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# Undergraduate Dissertation

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Beyond the Iron Curtain:  
Margaret Thatcher's Controversial Feminist Footprint  
and its Reflection in Liz Truss's Political Campaign

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## **Abstract**

Margaret Thatcher's rise to power in 1979 as the first woman to hold the office of prime minister in the United Kingdom and Europe represented a significant milestone, breaking the norms in a traditionally male-dominated field such as politics and opening new possibilities for women. However, her detachment and notable disengagement from the feminist movement have elicited considerable criticism questioning her commitment to women's rights. During her more than eleven years in office, Thatcher developed a distinctive political model based on neoliberalism, which came to be known as Thatcherism. Her political consistency and coherence have influenced leaders worldwide, regardless of gender or ideology, and within her party, she continues to be a role model. Former British Prime Minister Liz Truss, who held the shortest term in the country's history in 2022, lasting only forty-five days, was often compared to Thatcher in the primaries of her party and in her short term as prime minister, despite their different contexts and political approaches. These comparisons frequently raise the question of whether Thatcher's leadership model is replicable today and whether a contemporary political figure like Truss can once again embody the values of the Iron Lady.

**Key words:** Margaret Thatcher, Lizz Truss, feminism, neoliberalism, politics, gender.

## **Resumen**

El ascenso de Margaret Thatcher al poder en 1979 como la primera mujer en ocupar el cargo de primera ministra del Reino Unido y de Europa representó un hito significativo, rompiendo las normas en un ámbito tradicionalmente dominado por hombres como es la política y abriendo una nueva realidad para las mujeres. No obstante, su distanciamiento y notable desvinculación del movimiento feminista han suscitado numerosas críticas que cuestionan su compromiso con los derechos de las mujeres. Durante sus más de once años de gobierno, Thatcher desarrolló un modelo político característico basado en el neoliberalismo, el cual llegó a conocerse como Thatcherismo. Su consistencia y coherencia política ha influido a líderes de todo el mundo, independientemente de su género o ideología, y dentro de su partido, continúa siendo un modelo a seguir. La ex primera ministra británica Liz Truss, quien tuvo el mandato más breve en la historia del país en 2022, de sólo cuarenta y cinco días, fue comparada en varias ocasiones con Thatcher durante las primarias de su partido y su corto mandato como primera ministra, a pesar de sus distintos contextos y enfoques políticos. Estas comparaciones a menudo plantean la cuestión de si el modelo de liderazgo de Thatcher es replicable en la actualidad y si una figura política contemporánea como Truss puede encarnar nuevamente los valores de la Dama de Hierro.

**Palabras clave:** Margaret Thatcher, Lizz Truss, feminismo, neoliberalismo, política, género.

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## **1. Introduction**

Margaret Thatcher has consistently sparked controversy and continues to evoke both criticism and praise to this day. As Britain's first female Prime Minister, Thatcher secured three successive election victories, taking full advantage of the power of her office in a unique form of unwritten 'elected dictatorship' (Jessop, 17) while shaping a distinct political ideology known as Thatcherism. This ideology continues to influence political discourse and garner a substantial following even in contemporary times. Her rise to power in 1979 and resignation in 1990 made her the longest-serving individual in this role, establishing her as an iconic figure of the twentieth century who continues to evoke strong emotions today. Her economic policies, which combined neoliberalism with ideological conservatism, and her disengagement from social movements, led to the consolidation of Thatcherism in the UK. Her relationship with women and the feminist movement has always been complex. Despite holding a position of power and breaking the glass ceiling in a predominantly male domain, Thatcher never defined herself as feminist. She consistently adopted a masculine style of discourse while simultaneously extolling the figure of the housewife. Nevertheless, her influence on other politicians, regardless of gender or ideology, is undeniable and persists to this day. Liz Truss is a prime example of Thatcher's political influence and demonstrates how the shadow of the so-called Iron Lady continues to extend into the present, significantly shaping Truss's economic approaches and gender policies. However, whereas Thatcher was the longest-serving prime minister in the UK, Truss held the shortest term in UK history.

This dissertation seeks to delve into three key aspects: firstly, to examine Margaret Thatcher's interactions with the feminist movement; secondly examine her potential influence on subsequent politicians beyond gender or ideology; and thirdly, to assess the enduring presence of her political and ideological legacy in contemporary society through the analysis

of the figure of Lizz Truss. In examining Thatcher's association with the feminist movement, this work endeavors to encapsulate the nuanced dynamics of her relationship with women and their rights. It underscores the significant milestone Thatcher represented in terms of gender equality, disrupting entrenched norms within a predominantly male-dominated political context. However, despite her influential position, Thatcher notably distanced herself from the feminist movement and failed to actively contribute to the advancement of women's rights. Secondly, in evaluating Thatcher's potential impact on other politicians, the aim is to show how her influence goes beyond gender or ideology by presenting several examples. Finally, the third part and main analysis of this dissertation aims to evaluate the feasibility of sustaining the Thatcherite model in the 21st century. To accomplish this, this work will present the case of Liz Truss, a former minister of the United Kingdom whose tenure lasted less than two months, and will compare both political figures.

Regarding the bibliography used in the development of this work, it consists of a blend of academic papers and journalistic sources. The academic secondary sources offer a thorough analysis and interpretation of Thatcher's persona and her connections with various facets throughout her career. Press articles work both as secondary sources by providing contextual information in some instances, and as primary sources when they include speeches or direct testimonies of the politicians involved. The role of the press in this work is crucial as it provides access to real-time information. The majority of articles in this work are sourced from broadsheets like *The Guardian*, *The Independent* or *The Telegraph*—widely regarded as quality newspapers— and tabloids, such as *Mail Online*, which are known for their broader readership and more sensationalist tone. In essence, the goal of combining these sources is to obtain a broader perspective on all the comments and assessments made about Thatcher's figure and how she is perceived across different domains

## **2. Exploring Margaret Thatcher's Relationship with Feminism: Involuntariness, Disassociation and Utilitarianism**

Margaret Thatcher's relationship with feminism has always been a complex aspect of her political legacy. Serving as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, she remains a controversial figure in feminist discourse. While some argue that Thatcher paved the way for women in politics, setting an example for others to follow, others criticize her conservative policies for their negative impact on women. Within academic and intellectual circles, opinions vary widely. Authors like Natasha Walter view Thatcher as a figure who normalized the presence of women in positions of power and served as an inspiration for future generations. In contrast, critics like Beatrix Campbell argue that Thatcher never represented women and reserved power and greatness solely for herself. In short, the contrasting opinions on Thatcher's relationship with feminism make her a contradictory and complex figure. She has inspired a range of responses within the feminist movement, from reluctance and disengagement to utilitarianism.

Thatcher's rise to power was undoubtedly a milestone for gender equality in politics even if unintentionally. The fact that Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and then won the general election in 1979 marked a before and after for women in a male-dominated political landscape. Moreover, Thatcher's rise to power coincided with a transitional period of special activism and ideological development within the feminist movement. The transition from feminist activism represented by the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) during the 1960s and 1970s to the so-called "new feminism" of the late 1980s and early 1990s was beginning to take place. This progressive phase of the feminist movement marked by specific changes and approaches compared to earlier waves. Notably, this period emphasized intersectionality, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, which underscores the importance of addressing how gender intersects with race, gender identity, and social class. Additionally, the "new feminism" of the 1990s focused on the representation of women in

culture and media, as well as on empowerment. Thatcher's success helped demonstrate that women could hold positions traditionally held by men and help to break the glass ceiling somewhat. Within the framework of the "new feminism" that proliferated in the 1990s, there is an interest in exploring the relationship between feminism and power (Genz and Brabon 105,106) and the figure of Thatcher was analyzed and described by writers such as Natasha Walter in her book *The New Feminism* (1998), as the great unsung heroine of British feminism, a reference in the conquest of power and a breaker of invincible barriers. Walter acknowledges that although Thatcher was not a feminist, she "normalized female success" (Walter 176). It is for this reason that historians such as Martin Pugh consider Thatcher to be an unwitting feminist, because her policies may not have been aligned with feminist values but through her achievements she managed to change public opinion that women were not capable of holding positions of power and, in one way or another, she contributed to breaking the "glass ceiling". In fact, in the 1990s, many women in Britain succeeded in holding high-ranking positions in politics (Pugh 336, 337).

Beyond academia, several women politicians have recognized Thatcher's work in opening the way for women in politics independently of her commitment to the feminist movement. For instance, Labour politician Rachel Reeves has acknowledged the influence Thatcher has had on her and on the generation of women of her time and has stated that "whether you agree with her or not, she smashed glass ceilings and shifted the boundaries" (Butt). Another noteworthy example is the former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who in her statement following Thatcher's death said that Thatcher "was not a champion of women's rights - but as a woman who had made it to the highest office in a democracy at a time when this was far from usual, she was an example to many women who came after her" (Merkel).

On the other hand, as can be intuited from this involuntariness previously mentioned, Thatcherite policies revealed a disassociation of her figurehead with the feminist movement,

embodying the values of the feminine rather than the feminist. Her political style differed greatly from the mainstream feminist movements of her time and her conservative values and individualistic approach clashed with the collective and egalitarian view of many feminists. The second wave of feminism in Britain took place between 1960 and 1980 and was also known as the Women's Liberation Movement, focusing mainly on social equality and sexual and reproductive rights. Although Thatcher owes her success in part to the achievements of the feminist movement that worked to bring more women into politics, she never acknowledged this and always claimed that her success was due to her individual abilities and personal work (Pilcher 495). The emphasis on individualism was one of the foundations of Thatcher's government and a strategy to differentiate itself by creating an opposition against socialism which was portrayed as a collectivist movement against individual rights and choices. This widespread opposition to collectivism led to the criticism of the collective representation of women offered by feminism and focused on vindicating the figure of the housewife, highlighting domestic competence and explicitly rejecting the spirit of women's liberation promulgated by the feminist movement, which presented the housewife as the archetypical victim of gender inequality due to being unpaid and dependent on her husband (Prestidge 177,178).

Moreover, as Prime Minister, Thatcher also failed to show solidarity with the careers of other women by adopting a 'queen bee' stance, denying that women faced discriminatory practices when it came to climbing the social and political ladder (Ribbenrick, *I don't think of myself as the first woman Prime Minister* 175,176). Political scientist Jorgen Ramussen (601) highlights the irony of Thatcher's coming to power in 1979, since at that time female representation in the House of Commons was at an all-time low and "the number of women MPs was only four times higher than it had been half a century earlier" (Ramussen, 601). This suggests that political equality for British women had not yet been achieved and during her

term of office, Thatcher did not implement any policies to change this. In fact, very few women held positions of responsibility during her eleven years in power. Baroness Lynda Chalker (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Overseas Minister); Angela Rumbold (Home Secretary and Minister for Education and Science) and Jean Barker, Baroness Trumpington, (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) were some of the few women who obtained positions of responsibility in a government composed predominantly by men. Curiously, in spite of its distance from feminism and its individualistic view, according to Campbell (2003), Thatcher was only able to establish a relationship with women at the moment of her defeat, giving feminism a utilitarian approach, as if its political defeat was a battle won by male power over women.

In conclusion, the relationship of Margaret Thatcher with the feminist movement has different nuances and is complex to approach. These examples of criticism and praise can also be extrapolated to the world of politics, where the so-called Iron Lady has also left her mark, with many politicians citing Thatcher as a reference and inspiration.

### **3. Reflecting Thatcher's legacy in other politicians: beyond gender or ideology**

Regardless of her personal relationship to feminism, the figure of Margaret Thatcher has been a source of inspiration for other women in politics. Although Mrs. Thatcher's position as a role model for women in politics has not been the subject of systematic academic research (Campbell and Childs 164), many women politicians have referred to Thatcher as their inspiration for entering the world of politics. In 1981, political scientist Jorgen Rasmussen predicted that if Margaret Thatcher proved to be a successful prime minister, perhaps between ten to fifteen years later "an influx of young women taking their cue from her achievements could be allowed to flow into the political elite" (Rasmussen 620). Although there is no direct or demonstrable relationship between Thatcher's mandate and the increase in the number of women politicians in the UK, a clear gradual increase in the presence of women in British politics can be observed after Thatcher. In fact, it was in the British elections of 1997, that a striking change occurred and the proportion of women parliamentarians in the House of Commons multiplied from 9.2% to 18.2% (Lovenduski and Norris 97).

Within her own party, many women politicians have praised Thatcher and referred to her political legacy as a source of inspiration. One example of this is Sheryl Murray, MP for South East Cornwall, who said that Thatcher "led the way by showing women that they can reach the highest office and do the job well" and even supported the creation of a national "Margaret Thatcher Day" (Stone). For her part, politician Eleanor Laing also expresses this feeling in the introduction to her tribute to Baroness Thatcher by saying that she "changed the world for women—for women across the world, for women in Britain and for women in politics and in Parliament" (Laing). More recently, politician Priti Patel has made clear in her social networks her opinion about Thatcher, stating that she "was a visionary leader who inspired, delivered change and left a legacy few politicians can match" (Patel). Other conservative women politicians such as Theresa May, Lizz Truss or Kemi Badenoch, although they have

not openly admitted Thatcher's influence on their political careers, rather the opposite, have been the subject of strong media comparison with their predecessor.

In addition, it is imperative to acknowledge that Thatcher's influence extends beyond women: several male politicians have acknowledged her as a significant political influence or have been profoundly impacted by her policies. One of the most notable and extensively analyzed instances is former British Prime Minister David Cameron, whose leadership style and rhetoric bore a striking resemblance to that of Thatcher (Evans 340) and is known for establishing his own political model popularly known as "Cameronism", which is closely related to "Thatcherism". According to researcher Christian Fuchs, both models "Cameronism" and "Thatcherism" are "understood as being unities of ideology and policies that want to implement a particular model of society and for doing so, are organized along three dimensions: the economy, politics, and culture" (163). This triple vision is based on an economy based on a private-capitalist model that promotes privatization of public goods, a policy that favors deregulation and cuts in public expenditures, and a cultural approach based on individualism and traditional values as well as on national identity (Fuchs 163-164). Moreover, Cameron made this admiration even more visible through the tribute he dedicated to Thatcher when she passed away in 2013. In that speech, Cameron stated that Margaret Thatcher did not just lead the country but saved it and declared that "she was and is an inspiration" ("David Cameron's Statement on Lady Thatcher"). Another male political figure who has openly acknowledged the influence of Thatcherism on his political model is the current British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who has described himself as a Thatcherite and regards Margaret Thatcher as the best Tory leader in history ("Rishi Sunak says Margaret Thatcher best Tory leader in history"). British political analysts and media have echoed these similarities between the two conservative leaders. For example, journalist George Eaton defined Sunak's ascension to power as "a triumph for the Conservatives' Thatcherite wing" (Eaton).

All the aforementioned politicians adhere to conservative ideology; nevertheless, Thatcher's influence resonated beyond her own political camp, acknowledged even by figures from disparate ideological backgrounds. A notable instance is the social democrat Tony Blair, who openly professed his admiration for Thatcher and the enduring impact she had on the United Kingdom (Ribbenrick, "Gender politics with Margaret Thatcher: Vulnerability and toughness" 12). Blair has always shown a friendly attitude towards Thatcher and acknowledged that his "job was to build on some of the things she had done rather than reverse them" (Blair). In addition, Labour's leader Keir Starmer has also shown his appreciation for Thatcher, whom he said had made a "significant change" in the United Kingdom by "trying to bring Britain out of its stupor by unleashing our natural entrepreneurial spirit" during her 11 years in Downing Street (Malnick). These are just a few examples of how the recognition and even admiration for Thatcher's figure goes beyond political ideology.

In conclusion, Margaret Thatcher's political legacy has profoundly influenced politicians across gender and ideological spectrums. As the first female Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, her leadership style and policies left an indelible mark on British politics. Thatcher's unwavering commitment to free-market economics, privatization, and deregulation, often referred to as Thatcherism, reshaped the political landscape not only in the UK but also globally, and that is why her legacy also crosses borders. In short, Thatcher's legacy is widely acclaimed and recognized and frequently used as an example of political consistency.

#### **4. Is Thatcher's model replicable? Her reflection in Liz Truss' economic and gender policy approach**

As mentioned in the conclusion of the previous section, Thatcher's policy has been acclaimed and recognized from different sectors and it is very common to see attempts to replicate it. Her political paradigm represented a conservative approach that diverged from the interventionist tendencies and the Keynesian welfare state model established in the aftermath of the Second World War (Peck and Tinkerbell, 29). This neoliberal model, often likened to Reaganomics in the United States, embodied a blend of revolution and conservatism. Regarded as revolutionary, Thatcher's policies ushered in the most extensive era of deregulation in modern British history (Bolick 528), staunchly advocating for free market principles, extensive privatization, and minimal state intervention in the economy, unprecedented at the time. Nevertheless, juxtaposed with this economic paradigm, her ideological stance remained deeply conservative, emphasizing traditional values. Farral et al. have summarized the values considered Thatcherite and have highlighted three main aspects that set them apart from previous Conservative and Labour policies: distrust of government, support for traditional values and liberal economic perspectives (3).

Numerous scholars and political scientists have predicted the end of neoliberalism as we know it. For instance, professor and economist Joseph Stiglitz argues that the 2008 financial crisis is proof that neoliberalism is an unsustainable system, unable to deal with global problems such as climate change and that it "will literally bring an end to our civilization" (Stiglitz, 2). Other authors, such as economist Thomas Palley, stress that neoliberalism is a system that has been postponing for years the economic stagnation it has created and the only solution is to replace this economic model with a structural Keynesian model (Palley 48). However, this trend towards the disappearance of neo-liberalism seems to contradict the emergence of the political figure of former Prime Minister Lizz Truss, whose policy and ideology seemingly aimed to reviving the Thatcher era but in the 21st century, representing an

intentional throwback to pure neoliberalism and neoconservatism (Maher 3). However, Truss herself has wanted to disassociate herself from this comparison with her predecessor, saying that she is her “own person” (McGrath).

Although both Truss and Thatcher are conservative women and studied at the same university, their respective background and political evolution is very different. Thatcher was born in 1925 in Grantham, Lincolnshire and she was widely known as “the grocer’s daughter”, a nickname that highlighted the importance of individual effort and hard work that she championed in her policies. However, this nickname can be misleading, as it suggests a humble background. In reality, her father was not only a grocer but also owned several stores and eventually became the mayor of their city. She was admitted to a prestigious women’s grammar school and then gained a place at Oxford University, where she became president of the Oxford University Conservative Association in 1946. Despite studying chemistry, she went on to study law and, thanks to her marriage to wealthy businessman Denis Thatcher, she gained financial freedom and was able to pursue a career in politics (Ribbenrick, “I don’t think of myself as the first woman Prime Minister”<sup>168</sup>). For her part, Truss was the daughter of a Mathematics professor and a nurse and, unlike Thatcher, she was educated at a state school in Leeds, but she also gained a place at Oxford University. There, she was an active member of the Liberal Democrats, a centrist party opposed to the Conservatives in large parts of England and against institutions such as the royal family. She subsequently worked in finance in private companies and in 1998 she again became involved in politics, this time on the Conservative side (McGee). Despite coming from middle-class families and studying at the same university, their political trajectories are not similar and, while Thatcher has always maintained a conservative approach, Truss has undergone a political evolution. Truss’s political inconsistency has been the subject of debate in the British media and has been highly criticized. For example, the journalist Luke McGee described her in an analysis for CNN as a “political shape-shifter”, claiming that Truss

is “a political chameleon who has gone from a radical who called for the abolition of the monarchy to a flag-bearer of the Euroskeptic right wing of the Conservative Party”. On the other hand, Thatcher was characterized by her consistency and dominant personality, which was reflected in her political approach based on “conviction politics” and materialized in her three successive electoral victories (Jessop 18). Hence, the two leaders exhibit significant disparities in their initial circumstances, distinct backgrounds, and divergent political trajectories and projections. Consequently, Thatcher is often linked with stability and steadfastness, whereas Truss tends to be associated with volatility.

However, although Thatcher and Truss belong to different backgrounds and clearly operate in different eras and gendered contexts, their respective economic and gender policies share great similarities. In relation to her economic approach, Thatcher was mainly known for her neoliberal economic approach based on deregulation, the propulsion of private property, privatization of public goods, regressive taxation or cuts in state spending amongst other measures (Fuchs 168). For her part, Truss represented a very deliberate throwback to the neoliberalism of the Thatcher era, announcing a programme based on deregulation and proposing measures such as tax cuts for the rich and the repeal of all remaining European laws (Maher 326). The economic proposal of Truss was centered around fostering growth, yet her plan involving £45 billion in unfunded tax cuts primarily benefiting high-earners resulted in the depreciation of the pound, instigated market apprehension, and engendered widespread economic unease among Britons leading to her early resignation from power, after only 45 days in office (Serhan). In short, a pivotal determinant closely tied to Thatcher’s success and Truss’s failure lies within their distinct political and economic contexts. During the 1980s, the narrative advocating for the restoration of economic competitiveness through free-market principles, following years of adherence to a Keynesian framework, was met with considerable acclaim for its perceived innovation. However, in the contemporary landscape, there is more concern

about economic disparities, accompanied by a fervent demand for policies aimed at rectifying such inequities. This shift in societal awareness may have contributed to a diminished reception of economic strategies that predominantly benefit the affluent, such as those proposed by Truss.

In terms of gender politics, Thatcher's and Truss's approaches also exhibit noteworthy parallels. Although Thatcher did not hold any specific political office directly addressing women or gender policies, her discourse and policies contributed to idealizing the figure of the housewife, generalizing economic theory from the domestic to the global and pursuing a policy of promoting domesticity to support a deeply divisive patriarchal project (Campbell, "Margaret Thatcher" 46-50). She even posed for photographs in the kitchen, performing daily chores to promote the archetype of the political housewife (Weaver 110). For her part, Truss held several ministerial positions, including Secretary of State for Women's Affairs and Equality between 2012 and 2014 before she became Prime Minister. However, despite using her position as woman in power during her electoral campaign, when she became Prime Minister, she removed the title of minister for women and equalities and appointed Nadhim Zahawi as minister for equalities, removing the word "women" and claiming that this function covered women as well. This decision was widely criticized and described as "disappointing" even by the Conservative chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, Caroline Nokes (Topping). Besides, at a conference of the Conservative Party, Truss said it was "dehumanizing" to be "treated like a woman", and called for everyone to be seen as "individual humans" (Merrick). This perspective, which holds that merit should be the primary criterion for advancement in society rather than gender identity, leads to the endorsement of equal opportunities in employment and education rather than the implementation of positive discrimination measures. Truss stated that "gender quotas are potentially dangerous because they make women look like token appointments rather than the best candidates for the job" (Sighn). Hence, despite Truss inhabiting a gender landscape distinct from Thatcher's era, where women wield considerably

more influence, her political trajectory remains entrenched in generalization and the reluctance to carve out a distinct space for women. Instead, it underscores a neoconservative stance centered on equal opportunities rather than gender identity.

Regarding their discursive style and manners, Lizz Truss has also been compared to her predecessor on several occasions. Despite her short tenure - she only occupied Downing Street for forty-four days - Truss has not missed the opportunity to make nods to Thatcher in her way of speaking. Several language specialists have analyzed the similarities between Truss and Thatcher. Tony Thorne of King's College London, highlights the Thatcherite tone of Truss's speech and identifies formal and content elements. At the level of content Truss uses repeated references to neoliberal values such as freedom, democracy and also highlights her pride in British culture. In terms of form, Thorne argues that Truss imitates the slow, low-key manner of her predecessor after she came to power, which may be part of a strategy to generate respect and to be taken seriously (Robinson). Ribbenrick mentions in her article "Gender politics with Margaret Thatcher: Vulnerability and toughness" that in the past, women politicians tended to downplay their gender because most of the important figures in politics were men, so it was the male perspective that counted (5). In their eagerness to fit in, most women politicians adapted their discourse to fit male patterns and, according to Negm et al., both Thatcher and Truss use "traits often associated with men, such as leadership, courage, assertiveness and determination" (385), thus showing a masculine speech pattern despite the time difference between them.

Finally, it cannot be ignored that, in the realm of politics, the scrutiny faced by women extends beyond their policies and actions to encompass their personal appearance, particularly their clothing. This pervasive judgment reflects deeper societal biases and gender norms, revealing how public perception of female politicians is often influenced by their attire. Truss has frequently been compared to Thatcher due to their remarkably similar sartorial choices.

Both women have demonstrated their pride in British culture through their attire, consistently selecting British brands for the majority of their public appearances. (Owen). One of the most talked-about occasions when Truss imitated her predecessor was in the Tory debate against her opponent Rishi Sunak which took place in July 2022. Her choice of attire for that debate, a black blazer on top of a white blouse with an imposing bow, was virtually identical to the outfit Thatcher wore in a 1979 election broadcast (King). This choice does not seem accidental, Thatcher herself paid great attention to her appearance, her love of clothes was “legendary” and she even hired Gordon Reece, a former television producer, to take care of her image (Ribbenrick, “Gender politics with Margaret Thatcher: Vulnerability and toughness” 10).

It is intriguing to consider whether the persistent comparisons in the media focus more on political actions or simply on the fact that they are women. Thatcher’s convincing and stable policies ensured her many years in office, while Truss’s erratic decisions made her the shortest-serving prime minister in UK history. Both assumed power during turbulent times for the country; however, Thatcher’s neoliberal innovations proved successful, whereas Truss’s proposals led to her early resignation. Thus, it could be said that Thatcher shattered the glass ceiling while Truss fell off the glass cliff. According to the glass cliff theory, a term coined in 2005 by British professors Michelle K. Ryan and Alexander Haslam, women in management and power positions are more likely to be appointed during times of crisis, which increases their likelihood of failure, and this strategy is used by institutions to reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and further reduce women’s equality and upward mobility in the workplace (Bores). Moreover, Truss has made it clear that she has nothing in common with her predecessor, stating that “it is quite frustrating that female politicians always get compared to Margaret Thatcher whereas male politicians don’t get compared to Ted Heath” (McGrath). This comparison is not new; it was also experienced by former Prime Minister Theresa May, who refuted it by stating: “I have no role model, I do what I think is right” (Topping and Elgot).

Therefore, it appears evident that the spread of these simplifications in the media hinders the proper evaluation of these women's actual leadership styles and their roles in decision-making (Dunn-Jensen and Stroh 347).

## 5. Conclusion

Margaret Thatcher's relationship with the feminist movement and the role of women in society is highly complex. Despite her disassociation from the feminist collective and her individualistic approach that focused on femininity rather than feminism, Thatcher's rise to power was a significant milestone in both British and global political history and her ascent undoubtedly opened new perspectives and possibilities for women. By occupying a position of power in a traditionally male-dominated environment, she encouraged other women to participate in politics and to gain the confidence to pursue leadership positions. Her influence remains evident among political leaders of both genders and ideological backgrounds, and it continues to resonate today.

Liz Truss serves as a compelling example of Thatcher's enduring influence, even forty years later. However, after comparing Thatcher and Truss to identify their similarities and differences, particularly in economic and gender policies, and evaluating whether the Thatcherite model can be replicated, it becomes evident that such a model cannot be fully duplicated today due to the vastly different context in which it originally emerged. Truss' neoliberal economic proposals failed to account for the contemporary scenario, as the same solutions do not apply across different times. In the 1980s, an innovative economy based on restoring economic competitiveness had its place, whereas in today's globalized economy, certain innovations could jeopardize the competitiveness of the British market. Furthermore, it is notable that both Thatcher's and Truss' approaches to gender are highly individualistic and do not promote collectivism or solidarity among women.

Another significant aspect of this analysis is the examination of academic and press sources to gauge public perceptions of both figures. It can be determined that while Thatcher is commonly associated with stability, consistency, and seriousness, Truss, on the contrary, is often associated with volatility, inconsistency, and a lack of control. However, it is important

to consider that the times at which both women came to power were not the same. While a woman in power was once an innovative breakthrough that could shatter glass ceilings, placing a woman in a leadership position today during a crisis might be a strategy to reinforce gender roles according to the glass cliff theory. Moreover, the media's oversimplification through the comparison of Truss with Thatcher makes it very difficult to objectively assess their policies on an individual basis.

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