

## WOMEN MPs AFTER THE 2010 ELECTION

### Headlines

The Centre for Women & Democracy (CFWD) is predicting a small increase in the percentage of women in the next parliament. The headline findings of its 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, and may treble (currently 18).
- The number of Labour women MPs will probably rise slightly (currently 94).
- The number of Liberal Democrat women MPs will probably remain static, although a poll share of 20% or below at the election could see it fall. (currently 9).
- The UK currently stands 73<sup>rd</sup> in the world league table for women MPs; it will rise to 44<sup>th</sup> 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 currently (10 March 2010) 10 seats in which the candidates for the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are all women, and 205 in which they are all men.

## The Full Findings

1. There are currently 125 women MPs in the House of Commons. These constitute 19.2% of all MPs - in other words, fewer than one in five MPs are women.
2. There are 18 Conservative women MPs, 94 Labour women, and 9 Liberal Democrat women.
3. Until recently, received wisdom was that there would be little or no increase in either the number or percentage of women Members of Parliament. Most of the studies which led to this conclusion were carried out over a year ago, and therefore assumed the combination of a significant Conservative poll lead with a relatively low number of sitting MPs standing down.
4. Since then, a very large number of MPs have announced that they do not intend to seek re-election, and many of these have been replaced as candidates by women. In addition, the polls have narrowed considerably (the ComRes poll for the Independent gave the Conservatives a 16 point lead on 1 March 2009; on 1 March 2010 the same poll showed a Conservative lead of 5 points).
5. The Centre for Women & Democracy has therefore reassessed the available data on candidates and poll trends, and has found that the current picture is radically different from that of a year ago.
6. 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.
7. The study found that:
  - There will be a small increase in the overall percentage of women MPs; this is unlikely to exceed 5%, and would result in 24% of MPs being female.
  - This would represent an estimated numerical increase of 40 women.
  - This outcome is likely regardless of the polling figures, although generally speaking the larger the Conservative lead the lower the increase in the number of women elected.
  - Equally, however, the number of Conservative women MPs will more than double, and could treble, depending on the size of the party's share of the vote.

- The number of Labour women MPs will rise slightly if the election results in a hung parliament or a Labour majority, and fall slightly if the Conservative lead is 7% or more.
  - The number of Liberal Democrat women MPs will not increase and may decrease. In some scenarios (e.g., 5% Conservative lead, Liberal Democrats on 16%) the number may fall by more than half.
  - There is no prospect whatsoever of the percentage of women MPs in the UK reaching the 'critical mass' point of 30% at this election.
  - At the current rate of progress, and assuming that the unusually high number of MPs retiring will not be repeated at future elections, it will be at least 2025 before 30% of MPs are women, 2045 before 40% is reached, and 2065 before 50% is reached. This assumes an average increase of 2.5% at each election, with elections occurring at 5 year intervals. There was no increase at the 2001 election, and a 2% increase at the 2005 election.
8. CFWD examined the detailed implications of two rather differing polls published on 10 March 2010. One gave the Conservatives a lead of 4%, and the second gave them a lead of 8%. CFWD found that:
- The YouGov poll of 10 March 2010 put the parties at Con 36%, Lab 32% and Lib Dem 20%. If these were the poll shares at the election, the percentage of women MPs would rise to 24.9%, with the number of Conservative women elected almost tripling (though probably not reaching 50), the number of Labour women rising by about 4 and the number of Liberal Democrat women falling by 1.
  - The Harris poll of 10 March 2010 put the parties at Con 37%, Lab 29% and Lib Dem 18%. These poll shares at the election would produce 23.5% women MPs, with the number of Conservative women more than tripling, the number of Labour women falling below 90, and the number of Liberal Democrat women falling by 1
  - The UKPR Polling Average puts the Conservatives on 38%, Labour on 32% and the Liberal Democrats on 18%. This outcome at the election would result in an increase in the percentage of women MPs to 24.3%, with the number of Conservative women tripling, the number of Labour women remaining more or less unchanged, and the number of Liberal Democrat women falling by 2.
  - If the Conservative lead were to return to December 2009 levels (17% according to ComRes poll for the Independent on Sunday, 10/12/2009), it would make very difference to the projected level of women MPs (23.8%). There would, however, be a

9. These projections suggest that, although there will be a small increase in women MPs, the principal difference in the next parliament will not be their overall representation but their distribution between the Labour and Conservative 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 either two or three of the main parties are women - there are currently 10 in which Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat candidates are all women (as opposed to 205 in which they are all men), 43 where both the Conservative and Labour candidates are women, 36 in which both Liberal Democrat and Labour candidates are women, and 26 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 maintains a lead of 6% or more;
  - Labour's relatively high starting base (94 women MPs), which means that they are particularly vulnerable to losing women MPs if they lose even moderate numbers of marginal seats. Projected increases in Labour women MPs are made possible only by the high number of Labour women candidates (approximately 50% at the time of writing) 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, and, as with most parties, current Liberal Democrat women MPs tend to be concentrated in marginal seats so that the lower the party's projected share of the vote the more likely the overall number is to fall.
10. As at 10 March 2010, 24.1% of Conservative candidates are women, 29.7% of Labour candidates and 21.2% of Liberal Democrats.
11. Internationally, there are currently 72 countries with a greater percentage of women in their parliaments than the UK.

12. If the percentage of women MPs rises from 19% to 24% at the 2010 election this number will reduce to 43, with the UK finding itself just ahead of Lesotho and Liechtenstein, and just behind the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Suriname.
13. Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in its parliament (56%), followed by Sweden (46%) and South Africa (45%).
14. In terms of the UK's European neighbours, the Netherlands has 42% women MPs, Norway 39.6%, Belgium and Denmark 38%, Spain 37%, Germany 33%, and Austria 28%. Italy is currently at 21% and France is at the same level as the UK (19%), whilst the figure in Ireland is just 13.9%.
15. The last European countries to enfranchise women were Switzerland (1971), Portugal (1976) and Liechtenstein (1984). All three are currently ahead of the UK in the league table - 29% of MPs in Switzerland are women, 27% in Portugal, and 24% in Liechtenstein.

### **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.
4. Information on the representation of women internationally is taken from the International Parliamentary Union's website ([www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)). Electoral outcomes have been projected using software at [www.electoralcalculus.co.uk](http://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk) and [www.ukpollingreport.co.uk](http://www.ukpollingreport.co.uk). Data on women candidates has been compiled by CFWD from publicly available information and progress on this can be followed at [www.cfwd.org.uk](http://www.cfwd.org.uk)

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Leeds  
10 March 2010

Projected numbers of women MPs using polling data published on 13/12/2009 and 10/03/2010

| Date/Poll                   | Con Lead        | Women<br>MPs | % Women<br>MPs | No. Women MPs per Party |           |          |     |     |     |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------|----------|-----|-----|-----|
|                             |                 |              |                | Con                     | Lab       | LD       | Con | Lab | LD  |
| <b>Current Parliament</b>   |                 | <b>125</b>   | <b>19%</b>     | <b>18</b>               | <b>94</b> | <b>9</b> |     |     |     |
| ComRes 13/12/2009           | 17%             | 155          | 24%            | 77                      | 63        | 7        | 43% | 26% | 20% |
| YouGov 10/02/2010           | 4%              | 162          | 24.9%          | 48                      | 98        | 8        | 37% | 35% | 17% |
| Harris 10/03/2010           | 8%              | 153          | 23.5%          | 55                      | 87        | 8        | 37% | 32% | 19% |
|                             |                 |              |                |                         |           |          |     |     |     |
| <b>UKPR Polling Average</b> | <b>Con Lead</b> |              |                |                         |           |          |     |     |     |
| as at 10/03/2010            | 6%              | 158          | 24.3%          | 54                      | 94        | 7        | 38% | 32% | 18% |