

[00:00:18.630] - [VO]

On the Engender, Scotland's Feminist Policy podcast.

[00:00:23.090]

[Jingle]

[00:00:27.950] - Alys Mumford

Hello and welcome to On the Engender, Scotland's Feminist Policy podcast. I'm your host, Alys Mumford, and I am here with Engender's Executive Director, Emma Ritch. Hi Emma.

[00:00:36.740] - Emma Ritch

Hi.

[00:00:37.760] - Alys Mumford

And our Policy and Parliamentary Manager, Eilidh Dickson. Hi, Eilidh.

[00:00:41.270] - Eilidh Dickson

Hello.

[00:00:42.770] - Alys Mumford

We are talking today about the election. The election happened last week. We are recording this on the 11th. So but before we dive into that, let's talk about some things that have been making us happy. Some good things this week. Emma, what's good for you?

[00:00:59.780] - Emma Ritch

Mine is very election related, I'm sorry, Alys. But I just thought it was so-

[00:01:04.890] - Alys Mumford

On brand, I love it.

[00:01:04.890] - Emma Ritch

So, so cheering yesterday to see all the enthusiasm of the new MSPs going into Parliament [Sounds of agreement]. There was a real first day of school vibes, there were a lot selfies being taken. But really I think some massive enthusiasm for getting to work on the business of the nation, which was just quite cheering after an election campaign, which felt a bit flat because of obviously the public health measures we're all still taking.

[00:01:29.390] - Alys Mumford

For sure. Yes, that was very adorable. Some very nice photo thread's on Twitter of people being dropped off with lunchboxes, which I enjoyed a lot [Laughter]. Mine is not remotely election related, except it sort of is because I have a little bit more free time now the election is over, in that I finally caved and bought a Switch, an Nintendo Switch -

[00:01:49.220] - Eilidh Dickson

Alys, is yours Animal Crossing?

[00:01:52.170] - Alys Mumford

No, no, [Laughter] people will hate me for this, but I can't really get into it, it's too - there's too much walking around and talking to people. I could do that in my own life. I have been playing a lot of Mario Kart, because I can't do that in real life

[00:02:05.120] - Emma Ritch

Always a good choice.

[00:02:07.210] - Alys Mumford

And Luigi's Mansion 3, because I can't suck up ghosts with a vacuum cleaner in real life. And also last night I played for the first time, Ring Fit Adventure, where you have to go and defeat a dragon with

fitness poses [Laughter]. It's amazing, Eilidh you'd love it. It's so much better than Yoga with Adrienne [Laughter]. Anyway, Nintendo Switch. That's been my good thing. Very indulgent, sorry, but I love it.

[00:02:31.340] - Emma Ritch

Can recommend Tetris 99, although it's like obviously very old now, but yeah. Absolutely.

[00:02:37.280] - Alys Mumford

Excellent, thank you. Noted. Eilidh, have you got a good thing?

[00:02:41.810] - Eilidh Dickson

Honestly, I knew this was going to happen because all I've done is read election coverage, and watch election coverage, or play Animal Crossing on our Nintendo Switch.

[00:02:51.176] - Multiple voices

[crosstalk 00:02:51] - both of the two things!

[00:02:52.580] - Alys Mumford

Oh, that's exciting.

[00:02:53.770] - Eilidh Dickson

Yeah, we got one, we got one recently as well.

[00:02:57.510] - Alys Mumford

Don't be sorry, we could play! Very exciting.

[00:03:01.130] - Eilidh Dickson

I don't understand how technology works, so I'm well up for playing with Animal Crossing / Dragon fighting.

[00:03:08.960] - Alys Mumford

We could make a feminist island on animal crossing. Is that how it works?

[00:03:11.690] - Eilidh Dickson

There you go.

[00:03:13.510] - Alys Mumford

We can invite people to our feminist - we could basically make - what's the island in Wonder Woman? Make that.

[00:03:18.890] - Eilidh Dickson

Yeah, yeah.

[00:03:20.120] - Alys Mumford

I'm sure someone has already made that on Animal Crossing.

[00:03:21.800] - Eilidh Dickson

But there can be another. So, those were going to be, honestly, those were going to be either one of my two things [Laughter]. The other good thing I guess, is that I've been able to get out and see friends, now that restrictions are easing slightly in Scotland.

[00:03:35.030] - Alys Mumford

That is very true.

[00:03:35.900] - Eilidh Dickson

Yeah.

[00:03:36.590] - Alys Mumford

Oh, now I feel bad that I said no, sitting inside and playing computer games is my good thing, rather than seeing friends and loved ones. But you're right. That is good.

[00:03:46.130] - Eilidh Dickson

So I feel like I've got packed agendas at the weekends for the next couple of weeks. So we're taking my friends' soon to be three year olds, they're going to the zoo for their birthday. I hope they don't hear this! So we're going to the zoo on Saturday [Laughter]. So I'm very pleased to be allowed out, just a little bit.

[00:04:02.510] - Alys Mumford

Excellent. So on to more good things. Democracy. Yay! On May the 6th, or before that, if you had a postal vote, Scotland went to the polls to elect our new Members of the Scottish Parliament, or MSPs. So our last podcast, we were looking ahead to the election before the polls. And so we're back today to talk about what the results mean for women in Scotland, now that we know what's happened. So first off, we're going to talk about representation, and the headline figure being that now 45 percent of our MSPs are women. Is this good news, Emma?

[00:04:37.460] - Emma Ritch

Yeah, it's good news. I mean, it's not as good news as if there were 50 percent of -[Laughter]

[00:04:42.590] - Alys Mumford

Give me something, Emma!

[00:04:45.260] - Emma Ritch

But absolutely, and I think that many organisations, including Engender, Women 5050, the original 5050 campaign around devolution, can really pat themselves on the back for encouraging parties to take the action that made this result possible. And we also saw a bit of an intersectional approach being taken by some parties. So the SNP were putting disabled people and people of colour at the top of lists. And we have seen the first two women of colour elected, the first BME candidate outside Glasgow, the first party to have more women than men, the first permanent wheelchair using member of the Scottish Parliament. So some exciting barriers being broken down, but I think on the kind of more tempered side of our enthusiasm for this advance, we should note that often backlash comes after a step forward, parties can lose the kind of imperative to take these important steps, if they feel that they've completed the job. And we've often seen within political representation, kind of waves of progress followed then by steps backwards. So, still a lot of ball to keep our eye on.

[00:05:57.880] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, absolutely. We can't forget as well that, you know, we discussed it in the last episode that we saw lots of women decide not to re-stand last time, because of things they cited about difficulties of combining childcare responsibilities with being a parliamentarian, with toxic online misogyny. So basically, new women in Holyrood, we've got your back [Laughter]. Parties - the job is not done. So, you know, when we're talking about representation, and you know, we talk a lot about needing to get more women in decision-making roles, and we often have to remind folks that it's not just so that the photos look gender-balanced. It's not just about the numbers. Why is it good that we have more women in Holyrood?

[00:06:43.100] - Emma Ritch

Well, all of the evidence tells us that if you have women around the table, the conversation changes. And so women are much more likely, just because of the knowledge of their own lives, to be interested in talking about things like violence against women, like maternal health care. So it really, like having different viewpoints means that there's better quality legislation, there's richer conversations in committees. There's just more of an understanding, I suppose, that Scotland is crafting legislation for Scotland's people. But in a very practical way, because parties are somewhat attentive to the gender balance, having more women means more balanced committees, but also less work for individual women, because parties were often keen for committees to have some women around the table, which really just increased the workload for those who were very much a minority within their party. The jury is kind of out on culture change and whether women significantly shift the

culture and some of those arguments end up being a bit essentialist. You know, women are just naturally nicer, or women are more cordial and convivial. But actually, Parliament has traditionally worked very strongly cross-party on women's equality and rights. And so we've seen parties come together on violence against women, on period poverty. So, yeah, in terms of what Scotland has seen with women's representation, I think it's definitely fair to say that the women of the Scottish Parliament, historically have made a difference on women's equality and rights.

[00:08:12.370] - Alys Mumford
Hurrah!

[00:08:14.620] - Eilidh Dickson
And I think as you were saying before, Alys, we did see women who stood down at the last election citing the kind of political culture, and the institutional way of working. And I really hope that there's a way we can kind of harness this more representative group of MSPs, and look at some of the institutional mechanisms that need to change within Parliament, things like sitting hours and access to childcare.

[00:08:36.400] - Alys Mumford
Yeah, absolutely. And it was talked about a lot during the campaign, certainly at Engender's hustings, but also throughout. Women standing were quite outspoken about about that. So I'm really hoping that continues. And without the pressure of needing to say you're better or different than another party, you know, you can outwith election sort of, to actually work together as women across Parliament.

[00:09:01.090] - Emma Ritch
Yeah, and Eilidh makes such a good point about structural change. So we, from the last Parliament, we've kind of lost Aileen Campbell, Jenny Marra, Gail Ross, all younger women who had plenty of ideas still, energy, political savvy. And what women MSPs talked to us about is, the misogyny that they experience, but also work-life balance. How do you be a whole person when you work in politics and there's so much pressure on your day and on your time? And I guess that goes particularly in Scotland, where things like transport that we talk about a lot in terms of women's lives, that really affects whether you can be an MSP, like bobbing back and forwards to Edinburgh. If you can't get home, then to your rural constituency and see your kids then, what kind of whole life you have?

[00:09:48.640] - Alys Mumford
Yeah, absolutely. So we talked there a little bit about, sort of, gender-balancing in committees, and we spoke right at the top of the episode about the first day of school vibes. So what actually happens now to ask a silly question, Eilidh, the MSPs are ready, they get sworn in this week. Is the business of Parliament already happening? What's going on?

[00:10:09.850] - Eilidh Dickson
It takes a lot longer, I think, than people expect it to, actually. So we - I don't know when this is going out, but currently Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, this week, up to Thursday, the 13th of May, we have member induction, which is when the new MSPs, as you say, will turn up at Parliament and we have all those first day of school vibes, they're getting their training, they're getting assigned their offices, all of that sort of thing is going on at the moment. And then 13th of May, it's going to be the first formal day of the new Parliament, where we have the swearing in, and we'll also have the presiding officer elections in the afternoon. So that's actually a really big, important moment. And only from that point on, do we really start getting into the formal business Parliament. So we'll have Deputy Presiding Officer elections probably Friday, the 14th of May. None of this - all of this has to be confirmed, as I say, when we have the Parliament actually sitting.

[00:11:00.300]
Eilidh, just asking for a friend, what does the Presiding Officer do?

[00:11:05.250] - Eilidh Dickson
So the Presiding Officer oversees the business of the chamber. So they sit at the front, and they

formally chair the meetings of Parliament. And they're assisted by two Deputy Presiding Officers. So they have that kind of ceremonial meeting running role, within the chamber. But then they also have an important role about convening the Business Bureau, which is where the parties get together to decide on the agenda for the week, schedule, all of the business that has to happen, decide what the content of the motions and debates that are going to be happening is. And they also oversee parliamentary reform. So they are really important role and they'll have their own - they'll want to put their own stamp on how Parliament is actually going to be running.

[00:11:46.380] - Alys Mumford
Awesome, and they're elected by all of the MSPs?

[00:11:48.900] - Eilidh Dickson
They are. And what they do is they come from one of the parties represented, obviously, but they formally give up their party membership. So they are a neutral role from that point on.

[00:11:59.610] - Alys Mumford
Ah, hence all of the speculation about who it might be this time.

[00:12:03.360] - Eilidh Dickson
Absolutely. So we really don't know yet. I think there's lots of speculation, but we haven't really got any firm names in the running. By the time this goes out, we may know who's putting their name forward for it, but it really comes down to which party is prepared to reduce its number by one. And the maths makes that quite a difficult calculation for parties at the moment, because obviously the Greens have just had a really good running. They've never had a Presiding Officer. There's never been a Green Presiding Officer. But after they've just had an increase in their membership, are they going to want to give up one? Similarly, the SNP find themselves just short of a majority. The opposition parties are really conscious about how much of a reduction they want to make in their minority. So it's a really difficult calculation for parties.

[00:12:47.820] - Alys Mumford
Exciting. It's very, sort of, West Wing [Laughter].

[00:12:52.290] - Eilidh Dickson
Well, soon as we've had that, then we'll have the Deputy Presiding Officer, which is normally - they normally come from one of the parties that doesn't give up one of their number. So we have, but they don't give up their party allegiance. They kind of straddle both worlds. So that will happen on Friday. And then next week we'll be looking for the First Ministers to be elected, probably on the Tuesday, and then ministerial nominations announced and concluded.

[00:13:19.200] - Alys Mumford
OK, so yes, there's still a couple of weeks of -

[00:13:21.330] - Eilidh Dickson
Yeah.

[00:13:21.870] - Alys Mumford
Getting people in roles, figuring out where people sit - literally and figuratively.

[00:13:26.610] - Eilidh Dickson
Absolutely.

[00:13:27.510] - Alys Mumford
So then once we are into the sort of getting stuff happening, looking at legislation, looking at bills, the last episode we talked about, the different manifestos we'd seen and Eilidh you've been working at Engender, on the Gender Edit of manifestos, where you sort of pulled out all of the different policies that parties were saying they wanted to do that related to women's equality. Obviously after the election, we know that the SNP is back in charge. Nicola Sturgeon is the First Minister. Does that

mean that sort of nothing much changes? What happens to those policies we were talking about?

[00:13:58.950] - Eilidh Dickson

Well, I mean, it's interesting that you say Nicola Sturgeon is the First Minister. I mean, that still has to be formally appointed. Last time there was an election between Nicola Sturgeon and Willie Rennie. So I think we still have quite a long way to go. I don't - I wouldn't expect anybody but Nicola Sturgeon. But let's wait and see how that all forms, how all that forms out. And we also are expecting a bit of a reshuffle in terms of ministerial offices, we had four Cabinet Secretaries that stood down at the election. So, there are some rumours that we'll see cabinet reduced from twelve to eight, and that might have a bearing on how committees are managed. And what we have at Holyrood is seven mandatory committees that have to exist and then whatever subject committees the parliament agrees are needed. So I think it's very likely that we'll have a Covid committee again. So it will take a bit of time for the kind of internal policy-focussed subject area bits of work to happen, assigning the Committee Convenors and Deputy Convenors, and that really, last time took kind of a month. So I think we wouldn't really be expecting a lot of the policy detail, and the legislative programme to come forward until at least the start of June, probably waiting until the Programme for Government in September, which is when we'll get the full legislative programme from the government.

[00:15:17.010] - Emma Ritch

And it's definitely worth noting, I think, that - who is around the cabinet table is really important? So, the First Minister has previously been very committed to having a gender-balanced cabinet, but also that there is a possibility that women's equality and rights could take a larger or smaller role inside somebody's cabinet portfolio, depending on how many seats there are around that table. So we'll be watching the space.

[00:15:41.430] - Alys Mumford

So that's a really good point, yeah on the sort of gender-balanced committee or cabinets, and we've seen previously strong commitment to that. So I presume we at Engender and feminists in Scotland would be hoping to see that again, maybe even more women than men. Who knows? But what else will be hoping to see, you know, once people know what their job is and how they do it, what are we hoping to see in the next few, few months or even years, with this new Parliament?

[00:16:09.570] - Eilidh Dickson

Well, I think we saw in manifestos, quite a lot of consensus, actually, about what the issues are when it comes to women's equality, even if the detail of the responses the parties were proposing was quite different. I think we will see some cross-party action quite quickly on things like women's human rights, probably, the Government had committed to that before the election. So I think we'll start to see some conversations about CEDAW incorporation

[00:16:33.970] - Alys Mumford

Woohoo! Very exciting.

[00:16:33.970] - Eilidh Dickson

Which appeared in three of the five manifestos, and also the Greens committed to a kind of new human rights framework as well. There was also quite a big focus within the manifestos of the parties that were elected on violence against women and misogyny. So I would expect us to see a little bit of action around that quite quickly. Parties, were talking a lot about social care, and the SNP is obviously committed to a National Care Service. So there might be some interesting discussions between opposition parties about how they want to influence that reform agenda. And in terms of criminal justice reform, the Greens and Labour were committed to abolishing 'not proven', and the SNP, and also thinking back to Engender's hustings, the Lib Dems actually, supported a review of the not proven verdict. And the Conservatives and the SNP also both supported, at least in part, implementation of Lady Dorrian's recommendations from their review of sexual offences case management. So criminal justice might be another area that we see some quite quick action on. Thinking about the SNP as the Government going forward, there were some quite exciting things for Engender in the SNP manifesto. We were really pleased that there was such a big focus on women's health, for example, moving beyond the work that was underway previously on the Women's Health Plan. Quite a big programme

of action that they're foreseeing around women's health. Also the physical space safety audits, which are about using local knowledge of women to improve public spaces, were something that both the SNP and Labour committed to. So I think we'll be looking to have conversations about what that might involve and how those could be integrated into the wider planning system.

[00:18:05.750] - Alys Mumford
How exciting. So much, yes -

[00:18:07.710] - Eilidh Dickson
Absolutely.

[00:18:07.710] - Alys Mumford
So much to be talking about, and working on, in the coming years. Emma, anything for you you're particularly hoping to see?

[00:18:13.230] - Emma Ritch
It's the thing Engender will be focussed on first, I think, will be making that initial contact with Parliamentarians and with Ministers, and just talking about the priorities that we have, and where they align with priorities that have been committed to in manifestos. As Eilidh says, the Programme for Government is the really big statement, it's kind of Scotland's equivalent of the Queen's Speech, really big statement of policy, and that comes out in September. So officials inside government will be starting to work out content based on the manifesto, and quite pleasingly following a recommendation from the National Advisory Council on Women and Girls, the Programme for Government now has an extra process step, in that it will be assessed for its impact on women's equality and rights.

[00:18:53.883] - Alys Mumford
Oooh.

[00:18:54.990] - Emma Ritch
So, as Eilidh pointed out, there are some areas that aren't traditionally seen as women's issues, where there have been commitments to women's equality and we'll be wanting to see them really worked up into solid proposals for policy. So a lot on Engender's agenda.

[00:19:13.410] - Alys Mumford
Amazing. And we will obviously keep you, dear listeners, posted on all of that when we know what's happening, and what we're working on. Anything else people want to say about about the election that we haven't covered?

[00:19:24.870] - Emma Ritch
So there's been a lot of turnover in the Parliament, and we're definitely excited to see some people that we've worked with before taking up seats in the Parliament. Katy Clark from Labour, who's worked a lot on abortion rights advocacy, Elena Whitham from the SNP, who's worked on violence against women and had a real leadership role in Equally Safe, when she was a Councillor. We've got the excellent Pam Duncan-Glancy, who's been a hugely talented and successful human rights campaigner for about 20 years, and a former member of Engender's board, joining the Parliament from Labour. And some great women from the Green Party who've shown real enthusiasm for women's equality and rights, including Maggie Chapman, who's been managing a rape crisis centre in Scotland. So really familiar with a lot of the issues that we're talking about.

[00:20:13.740] - Alys Mumford
And it's so exciting as well, thinking that there's people that have a grounding in these issues, and already they're sort of raring to go, you know, don't need the explanation of why women's equality is important, and what can be done. So yeah, really exciting bunch of people, lots of new young women, people that have got experience of local government, as you say, and can bring the importance of that into the Parliament. So, yeah, hopefully a really exciting, exciting Parliament. So, we're feeling cautiously, cautiously optimistic about having some feminists in the chamber. But as you said right at

the top of the episode, Emma, knowing that the job is most definitely not done, and you know, that we need to be pushing both for continued gender-balancing mechanisms within parties, for support for the women that are there, and of course, for making sure that good policy is made, good feminist policy. So we'll be keeping you updated with all of that. I'm going to bring us out of the episode now, unless anyone has anything else they want to say? But I hear silence, so I will go straight into our recommendations, which can't just be Nintendo Switch [Laughter].

[00:21:27.850] - Emma Ritch
Other handheld consoles are available.

[00:21:30.360] - Alys Mumford
But aren't as good [Laughter].

[00:21:31.680] - Emma Ritch
Amen.

[00:21:35.880] - Alys Mumford
Emma, have you got a recommendation for us?

[00:21:37.830] - Emma Ritch
I do. So, this week I have been reading *This Is How We Come Back Stronger*, which is edited by the Feminist Book Society, and is essentially per its own blurb, feminist writers on turning crisis into change. So it's a lot of brilliant women writing about Covid, what that's meant for their lives, their work, it takes a deliberately intersectional approach, and 20 percent of every sale is donated to Women's Aid in England and Imkaan. So worth a read.

[00:22:06.210] - Alys Mumford
Awesome. Eilidh?

[00:22:08.910] - Eilidh Dickson
I have a book as well, unsurprisingly. I think I've been so invested in the election I'm starting to think about what comes next and I've been reading *Feminist Democratic Representation* by Sarah Childs and Karen Celis, which is kind of all about how we can make our institutions more representative, not just of women, but of kind of feminist ways of thinking and working.

[00:22:30.570] - Alys Mumford
Amazing. I also have a book, very off-brand for me, sorry. I normally have something frivolous. I've been reading Emma Dabiri, *What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition*. So, Emma wrote *Don't Touch My Hair*, last - two years ago, which is a best seller. And this is quite short, it's sort of an essay book looking at, it's a beautiful book in that it's - the cover is sort of hand-drawn flowers and looks like it might be quite a nice floaty 'be nice' guide. Whereas actually it's just a really great sort of skewering of the anti-racist movement that doesn't do anything, and talks about actual solidarity and coalitions. So, yeah, lots and lots of food for thought in that. We'll put links to all three of those in the show notes. I think that's us. And thank you very much Emma and Eilidh, for joining us, and giving us all your election wisdom. Thank you, listeners, for joining us. And we'll be back with you soon. Stay safe.

[00:23:29.680]
[Jingle plays out]