

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| DATE | 23 rd April 2015 |
| MONTHLY USERS | 4,600,000 |

THE HUFFINGTON POST



Adeline Ginn ♥ Become a fan
 Founder of Women in Rail, General Counsel for Angel Trains



Why Do Fewer Women Vote?

Posted: 23/04/2015 17:28 BST | Updated: 12 minutes ago

👍 1
1
1
0
0

[Like](#)
[Share](#)
[Tweet](#)
[Share](#)
[Comment](#)



More than nine million women failed to vote in the last general election, compared to eight million men, research carried out by the House of Commons Library has shown. But why is this? We have found that the reasons behind the gender gap in voting closely relates to the reasons behind the gender gap in business.

An image problem

The first reason is quite apparent, even to the least politically engaged among us; there are far more men in politics than there are women. In 2010, 143 of the 650 MPs elected to the Commons were women (22%). This affects women on a number of different levels, the first being that the issues being discussed are those that men care more about, the second being that media coverage of these discussions is less relatable, and less focussed on the opinion of women.

Recent research by TNS for *Women's Hour* found that 48% of women felt that none of the leaders - Tory David Cameron, Labour's Ed Miliband, Ukip's Nigel Farage, Liberal Democrat Nick Clegg, the SNP's Nicola Sturgeon, the Green party's Natalie Bennett and Plaid Cymru's Leanne Wood - understands what life is like for them and their families, compared with 41% of men.

The polling also found that almost 60% of women said they were concerned about the NHS, while 40% identified living costs as a major issue and 30% picked the cost of caring for their family - all of which were lower down on the list of priorities for male voters. In reverse, 31% of men were concerned about the economy, including the deficit and unemployment, compared with just 21% of women. It just so happens that, although policies answer to all of these issues, much of the political agenda surrounds the deficit.

Understandably, these male politicians get a lot of air time. Research has shown that in the UK, women are interviewed or cited in only 30% of television news stories. This under-representation harms female understanding and curbs women's motivation to acquire political knowledge actively, discouraging them from political participation.

This is an issue faced in business, too. Among chief executives and chairs of FTSE 100 companies, there are 17 men called John - more than the total of seven female bosses. As we know, there are many Johns in the rail industry, too. Our friends in Westminster have an image problem, similar to the one that afflicts all male dominated industries - whether it be rail or oil rigging - that leaves women feeling left out, and less inclined to get involved.

| | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| DATE | 23 rd April 2015 |
| MONTHLY USERS | 4,600,000 |

A lack of confidence

Another reason behind women's disengagement with politics is their confidence. The first being in their own opinion, and the second being in their vote actually making a difference.

Recent analysis of Twitter saw that of those that used the main political parties' hashtags, three in four tweets were male - with just a quarter female. The hashtag #LibDems had the most overwhelmingly male profile, with 84% of tweets being from men. UKIP was also testosterone heavy, with eight in ten tweets using the #UKIP hashtag coming from male accounts. It was a similar 80/20 split with the #conservative tag, while even #Labour - often thought of as having a disproportionate appeal to women - had 76% male usage.

This lack of participation is indicative of a trend - political debate is dominated by males, a gender generally more confident in themselves and their political beliefs than females. Women are less likely to join in and therefore less likely to keenly obtain understanding of the topic.

This issue of self-belief is also the reason most frequently cited for voting, too. A poll by Survation found that the majority of people don't vote because they don't believe their votes will make any difference.

Self-belief is also something that affects women in business. Even before they enter their careers, women value themselves less than men do. Manchester University professor, Marilyn Davidson - asks her students when they start their course how much they expect to earn when they graduate. In terms of salary expectations, the male students expect about £52,000 a year and the women about £41,000. On average the men think they deserve £10,000 more a year than the women - that's 25% more than the women think they're worth - a staggering figure.

As much as many of us may like to - you can't eradicate self doubt overnight. But by inspiring confidence and encouraging women to take little steps out of their comfort zone on a regular basis, you can slowly see it melt away. As a society we need to take steps to foster an environment which is not dog-eat-dog, but nurtures the skills of individuals to proactively help everybody to gain confidence and achieve their potential.

Arguably, this starts from the top. Maybe it's time parliament stepped away from the masculine jeering, and name calling that is synonymous with Prime Minister's Questions - and instead conducted itself with more poise, and self-control. A more feminine parliament would be beneficial on all fronts; much like a more female dominated businesses are often more successful. A recent study of 500 boardrooms in the US showed that companies with three or more women on their board of directors experienced an 83% higher return on equity, a 73% boost in sales and a 112% higher return on invested capital.

It makes sense to me.

Follow Adeline Ginn on Twitter: www.twitter.com/WomeninRail

MORE: [Election](#), [Women](#), [Politics](#), [Business](#), [Gender Equality](#), [General Election 2015](#)