theage.com.au
THE AGE

Print this article | Close this window

Voters prefer men, political study finds

Josh Gordon
November 22, 2007

Advertisement

AUSTRALIAN voters are strikingly biased towards men.

A major study covering 17,000 candidates that have contested federal seats over the past century has found that women continue to face a "systematic penalty" at the ballot box.

For no other reason than gender, a female candidate representing a major party is likely to get an average of 1500 votes less than a male colleague — enough to shift the outcome in one out of every 10 seats.

The study, by Oxford University academic Amy King and Australian National University economist Andrew Leigh, concluded that female candidates in major parties tend to get 1.5% fewer votes than their male colleagues, all other things being equal. The average shrinks to a still-significant 0.6 percentage point gap when minor parties are included.

Dr Leigh said the vote bias helped to explain why women continued to be under-represented in Parliament, despite making up 50.3% of the population.

"It certainly does suggest why the major parties tend to put up fewer women if they are run by risk-averse blokes," Dr Leigh said.

But Hutch Hussein, the co-convener of Emily's List, an organisation which pushes for more Labor women in parliaments, said the bias was in the major parties, rather than the public.

"I don't think it has been the Australian public that is responsible," Ms Hussein said. "It has more to do with parties struggling to share power. Affirmative action is very important."

After the 2004 election, the share of women in the lower house was just 25% — the 36th-worst out of 189 countries. Prior to 1970, only three women were elected to Parliament, and during the 1970s there was only one.

Dr Leigh said in marginal electorates the gender bias was significant enough to make a difference. "One in ten races … are typically determined by a margin of less than 1.5%. Our results imply that in those races, one of the major parties could win with a man, but not with a woman."

The gender bias, averaging 600 votes when minor parties are included, would also affect electoral funding — parties are rewarded for their votes with money by the Australian Electoral Commission after the election —

creating a significant impost for small parties dependent on commission funds.

"The AEC public funding amount is about $2 per vote, meaning that if a minor party puts up a woman, it'll typically receive $1200 less public funding than if it puts up a man," Dr Leigh said.

Although women candidates received fewer votes on average than male candidates in the 2004 election, the study found that the gap has shrunk massively as the pay gap between men and women has gradually closed.

In the 1920s, female candidates received an average of 10% fewer votes than male candidates of the same party. By the 1940s, the gap had narrowed to 5%. Since 1980, the vote penalty for being a female candidate has narrowed to between 0.5% and 0.7%.

The study also found that female candidates were not helped when competing with more than one woman on the same ballot, although female candidates tended to fare better with more women in Parliament overall.

The study found no evidence that poorer quality female candidates were chosen through the preselection process. But it did find that Australian voters may tend to use a candidate's gender to make predictions about his or her political attitudes.

The study said female candidates were one-third more likely to rate health as their top priority, and one-third less likely to rate taxation as their top priority.

This story was found at: ***http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2007/11/21/1195321865859.html***

Bias has begun moving off the gender agenda

CHERYL MCGREGOR
18 Jan, 2010 04:41 PM
WOMEN don't vote for women politicians. Men don't vote for women politicians. Statistics, in-depth studies, panels, polls and surveys all point to the same conclusion.

Yet the deputy leaders of both major political parties in Australia, mesdames Gillard and Bishop, are not figments of our fevered collective imagination.

So what's going on?

Ask this question in the pub and you might get a vague "society's changing". Maybe you'll even get a "Well, they have to, don't they?", as if there were some law that says, "If a woman's on the ballot, you must vote for her".

For that proportion of the country that votes Labor, there almost is. The ALP has had a quota in force since 1994. That's when it began insisting that party members choose women candidates to stand for 35 per cent of seats. In 2001, it upped it to 40 per cent.

That's "per cent of winnable seats" by the way. Lazy party apparatchiks can't get away with shoving consenting female vote-fodder onto the ballot to be annihilated in safe Opposition seats.

And it does seem to be working. The federal ministry is almost 25 per cent female; women make up 31 per cent of Labor's federal pollies; still way behind the 50.3 per cent make-up of the Australian populace, but at least on track.

True, the Opposition is coming within cooee of these figures without an official quota, but Labor can argue that that's just because it had to react to public demand or look unbearably fuddy-duddy beside the progressive ALP. The hard and fast no-escape clause rule changed the mates' club of Australian parliaments.

Except, according to a new study, it wasn't.

The study by the Australian National University researcher Dr Andrew Leigh and his Rhodes Scholar co-author Amy King turns upside-down this and quite a few other commonly held assumptions.

For example, it might seem obvious that the more female candidates there are on a ballot paper, the less bias there will be against females in the popular vote. In practice, though, "female candidates are harmed, not helped, by having more women on the same ballot paper in the same election".

That is, female candidates competing against other female candidates triggers public bias against female candidates.

Yet if there are a lot of female candidates standing in different seats around the country, it helps individual women candidates in individual seats. But women don't do better in seats that have more women voters on the roll.

The research that Leigh and King back their findings up with is, well, to a non-academic, awesome. They went through details of every federal election since 1903 (no women were elected before that). To clarify the gender of candidates, they even did a side venture into gender-specific names finding, interestingly, that 96 per cent of Australian women have names that are extremely feminine (that is, more than 99 per cent of people with that name are female) and 99 per cent have highly feminine names (more than 90 per cent of people with that name are female).

Such thoroughness is typical of the pair. Their career fascination is with what makes ordinary people vote the way they do; they're the ones who gave us the finding that Australians actually like, and prefer to vote for, handsome men and pretty women (but not too pretty).

This new study dealt with voter bias against women: is it really "voter" bias, or is it the result of the political parties' candidate selection procedures? Is the population biased, or just the party members?

Answer: it's us. Bias against women has been steadily declining, though, from 10 per cent until the 1920s through 5 per cent before World War II and up to the 1940s, until today's 0.6 per cent. But even that is significant in a country where about 4 per cent of seats are decided by a margin of 0.6 per cent or less.

The individual policies of a woman candidate who belongs to one of the major parties apparently have very little effect. We vote for their party's policies Julia Gillard and Julie Bishop are just "Lab" and Lib" in our collective eyes, regardless of whether they flirt with one of their party's wings or stick firmly in the centre. (So much for Julia G's "non-nurturing" image: the electorate, apparently, couldn't care less.)

The Leigh/King paper correlates social attitudes (or bias against) women with the gap between male and female rates of pay. The more equal our pay rates are, the more women candidates, the lower the electoral bias.

Its said the French vote with their wallets; Australians, it seems, choose a variant on that. Checking out our (pretty or handsome) candidates, we croon, "If you earn the money, honey, we've got the time".

(The survey is at http:// cepr.anu.edu.au/pdf/DP625.pdf)

Local News Headlines
Get The Latest News, Instantly Online
As It Happens! SMH.com.au
Ads by Google

comments

•

November 21, 2007 12:11pm AEDT

Female candidates get fewer votes - study

By Mark Schliebs | *November 21, 2007*

JULIA Gillard's gender may be detrimental to Labor's chances of winning Saturday's federal election if history is anything to go by, a study has found.

The research by the Australian National University found female candidates received fewer votes than their male counterparts.

ANU economist Andrew Leigh and Oxford University student Amy King discovered that of 17,000 candidates for the Lower House between 1903 and 2004, female candidates were often “the difference between winning and losing”.

On average, female candidates received 0.6 per cent fewer votes than male candidates but female candidates representing a major party averaged 1.5 per cent fewer, Ms King said.

“For one in ten races, this is the difference between winning and losing," she said.

Female candidates did not appear to benefit from running in electorates where female voters predominated either.

The study did find, however, that the gender gap is shrinking.

“Since (the 1970s) the gender gap has fallen, in line with the gender pay gap,” Dr Leigh said.

“It seems that discrimination in the labour market and at the ballot box move closely together. Both measures are improving but women are still at a disadvantage.”

Party affiliation, incumbency, expected vote share and the number of candidates on the ballot were examined for the study.

Copyright 2007 News Limited. All times AEDT (GMT +11).

smh.com.au
The Sydney Morning Herald

Female candidates get fewer votes: study

November 21, 2007 - 12:56PM

Advertisement

If Malcolm Turnbull was a woman he would receive 600 fewer votes on Saturday, an academic claims.

That's because voters favour male candidates over female candidates, according to a study by the Australian National University (ANU).

ANU economist Dr Andrew Leigh and Oxford University student Amy King found that female candidates, on average, receive 0.6 per cent fewer votes than their male party counterparts.

"If Malcolm Turnbull (the Member for Wentworth) was in a dress then he would receive 600 fewer votes," Dr Leigh said.

The study looked at 17,000 female candidates who ran for the House of Representatives between 1903 and 2004 taking into account party differences, incumbency and seat margins.

It found for major party candidates the gender gap was around 1.5 per cent which could mean the difference between winning and losing seats, Dr Leigh said.

Labor has 45 female candidates running for the lower house on Saturday compared to the coalition's 34.

Eight of the Labor candidates are contesting marginal Liberal seats - half the number the opposition requires to win government.

Labor candidate Amanda Rishworth is contesting the country's most marginal seat - Kingston (SA) - and needs a swing of just 0.1 per cent to win.

In Hasluck (WA) Sharyn Jackson needs a 1.8 per cent swing and in Bonner (Qld) Kerry Rea needs a 0.5 per cent swing.

The coalition has five female candidates contesting marginal seats.

In Hindmarsh (SA) Rita Bouras needs a swing of 0.1 per cent to claim a seat in parliament while the Nationals Sue Page needs a swing of just 1.4 per cent to take Richmond (NSW) from Labor.

"You can see that it really starts to matter in those marginal seats," Dr Leigh said.

"The study suggests that the women would have less of a chance of winning than a man."

Dr Leigh said it was often suggested that there was benefit being a female candidate in Australia.

"So we were surprised that we didn't see any benefit."

The study also found that the gender-voting gap had shrunk considerably over time.

In the 1920s, female candidates received 10 per cent fewer votes than male candidates and by the 1940s that gap

had shrunk to five per cent, Dr Leigh said.

"Just as we see a gender-pay gap on average narrowing we also see gender-voting gaps."

"That doesn't mean that every woman gets paid less than every man and it doesn't mean that every female candidate is going to lose."

In the last federal parliament there were 37 women in the Senate - representing 35.5 per cent of upper house numbers.

This story was found at: ***http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/11/21/1195321833897.html***