

Press release from the Fawcett Society

Record number of women MPs

On May 5 128 women were elected to the commons – an increase of ten compared to before the election was called.

Labour now has 98 women MPs, the Conservatives 17, the Lib Dems 10, the DUP 1, the UUP 1 and Sinn Fein 1.

While this is good news, there remain large differences between how well each of the parties are doing at selecting women for winnable seats and there remains much to be done – the proportion of women MPs is still not going to rise above a quarter.

The Conservatives have a particularly large challenge - in spite of making large gains, the party has increased its proportion of women MPs by just one percentage point to 9%. At the current slow rate of change, it will take the Tories more than 400 years to gain equal numbers of women and men MPs.

Conservatives

- Before the election, the Conservatives had 14 women MPs, representing 8% of the party
- The Conservatives now have three more women MPs, bringing their total to 17, representing 9% per cent of the party
- The Conservatives' continuing poor levels of representation by women are largely due to their failure to put women in winnable seats – just 12% of the candidates selected for the Conservatives' 50 most winnable seats were women.
- At the current rate of change, it will take the Conservatives 400 years to achieve equal representation.

Liberal Democrats

- Before the election, the Lib Dems had six women MPs, representing 11% of the party
- The Lib Dems now have four more women MPs, bringing their total to ten, representing 16% per cent of the party
- In the Lib Dems 50 most winnable seats, 32% of candidates selected were women
- While the Lib Dems have nearly doubled their number of women MPs, the rate of change is still well behind the Labour party's, meaning it will take them more than 40 years to achieve equal representation.

Labour

- Before the election, Labour had 94 women MPs, representing 23% of the party
- Labour now has four more women MPs, bringing its total to 98, representing 28% per cent of the party
- Although Labour lost seats overall, it was able to still increase its numbers of women MPs by using all-women shortlists to select candidates for most of its retirement seats. This is the reason it is so far ahead of the other two main parties – where Labour does not use all-women shortlists, its record of picking women candidates is not much better than the other two parties'
- At the current rate of change it will take Labour around 20 years to achieve equal representation.

The evidence at this election shows that the most effective way to increase the numbers of women in parliament is by use of positive action. This reflects international evidence, which shows no country has significantly increased numbers of women MPs without using some form of positive action.

There is a clear desire among 65 % of women and men for more women in parliament. In constituencies where there is a sitting women MP, turnout among women goes up by 4%, and stays the same among men

A spokeswoman for the Fawcett Society said: "We warmly welcome the increased numbers of women in parliament. Nonetheless, there is no reason to be complacent yet as all parties still have a long way to go.

"Labour is particularly to be congratulated for increasing its numbers of women MPs even though it lost seats – a clear vindication of its use of all-women shortlists.

"The Lib Dems have done well to almost double their numbers of women, but must not rest on their laurels as their proportion of women MPs is still only 16 per cent.

"The Tories may be celebrating large gains, but there is not much for those of us who believe there should be equal representation to celebrate in their results. They urgently need to address their failure to pick women for winnable seats – or else they will look more and more out-of-touch compared to the other parties.

"We urge all parties to use positive action to ensure parliament better reflects the population as a whole. These new MPs will be making decisions on behalf of the whole country. But they still currently lack the breadth of experience that a more diverse body of MPs could bring."

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Notes to editors

1. Fawcett is UK's campaign for equality between women and men. www.fawcettsociety.org.uk
2. In working out the proportions of candidates selected for winnable seats, Fawcett included candidates selected to fight seats the selecting party does not currently hold and new candidates selected to fight seats the party currently holds and from which the current MP is retiring
3. In working out how long it would take each party to reach equal numbers of women and men MPs, we took the average increase (or decrease) in the number of women MPs elected to each party at the previous six general elections (including the current one). Then, we calculated how long it would take each party and parliament as a whole to reach equal representation at the current rate. In working this out, we assumed that the three main parties would retain the same number of seats that they won in 2005 and that a general election is held every four years.