

PROJECTIONS FOR WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

AFTER THE 2010 ELECTION - UPDATE

Headlines

In March 2010, the Centre for Women & Democracy (CFWD) published an analysis of the effect of the various parties' poll standings on the numbers of women in parliament¹. Since then, there have been dramatic changes in the polls, with a strong and apparently sustained surge of support for the Liberal democrats and Labour falling, in some polls, to third place.

CFWD has now looked at the effect this surge might have were it to translate into votes on 6 May. We are still predicting a small increase in the percentage of women in the next parliament, but this could be differently distributed between the parties.

In March we said that the increase was unlikely to take the UK above the 24% mark, and this remains the case. It is now difficult to see any circumstances which could change this.

As before, the analysis is based on the application of poll data across the board, and takes only limited account of possible tactical voting patterns. All figures are projections and actual outcomes may vary. However, even allowing for these caveats, the probabilities are clear.

The headline findings of the updated report are that:

- There are currently 125 women MPs - 19% of a total of 650.
- The percentage of women MPs in the next parliament is unlikely to rise above 24% .
- This would represent approximately 40 more women in the House of Commons
- At the current rate of progress, the level of women in the Members of Parliament will not reach 30% until at least 2025, 40% until 2045, or 50% before 2065.
- The number of Conservative women MPs in the next parliament will at least double (currently 18), although if the party loses seats to the Liberal Democrats any further increase will be limited.
- The number of Labour women MPs will depend heavily on the nature of the current Liberal Democrat surge; if this falls back it will remain much the same, but if the Liberal

¹ This is available from our website, www.cfwd.org.uk

Democrat share of the vote remains strong, and is translated into seats, Labour could lose women MPs. If the Liberal Democrats were to take a 33% share of the vote (as suggested in a few polls) this loss could be nearly 20.

- The number of Liberal Democrat women MPs (currently 9) will probably remain static if the Liberal Democrat share of the vote is around 20%, and a poll share of less than that could see it fall, but a vote share in the mid-twenties would see it rise and if the party receives more than 30% of the vote it could triple to 27.
- The UK currently stands 73rd in the world league table for women MPs; it will rise to 44th if 24% of MPs after the election are women.
- The projected increase to 24% is only possible because of the unusually high number of MPs who are retiring.
- There are 11 seats in which the candidates for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are all women, and 266 in which they are all men.

The projections suggest that, although there will be a small increase in the number of women MPs, the principal difference in the next parliament will not be their overall representation but their distribution between the parties. Possible reasons for this include:

- significant concentrations of women candidates for all parties in the more in marginal seats;
- relatively high numbers of seats in which the candidates for two of the main parties are women - there are 47 seats where both the Conservative and Labour candidates are women, 42 in which both Liberal Democrat and Labour candidates are women, and 31 in which both Conservative and Liberal Democrat candidates are women;
- the Conservatives' very low starting base (currently 18 women MPs), which means that they are able to achieve quite dramatic change on relatively small numbers. However, although the number of Conservative women will almost certainly double, it will only treble if the party has a lead of 6% of the vote or more;
- Labour's relatively high starting base (94 women MPs), which means that they are particularly vulnerable to losing women if they lose even moderate numbers of marginal seats. Previously projected increases in Labour women MPs were made possible only by the high number of Labour women candidates (approximately 50%) in seats where Labour MPs are retiring, although the worse the result is for Labour, the more difficult it will be for these to cancel out the losses in the marginals;

- the Liberal Democrats' very low number of current women MPs (9), which means that although 21% of the party's candidates are women, there are not enough retirements to enable them to make real progress by that means. As with most parties, Liberal Democrat women candidates tend to be concentrated in the more marginal seats; as a result, the current surge in support for the party could have a dramatic effect on the number of women elected. However, a significant number of these would be at the expense of Labour women, which would restrict the increase in the House overall.

As at 19 April 2010, 24.1% of Conservative candidates were women, 30.3% of Labour candidates and 20.8% of Liberal Democrats. CFWD will be publishing a detailed analysis of candidates for all parties shortly.

Notes:

1. This report was compiled using polling data as at 10 March 2010; all predictions are approximate.
2. All projected figures are estimates and will be affected by future changes in candidate and polling data. For this reason the report will be updated at intervals.
3. A table showing the data on which this report is based is attached.

Centre for Women & Democracy
Leeds
20 April 2010

Projected numbers of women MPs using polling data published on 18-20/4/2010

Date/Poll	Women MPs	% Women MPs	Poll Position			No. Women MPs per Party *		
			Con	Lab	LD	Con	Lab	LD
Current Parliament	125	19%				18	94	9
YouGov 18/04/2010	150	23.1%	37%	35%	17%	40	77	27
UKPR Polling Average								
as at 19/04/2010	160	24.6%	35%	30%	24%	44	95	14
as at 20/04/10	153	23.5%	34%	28%	27%	44	87	16

* Projections allow for women who may be elected for other parties (e.g., Greens, SNP, Plaid Cymru, etc. The figures in the 'Women MPs' column therefore total more than the figures for the three parties in these columns.