



Women. Men. Different. Equal.  
Equal Opportunities Commission

**Embargoed until 1pm Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> April**

**Joint response from the Equal Opportunities Commission and Fawcett Society**

### **Choose a Winner, Select a Woman**

This exciting new Electoral Commission research confirms that women candidates are an electoral advantage for the parties.

The report shows that overall women are as likely to turn-out to vote in elections as men, but that they tend to be turned off by male-dominated Westminster politics.

However, this report also demonstrates that the presence of women candidates significantly increases women's turn out and engagement. In seats with a woman candidate, women voters are more likely to turn out than men (a gender gap of four percentage points). Turn out among men is unaffected by the sex of the candidate.

In constituencies with a woman MP, women voters are much more likely to believe that 'government benefits people like me'.

Women voters are more likely to be motivated to work and campaign for a female candidate than for a male candidate.

The report recommends that removing the existing barriers to women being selected and standing for elected office is an important priority (1).

The research demonstrates that the convenience of voting also plays an important part in boosting turn-out. Women's reported turnout in all-postal pilot areas in May 2003 was 13% higher than men's. The report recommends that postal and convenience voting should be more widely available, to maximise the participation of women and those with parenting and caring responsibilities.

Julie Mellor, Chair of the Equal Opportunities Commission said:

"At a time when only 53% of women intend to vote at the next election, every vote counts (2). Political parties, which want to win seats, need to look at their selection processes to ensure that the people they put up across local, regional and national elections represent the diversity of people they serve.

"We need the voting process to take into account voters' work and caring responsibilities which may make it more difficult to get to a polling station. Offering more all-postal ballots and polling stations in shopping centres would increase the turn -out and ensure that more people, particularly women who still tend to take on more caring responsibilities overall, have a say. British democracy rests on us making sure that women and men have the same chance to vote on their political representation."

Dr. Katherine Rake, Director of the Fawcett Society, said

"This report shows that action to increase women's representation must be a central part of the effort to reconnect politics with the electorate. Currently 82% of MPs are men.

Overall women are just as likely to turn-out as men, but the evidence shows that they are turned off by the male-dominated culture of Westminster politics.

The challenge to the parties is clear – whilst the Labour Party continue to use all-women shortlists to promote women candidates, the record of the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives on selecting women for winnable seats is poor. Radical steps must be taken to prevent participation in elections falling yet further."

**Notes to editors**

1) Women currently only make up 18% of MPs at Westminster. So far, Labour has selected 16 women out of 26 retirement seats at the next election, with a further two seats reserved for women. The Conservatives have selected two women out of 10 retirement seats and one woman has been selected out of five Liberal Democrat retirement seats.

2) *An audit of political engagement* revealed the proportion of women planning to vote in the next election was published by the Electoral Commission and Hansard Society in 2004. This research also found that 48% of men were planning to vote in the next election.

2) The Equal Opportunities Commission is the statutory body working to eliminate sex discrimination in 21st Century Britain.

3) The Fawcett Society is the UK's campaign for equality between women and men.  
[www.fawcettsociety.org.uk](http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk).

**Ends**

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