven demonstrates that both men and women MPs were more likely to mention their children on their website when their eldest child was under sixteen years old than when their eldest child was over sixteen.[13] Men with children under sixteen more often mentioned their children than women with young children but (albeit with a relatively small sample size) the difference is not statistically significant.

TABLE SEVEN ABOUT HERE

We therefore find support for H4, in that the majority of politicians with children, both male and female, do mention them in their material. The initially large difference between male and female MPs in the extent to which they do this – with women less often referring to their children on their websites - is mostly because British women politicians are less likely to have children. Once we control for that, much of the difference largely disappears. The only statistically significant difference that remains –the higher proportion of male politicians with photographs of their children on their website –applies to a very small percentage of MPs. We thus find only partial support for H5. We can reject H6, as we found no statistically significant difference in the mentions of young children by gender.

Discussion and conclusion

Children are an electoral advantage - and it would appear that British politicians know that.

In study one, we found clear evidence that politicians with children tended to receive higher evaluations than those without. The boost the hypothetical candidates in our survey received was not massive, but neither was it trivial. This experimental effect is likely to be maximal given that our participants lacked other important information about the candidates, such as their party allegiance (and that, in real world contests, many voters will not know about the parenting status of their candidates). However, in tight electoral districts or leadership contexts this small advantage may be electorally significant.

Moreover, given the high proportion of MPs who are parents who make reference to their children in their websites, as we showed in study two, we suspect they are intuitively aware of the advantage that this gives them.

But the effects are not uniform. In particular, we found that women politicians without children are punished more for their lack children than male politicians in a similar position. Again, the effect of this is not massive, but it is consistent, and could matter in close electoral races.

We find that men and women politicians basically behave identically, with women MPs more or less likely to deploy information about, their families than men MPs. Initial appearances of gender differences are due to the differential nature of politicians' parental status. Once that is controlled for, almost no differences remain. The only remaining difference is that of utilising photographs, but this relates to a very small sample of both men and women. It is plausible that in other contexts, where gender stereotypes and attachment to traditional gender roles are more prevalent in society, a gap between men and women

politicians' willingness to identify themselves as parents might exist, but there is no evidence that there is such a gender divide currently in the UK.

Figures and Tables

Table 1: Experimental manipulations

Variant	Sex and parenthood information	N
1	Both men	720
2	Both men with two children	715
3	Both men; George with two children	700
4	Both men; John with two children	747
5	Man and woman	729
6	Man and woman, with two children	739
7	Man and woman; Sarah with two children	708
8	Man and woman; John with two children	758

Table 2: Preferred candidate

Variant		John	George	Neither	John lead	Net effect of having children
1	No mention of children	37	23	40	+14	
2	Both have two children	41	23	36	+18	
3	George has two children	33	27	41	+6	+8
4	John has two children	41	23	36	+18	+4
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	30	32	39	-2	
6	Both have two children	31	30	39	+1	
7	Sarah has two children	29	34	38	-5	+3
8	John has two children	37	26	37	+11	+13**

Data weighted by YouGov's standard survey weight
**Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.01 level Chi Square test

Table 3: Approachability

Variant		John	George	Neither	John lead	Net effect of having children
1	No mention of children	38	22	41	+16	
2	Both have two children	42	21	37	+21	
3	George has two children	34	27	40	+7	+9
4	John has two children	45	19	36	+26	+10*
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	27	33	40	-6	
6	Both have two children	29	30	41	-1	
7	Sarah has two children	26	37	37	-11	+5
8	John has two children	35	28	37	+7	+13**

Data weighted by YouGov's standard survey weight
**Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.01 level Chi Square test
*Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.05 level Chi Square test

Table 4: Experience

Variant	John	George	Neither	John lead	Net effect

Variant		John		Neither	John lead	of having children
1	No mention of children	21	24	54	-3	
2	Both have two children	25	23	52	+2	
3	George has two children	23	23	53	0	-3
4	John has two children	28	23	50	+5	+8*
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	26	21	53	+5	
6	Both have two children	27	20	53	+7	
7	Sarah has two children	25	22	53	+3	+2
8	John has two children	33	17	50	+16	+11**

Data weighted by YouGov's standard survey weight

** Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.01 level Chi Square test

*Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.05 level Chi Square test

Table 5: Effectiveness

Variant		John	George	Neither	John lead	Net effect of having children
1	No mention of children	28	25	47	+3	
2	Both have two children	33	23	44	+10	
3	George has two children	26	25	49	+1	+2
4	John has two children	31	24	45	+7	+4
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	25	30	46	-5	
6	Both have two children	26	23	50	+3	
7	Sarah has two children	28	28	45	0	-5
8	John has two children	32	24	44	+8	+13**

Data weighted by YouGov's standard survey weight

**Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.01 level Chi Square test

Table 6: Preferred candidate, by left-right position

Variant		John	George	Neither	John lead	Net effect of having children
LEFT						
1	No mention of children	43	26	31	+17	
2	Both have two children	41	26	34	+15	
3	George has two children	37	25	38	+12	+5
4	John has two children	40	24	36	+16	-1
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	28	32	40	-4	
6	Both have two children	30	36	34	-6	
7	Sarah has two children	31	36	34	-5	+1
8	John has two children	41	28	32	+13	+17**
RIGHT			George			
1	No mention of children	36	26	38	+10	
2	Both have two children	47	23	30	+24	

3	George has two children	37	33	31	+4	+6
4	John has two children	43	26	31	+17	+7
			Sarah			
5	No mention of children	36	32	32	+4	
6	Both have two children	38	27	35	+11	
7	Sarah has two children	32	33	35	+1	+3
8	John has two children	41	28	31	+13	+9

Data weighted by YouGov's standard survey weight
**Difference between sub-samples significant at the 0.01 level Chi Square test

Table 7: Mentions of children by MP's sex and age of eldest child

	Age of eldest child	Children not mentioned	Children mentioned	Total
Women	Over 16	16 (46%)	19 (54%)	35 (100%)
	Under 16	6 (35%)	11 (65%)	17 (100%)
Men	Over 16	30 (32%)	64 (68%)	94 (100%)
	Under 16	11 (20%)	44 (80%)	55 (100%)

N=201

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[1] The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) represents something of an exception to this gender consensus; the party's leader, Nigel Farage, has provoked controversy by suggesting that women who want to succeed in the financial sector would be better off if they remain childless, a sentiment that sets him apart from the leaders of the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the Greens as well as Plaid (in Wales) and the Scottish National Party (in Scotland).

[2] Our sample becomes too small to test a plausible seventh hypothesis: that Conservative women politicians with young children will make fewer references to their children than other women representatives with young children.

[3] We have similarly used this approach elsewhere and the trait measures produced meaningful variation in responses.

[4] Our study design does not allow us to compare the performance of a female candidate without children up against a female candidate with children.

[5] The remaining 1300 or so are don't votes, won't says, and the supporters of minor parties.

[6] The urls of such sites are themselves a potential study, covering such variation as the vast array of domains (such as .co.uk, .com, .org, or, in the case of Sinn Fein, .ie), the decision to include titles or not (such as www.sirgeorgeyoung.org.uk or www.stephentwiggmp.co.uk or www.drsarah.org.uk), and to those not named solely after the MPs (such as www.workingforwalthamstow.org.uk or www.fromtelfordfortelford.com or www.caroline4gosport.co.uk).

[7] See, for example, www.middorsetlibdems.org.uk (which describes itself as 'Annette Brooke's website) or www.camborneredruthconservatives.com ('Camborne, Redruth & Hayle Conservatives and your local MP George Eustice').

[8] See for example,

www.conservatives.com/OurTeam/Members_of_Parliament/McLoughlin_Patrick.aspx or

www.welshlabour.org.uk/mps/albert-owen-mpas/ or www.snp.org/people/angus-macneil.

[9] AUTHOR NAMES REDACTED conducted a six-question survey of all British MPs in the

spring 2013. The survey was supported by the Speaker of the House of Commons and the

Commons' Diversity and Inclusion Unit. The six survey items for MPs were: party,

biological sex, number of children, children's date of birth, MP's date of birth and MP's year

of election to Westminster. In total 210 completed surveys were returned, a healthy response

rate of 32 per cent. The dataset was then 'topped up' through public sources such as the

parliamentary record website and personal webpages. This created a complete dataset of 647

MPs for many of our survey items, with the exception of the date of birth of MPs' oldest

child (children's birth dates are rarely recorded in the public domain). See ARTICLE

INFORMATION REDACTED.

[10] In addition, we ran a binary logistic regression on whether MPs mentioned their children

on their website and there was no statistically significant effect of MPs' sex on the likelihood

of mentioning their children. There was a small statistically significant relationship between

age and mentioning children, with older MPs less likely to do so, most likely because older

MPs more often have adult offspring and are not actively involved in parenting.

[11] Only one woman MP used a photo of her child on her website, which prohibited

regression analysis.

[12] Of the same group, men were also more likely to use a photograph of a partner than

women (4% v 10%), but this difference was not statistically significant.

[13] This could be for a variety of reasons: older children may be less willing to take part (or at

least more able to refuse to participate) in photo opportunities; older children may be

considered less of an electoral asset; or it could just be that children are a larger part of one's identity when they are younger.