

# 2018/12: Should the Liberal Party use quotas to get more women into Parliament

## What they said...

*'Women are unquestionably destined to exercise more and more influence upon practical politics in Australia'*

Sir Robert Menzies, founder of the Liberal Party, speaking in 1944

*'It's...demeaning to sit in a Parliamentary party room for 20 years without seeing a progressive increase in the number of women members'*

Judith Troeth, former Liberal Senator (1993-2011) seeking a quota for women in 2010

## The issue at a glance

On September 12, 2018, Liberal MP Julia Banks joined those calling for quotas within the Liberal party to increase the number of Liberal women in the federal parliament. Ms Banks stated, 'It's really simple, if you only have a man running and there's no woman, find one. They're out there.' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/outgoing-liberal-mp-julia-banks-calls-for-gender-quotas>

On September 10, 2018, former Liberal frontbencher Craig Laundry, who quit the ministry when Malcolm Turnbull was removed as prime minister, also called for quotas, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-11/liberal-women-quotas/10230298> while on September 6, 2018, Sussan Ley, Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories in the Morrison Liberal government, similarly called for quotas. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/06/liberal-party-should-consider-quotas-for-female-mps-sussan-ley-says>

These demands from within the Liberal party have been supported by former Labor Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who has urged the Liberal party to rethink its position on quotas. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-04/julia-gillard-on-mental-health-politics-and-promoting-women/10334336>

Liberal Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, while supporting measures being taken to increase the number of women within the parliamentary Liberal Party, is opposed to quotas, believing that gender should not take priority over merit. <https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/a-plea-for-gender-quotas-in-australian-politics-time-to-give-a-fair-go-to-everyone/news-story/31614f523a5eaa4887c359c3c27340a>

## Background

### Women's under-representation in parliaments worldwide

Women in government are under-represented in most countries worldwide. This historical tendency still persists, although women are increasingly being politically elected to be heads of state and government. As of January 2017, the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments is 23 per cent. In 2013, women accounted for 8 per cent of all national leaders and 2 per cent of all presidential posts. A number of countries are exploring measures that may increase women's participation in government at all levels, from the local to the national.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women\\_in\\_government](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_government)

### The under-representation of women in the Australian parliament

Australia's representation of women in parliament is low by international standards. Only 31 per cent of Australian Federal parliamentarians are female and the Inter-Parliamentary Union ranks Australia at 50th in the world for female representation as at September 1, 2018; behind many Scandinavian, African and Latin American countries that boast over 40 per cent representation in their lower houses. New Zealand, France, Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom all have higher levels of female representation. <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/sexism-women->

## and-australian-politics

### Party-based differences in women's representation in the Australian federal parliament

There are significant party-based differences in the percentage of women representatives in the federal parliament. Within the current (45th) parliament, the Greens have the highest percentage of female representation at 50 per cent. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament) The Labor Party (with the recent inclusion of two additional female representatives in Kristina Keneally and Ged Kearney) now has 48 per cent female representation. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament)<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/a-women-in-politics-scorecard-20180711-p4zqtm.html> Both the Liberals and the Nationals have much lower levels of female representation at 21 per cent and 14 per cent respectively. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament)<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/a-women-in-politics-scorecard-20180711-p4zqtm.html>[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The\\_gender\\_composition\\_of\\_the\\_45th\\_parliament](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2016/August/The_gender_composition_of_the_45th_parliament) Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the percentage of Liberal women elected in the House and Senate has remained stagnant. Comparatively, Australia's low ranking for female representation is, arguably, attributable to the Liberals failing to nominate and elect women. Among established democracies with the highest levels of female representation, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland have over 40 per cent of women elected in their national legislature; a percentage similar to the Australian Labor Party. <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2018/05/04/partisanship-and-the-gender-gap-support-for-gender-quotas-in-australia/> The large disparity between the two major political parties when it comes to the election of women has provoked debate about the role of gender quotas in politics.

### Gender quotas in the Labor Party

The Labor Party brought in gender quotas in 1994: 35 per cent of winnable seats were to be contested by women by 2002. Between 1994 and 2010 the pre-selection of women candidates increased from 14.5 per cent to 35.6 per cent. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#\\_Toc372193127](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#_Toc372193127)

The party adopted a 40:40:20 quota system in January 2012. This means that 40 per cent of seats held by Labor were to be filled by women, and not less than 40 per cent by men. The remaining 20 per cent could be filled by candidates of either gender. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#\\_Toc372193127](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#_Toc372193127)

At its 2015 national conference, the Labor Party increased this quota to 45 per cent by 2022 and 50 per cent by 2025, and expanded those quotas to apply to party positions and delegations to conferences, including union delegations. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/18/quotas-for-women-maybe-the-conservative-side-of-politics-is-just-more-misogynist>

State branches use different strategies to ensure the quota is met. New South Wales Labor adds a 'loading', whereby a female candidate gets an additional 20 per cent added to her vote. Other states, like Western Australia, use central selection committees.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/18/quotas-for-women-maybe-the-conservative-side-of-politics-is-just-more-misogynist>

### Liberal and National Party strategies to increase women's participation in parliament

The Liberals and the Nationals do not formally support gender quotas on the basis that they contradict the principle of merit for political candidates. Instead, the parties have adopted

strategies to develop women's networks within the party and provide support for women to stand for pre-selection.

In 1945, the party established a Federal Women's Committee which was incorporated in the party's Constitution in 1946. The Committee has had representation on the Federal Executive since then, and the party's federal Constitution requires the vice-president of the party to be a woman. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#\\_Toc372193127](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#_Toc372193127)

In the lead-up to the 1996 election, the Liberals set up support structures for women in the party and argued for more women candidates.

In 2010, Liberal Senator Judith Troeth circulated a policy paper proposing that the quota for women in the organisational wing of the party (introduced in 1944) should be applied to the parliamentary party. She stated that women are not 'progressing through party pre-selection to parliament and beyond', and called for women candidates to be endorsed in a minimum of 40 per cent of its seats for the 2010 federal election. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#\\_Toc372193127](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#_Toc372193127)

In September, 2016, Liberal Party's federal executive adopted a 10-year plan to significantly increase its female representation in Parliament. The plan sets an aspirational target of 50 per cent female representation by 2025. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-06/liberal-partys-watershed-plan-to-attract-more-females/7819332>

In 1959 the forerunner of the National Party, the Country Party, created a Women's Federal Council (initially called the Women's Conference) within the party's Federal Council to contribute to party policy and decision-making processes. The party 'supports and encourages participation by women in all aspects of the party or standing for parliament'.

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#\\_Toc372193127](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas#_Toc372193127) However, historically and now the representation of women within the National Party and its earlier iterations has been very low.

### **Internet information**

On September 28, 2018, The West Australian published a comment by Phoebe Wearne titled 'Why we need gender quotas for women in Federal Parliament'

Wearne argues for the need to increase the representation of women within the Liberal Party.

The full text of the argument can be accessed at <https://thewest.com.au/opinion/why-we-need-gender-quotas-for-women-in-federal-parliament-ng-b88973635z>

On September 22, 2018, news.com.au published a comment by Chris Urquhart titled 'A plea for gender quotas in Australian politics: Time to give "a fair go" to everyone'

The opinion piece is an argument for the Liberal Party to introduce quotas as a means of remaining relevant.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/a-plea-for-gender-quotas-in-australian-politics-time-to-give-a-fair-go-to-everyone/news-story/31614f523a5eeaa4887c359c3c27340a>

On September 15, 2018, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by Miranda Devine titled 'Demands for Liberal gender quotas are an insult'

The opinion piece argues that quotas assume women cannot succeed without privileged treatment and undermines the standing of women who are pre-selected through quotas.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

On September 14, 2018, The Australian published a report titled 'Boost women or pay the price, Credlin warns'

The report gives the view of Peta Credlin, Chief of Staff to former prime minister Tony Abbott,

that the Liberal Party must promote women within the party or become less electable.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/boost-women-or-pay-the-price-credlin-warns/news-story/45ce3a85735704b0eee6757192aad846>

On September 13, 2013, Crikey published a comment by Bernard Keane titled ' No, Australian politics isn't having a #metoo moment'

The opinion piece suggests that Liberal women parliamentarians and the party generally is retreating from a full acknowledgement of its bullying culture and the need for quotas.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/australia/no-australian-politics-isn%E2%80%99t-having-a-supernumbermetoo-moment/ar-BBNfUOW>

On September 13, 2018, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by Jeremy Sammut titled ' Gender quotas won't put Liberals back in touch with voters'

This opinion piece argues that electorates vote on the basis of a wide range of interests beyond those associated with gender.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/gender-quotas-wont-put-liberals-back-in-touch-with-voters/news-story/9fc3aa0f17a6a3abb3eef62357db1bb6>

On September 12, 2018, Women's Agenda published a comment by Georgina Dent titled "'Liberal women need support not quotas": Prime Minister Scott Morrison'

The point of view is critical of current attitudes toward the representation of women within the Liberal Party.

The full text can be accessed at <https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/liberal-women-need-support-not-quotas-prime-minister-scott-morrison/>

On September 12, 2018, The Conversation published a comment by Andrea Carson, incoming Associate Professor at LaTrobe University. titled 'She'll be right: why conservative voters fail to see gender as an obstacle to political success'

The opinion piece is an attempt to explain the apparent complacency within the Liberal Party's support base regarding the position of women within the party.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/shell-be-right-why-conservative-voters-fail-to-see-gender-as-an-obstacle-to-political-success-102905>

On September 12, 2018, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Sam Crosby titled 'I opposed a gender quota - and was 100 per cent wrong'

The opinion piece argues that the McKell Institute has gained significantly from using a quota selection system to diversify the composition of its board.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/i-opposed-a-gender-quota-and-was-100-per-cent-wrong-20180912-p503cg.html>

On September 11, 2018, The Spectator Australia published a comment by John Ruddick titled 'Liberals want quality, not quotas'

The opinion piece argues against pre-section quotas or any other device which specifically seeks to guarantee a place in parliament to a candidate on the basis of his/her sectional status.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.spectator.com.au/2018/09/liberals-want-quality-not-quotas/>

On September 6, 2018, the ABC's Fact Check examined the question 'Is the level of Liberal women in Parliament lower now than it was in 1996?'

The analysis examines the representation of women within the Liberal Party since 1996.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-06/fact-check-liberal-women-in-parliament/9796976>

On September 5, 2018, The Guardian published a comment by Van Badham titled 'No glass ceiling to see here: how the Liberal party blew up the merit myth'

The opinion piece argues that the culture within the Liberal Party is antithetical to women representatives.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/sep/05/no-glass-ceiling-to-see-here-how-the-liberal-party-blew-up-the-merit-myth>

On May 21, 2018, The Conversation published a comment by Anika Gauja, Associate Professor, Department of Government and International Relations, University of Sydney; Fiona Buckley, Lecturer, University College Cork and Jennifer Curtin, Professor, University of Auckland, titled ' The Liberals have a serious women problem - and it's time they took action to change it'

The opinion piece examines the problem of equitable gender representation within the Liberal Party and in a number of democracies around the world.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-liberals-have-a-serious-women-problem-and-its-time-they-took-action-to-change-it-96643>

On April 23, 2018, The Herald Sun published a comment by Alana Schetzer titled 'How do we fix the Coalition's woman problem?'

The opinion piece argues for quotas and suggests that the supposed merit principle often results in inequitable prejudice in favour of male candidates.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/rendezview/how-do-we-fix-the-coalitions-woman-problem/news-story/8dcce4d76fc4084f843e2c85028a595f>

On April 22, 2017, The Australian published a comment by Peter Van Onselen titled 'Good night, ladies, we're going to dump you now: Coalition'

The opinion piece argues that the culture and practices within the Liberal Party are antithetical to women representatives.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/columnists/peter-van-onselen/good-night-ladies-were-going-to-dump-you-now-coalition/news-story/7f046e730296c467ca4c507506f021e0>

On October 20, 2016, The Herald Sun published a comment by Tom Elliott titled ' Job quotas add up to mediocrity'

Elliott argues that selecting on criteria other than excellence results in poor appointments.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/tom-elliott/tom-elliott-job-quotas-add-up-to-mediocrity/news-story/28ffeade7c8e79491e31ea56958ba624>

On August 25, 2016, The Conversation published a comment by Marian Sawer, Emeritus Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University, titled 'Australia should look overseas for ideas to increase its number of women MPs'

Professor Sawer examines a number of mechanisms, including quotas, used internationally to increase women's participation in government.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/australia-should-look-overseas-for-ideas-to-increase-its-number-of-women-mps-63522>

On July 19, 2016, The Conversation published a comment by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra, titled ' Liberals deride quotas for women MPs but how are they going to make targets work?'

The opinion piece considers the difficulties of making aspirational targets and other strategies designed to attract women candidates to the Liberal Party work.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/liberals-deride-quotas-for-women-mps-but-how-are-they-going-to-make-targets-work-62727>

On July 13, 2016, the Centre for Ethical Leadership, University of Melbourne, produced an analysis titled 'Closing the gender gap in politics'.

The analysis demonstrates that internationally quotas have been the most effective means of increasing the political representation of women.

The full text can be accessed at <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/closing-the-gender-gap-in-politics>

On February 11, 2016, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by Josephine Cafagna titled 'Why so many women do not go into politics'

The opinion piece attempts to explain some of the factors that dissuade women from seeking to enter parliament.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/why-so-many-women-do-not-go-into-politics-20160211-gmr7dx.html>

On July 30, 2015, The Conversation published a comment by Marian Sawer, Emeritus Professor, School of Politics and International Relations, Australian National University, titled 'The case for quotas in politics: the absence of women isn't merit-based'

Professor Sawer uses calls for quotas from within the Liberal Party and evidence of their success internationally to argue for their adoption. She argues against the validity of supposed merit-based selection.

The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-case-for-quotas-in-politics-the-absence-of-women-isnt-merit-based-45297>

On August 9, 2010, Online Opinion published a comment by Lydia Bevege, Secretary of the University of Melbourne Student Union and a member of the Liberal Party of Victoria, titled 'Women don't need a quota'

The opinion piece argues that quotas do not result in the selection of quality candidates.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=10794>

On July 7, 2010, Inside Story published an article by Marian Sawer, Emeritus Professor and ANU Public Policy Fellow in the College of Arts and Social Sciences at the Australian National University, titled 'Quotas for the Liberal Party?'

The article treats the views of long-standing Liberal senator Judith Troeth who argues for quotas to address the gender imbalance within the Liberal Party.

The full text can be accessed at <https://insidestory.org.au/quotas-for-the-liberal-party/>

## **Arguments in favour of the Liberal Party using quotas to get more women into Parliament**

1. Having a gender balance within a political party makes it more representative and positively impacts on policy and quality of representation

Supporters of more women in parliament and thus of quotas argue that parliamentarians will better represent their electorates if there is a gender balance in parliament. According to this argument, a parliament needs to reflect or mirror the population that elected it in order to help ensure that the wide-ranging needs of different sectors in the population are addressed.

This point was made by Dr Avery Poole, Assistant Director, Melbourne School of Government, University of Melbourne, in an opinion piece published in Pursuit on June 9, 2018. Dr Poole stated, 'If parliament is to be truly representative and if the burning issues affecting people's everyday lives are to be properly heard then we need a diverse parliament, and that includes more women, just as it includes having people from different backgrounds whether that be ethnicity, regionality, social-economic status, sexuality or profession.'

<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/sexism-women-and-australian-politics>

Dr Rae Cooper, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Business, and Associate Professor, Work and Organisational Studies, at the University of Sydney Business School, has similarly stated, 'We

elect politicians to act on our behalf and in the community interest. Women parliamentarians bring different experiences with them to the leather seats of the houses of parliament. These experiences inform their behaviours and actions.

International evidence suggests that the presence of women politicians at a critical mass can impact on the issues parliaments prioritise and pursue. Where more women are involved in setting parliamentary agendas there is more effort to address gender-based violence, issues of workplace inequality and to create policies focussed on the care of young children.'

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-23/cooper-we-need-action-to-get-more-women-into-politics/7536740>

James Connelly, Professor of Politics at the University of Hull, has argued for the need for a diverse range of life experience among parliamentary representatives. Professor Connelly has stated, 'Despite their best efforts, if the composition of parliament is entirely different from the composition of the country, representatives will be unable to achieve the necessary breadth of understanding and viewpoint.' <https://theconversation.com/how-can-we-better-represent-women-in-parliament-37787>

Georgina Downer, a member of the Victorian Liberal Party's administrative committee, though not a supporter of quotas, also argues that there should be many more Liberal women parliamentarians.

Ms Downer has stated, 'The research on gender equality in decision-making establishes that there will be better results for the community as a whole if women are represented and involved in politics equally. More women in politics means a more representative democracy and sends the message that Australian society is inclusive of women.' <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/gender-equality-in-parliament-quotas-just-a-quickfix-solution-20150809-giuy5w.html>

A similar point has been made by Melanie Fernandez, a spokesperson for WEL (Women's Electoral Lobby), who has stated, 'The lack of women in government seats is particularly shocking and nowhere near good enough from a party that says it is committed to ending gender-inequality that leads to domestic violence.' <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/house-of-unrepresentatives-female-coalition-mps-at-lowest-level-in-two-decades-20160713-gq4mvf.html>

It is further stated that a small representation of women in parliament means that much of the available ability pool within the Australian community is not being drawn on. Former prime minister, Julia Gillard, has stated, 'If you believe, as I do, that merit is equally distributed between the sexes, then if you can look at any organisation - the Parliament, the Cabinet - and not see around half-half men and women, then that must mean that there were women of merit who should've come through, but didn't come through.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-04/julia-gillard-on-mental-health-politics-and-promoting-women/10334336>

Australia's former deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Julie Bishop, though not a supporter of quotas, has similarly remarked on the wasted ability that occurs when women's capabilities are not utilised. Ms Bishop has stated, 'No...country can reach its full potential unless it embraces the skills, talents, energy, intellect and ideas of the 50-percent of the population that is female.' <https://www.vogue.com.au/vogue-codes/news/julie-bishop-on-womens-empowerment-role-models-and-the-future-for-australian-girls/news-story/f0543dbcc7e55ba44cade4842e1c2236>

## 2. Women are under-represented in the Liberal Party

Many supporters of women being represented in parliament argue that as women form approximately 50 per cent of the population it is reasonable to expect that they would form approximately 50 per cent of the elected members of parliament. Critics outside and within the Liberal party argue that the party is dramatically failing to achieve anything like this level of women's representation and that the situation has not shifted in a generation.

In absolute terms, the trend toward decreasing numbers of Liberal women in federal parliament has been in evidence since the late 1990s. There were three more Liberal women in parliament during 1996 compared to May 2018. In fact, 1996 saw the highest number of Liberal women

holding seats in parliament. As a proportion of seats held by the party, female parliamentarians have barely increased in number. In 2016, Liberal female parliamentarians formed 24 per cent of those elected. By 2018 that percentage had dropped to 21. This is the same as the figure for 1996. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-06-06/fact-check-liberal-women-in-parliament/9796976>

Looking only at the House of Representatives, the ratio of 17 per cent of Coalition seats occupied by women is lower than under all four terms of the Howard government, which ranged between 19 per cent and 22 per cent, and is at its lowest since Mr Keating won in 1993.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/house-of-unrepresentatives-female-coalition-mps-at-lowest-level-in-two-decades-20160713-gq4mvf.html>

Having approximately a fifth of liberal seats held by women is thrown into sharp distinction by the situation in the two other major parties. 50 per cent of Democrat representatives are women. In the 2016 election 44 per cent of elected Labor representatives were women while by 2018 that number had risen to 48 per cent.

It has been noted that the numerical inequality of women operates at a number of levels within the Liberal Party. It has been claimed that men are much more likely to win pre-selection for safe Liberal seats than women are. Since 2015, thirteen Liberal MPs have retired from safe seats, and male candidates have been chosen to replace all but two of them. By comparison, women are overwhelmingly more likely to be selected to contest marginal seats for the Liberal Party. In the 2016 federal election, the Liberal Party put forward more female candidates than ever before, but only three of the 38 were pre-selected to contest safe seats.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-27/liberal-party-lack-of-women-costing-votes/9175150>

It is also claimed that women are under-represented in Coalition cabinets. This claim was made most forcefully when Tony Abbott was elected in 2016 and appointed only one woman, Julie Bishop, to his cabinet. The contrast was particularly stark because one of the former Labor governments had had a woman, Julia Gillard, as prime minister.

The number of women in cabinet only began to trend upwards late in John Howard's 2001-2004 term as prime minister. Since then, female representation in cabinet was lowest after Tony Abbott became prime minister in 2013. Mr Turnbull made some changes when he became prime minister. In September 2015 he promoted Michaelia Cash, Kelly O'Dwyer and Marise Payne into cabinet, and in February 2016 added Fiona Nash, taking the total number of women to six. That is more women than in any previous Liberal-National government and equals the number in Kevin Rudd's Labor cabinet. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-11/fact-check-are-there-more-women-in-federal-cabinet-than-ever/9033650> However, neither party has achieved numbers which satisfy those looking to see women acquire more influence in parliament.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-11/fact-check-are-there-more-women-in-federal-cabinet-than-ever/9033650><http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-11/fact-check-are-there-more-women-in-federal-cabinet-than-ever/9033650> Scott Morrison also has six women in his cabinet while Bill Shorten's shadow inner ministry has seven women.

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Parliamentary\\_Handbook/Shadow](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Shadow) Under Prime Minister Julia Gillard there was a record eight women in the ministry and five in cabinet.

This included a woman, Nicola Roxon, as Attorney General and another woman, Penny Wong, as Finance Minister. Wong was also Deputy Leader and then Leader of the Government in the Senate. [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Parliamentary\\_Handbook/Shadow](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Parliamentary_Handbook/Shadow)

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2013/march/1361848246/anna-goldsworthy/critical-mass> Thus, for critics of women's representation within Liberal ministries and cabinets, it is a question of both absolute numbers and the significance of the positions held.

3. 'Merit' is used to discriminate against the pre-selection and advancement of women within the Liberal party

Opponents of the Liberal Party's supposedly merit-based system dispute that the continued small number of women pre-selected and advanced within the Liberal Party reflect the ability of the women who might have been recruited or promoted.



Long-standing Liberal senator, Judith Troeth has argued that a lack of merit is not what is preventing larger numbers of Liberal women candidates from securing a place within the parliament. Rather, she suggests, a system based on a falsely-applied concept of merit serves to deny women access. Ms Troeth has stated, 'It eventually fails the test of reason after sitting in a parliamentary party room for nearly 20 years without seeing a progressive increase in the cohort of women members. As if those handful of women members who are there were the only "women of merit" who put themselves forward for pre-selection.'<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2015/08/19/comment-merit-vs-quotas-or-men-vs-women-australias-political-system> It has been claimed that supposedly merit-based selection processes are intrinsically biased because the concept of 'merit' is subjective and frequently reflects the group identity of those men making the judgement.

This point has also been made by former Liberal senator Judith Troeth who has been proposing her party adopt a quota system since 2005. Ms Troeth has stated, 'Believing your organisation hires and promotes on merit is not enough. Why? It turns out judging merit is not an exact science. Such decisions are frequently swayed by bias, because many decision makers have set ideas of what leaders look like and, quite often, those stereotypes are male.'

<https://insidestory.org.au/merit-isnt-working-so-its-time-to-introduce-quotas/>

An editorial published in Elle on April 5, 2018, argued in favour of positive discrimination for women and minority groups in parliament and elsewhere. It too argued that the concept of merit was a social construct which frequently reflected the prejudices of those assessing the applicants for a position. The editorial observed, 'Countless studies have proven we do not live in a meritocracy - merit is socially constructed and gendered. By introducing blind auditions for major symphony orchestras, the United States increased women's chances of advancing through preliminary rounds by 50 per cent...Women didn't magically become better musicians overnight, but the opportunity for bias was eliminated and suddenly, the workplace was more diverse.'<https://www.elle.com.au/culture/meritocracy-myth-female-politicians-hide-behind-16239>

Former Liberal party opposition leader, John Hewson, has argued that while any quota system would need to ensure the quality of those appointed, the Liberal Party's current supposed merit system is a fiction. Mr Hewson stated, 'Most of the men who get into parliament these days haven't ever run anything.'<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/08/the-meritocracy-myth-has-silenced-liberal-women-but-no-more>

It has further been noted that in supposedly merit-based interviews for pre-selection women candidates have been asked gender-biased questions about their childcare and other family arrangements. Prior to being elected as a representative of the Victorian Liberal Party, Margaret Fitzherbert declared, 'It is not a merit-based process if only the female candidates for pre-selection are asked who will look after their children if they go into parliament.

It is not a merit-based process if only the female candidates for pre-selection are asked if they are planning to have a family and how that might work with being an MP.

It is not a merit-based process if only the female candidates are told by delegates that maybe they should wait and try for a seat when their children are older.'<https://www.aph.gov.au/~/~/~link.aspx?id=240F755AE81F4EE18C62C028129D82E6&z=z#ftn7>

#### 4. The Liberal Party will lose support among women and younger voters

Those who support a quota system within the Liberal Party argue that the party's electoral appeal will decline if its number of female candidates and representatives continues to stagnate or decline.

The 2015 'Gender and Politics' discussion paper produced by the Menzies Research Centre states, 'Correlation is not causation, but the trend over the last 20 years is clear. Labor has more women in parliament than the Coalition and it has a larger share of the female vote. By contrast, the number of Liberal women elected has largely flatlined. [If] the Liberal Party does not do something to address this, the gap between Labor and Liberal female MPs elected [is] likely to grow wider.'

The Liberal Party has been slow to react to the growing gender disparity. As a result the party's

"retail" brand is suffering.' <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/mensclub-liberals-must-act-on-gender-balance/news-story/fcc45ef23f1446227f5809f6f8ebd24a>

The discussion paper concedes that quotas have given the Labor Party a 'competitive edge' after more women voted for Labor than men at the 2010 and 2016 elections following decades of the reverse voting pattern. It states, 'Labor Party spokespeople who appear on television or radio are more likely to be women than their counterparts. In any retail-facing business this matters.' <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/mensclub-liberals-must-act-on-gender-balance/news-story/fcc45ef23f1446227f5809f6f8ebd24a>

Commenting on the likely electoral consequences of a reduction to a probable five or six female Liberal representatives in the lower house after the next election, Sydney Morning Herald commentator, Jacqueline Maley, has stated, 'It is no longer good enough for a major party, a party that says it understands, and seeks to represent, the greatest share of the voting public, to treat half the population as a boutique minority group.' <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/the-liberals-woman-problem-men-in-grey-suits-misjudge-level-of-anger-20180917-p504b9.html>

Liberal women already elected to parliament argue that there are practical rather than ethical reasons for increasing the number of women. They claim that without additional women candidates and representatives the party will become increasingly less attractive to voters, especially female and young voters.

Liberal senator Jane Hume has stated, 'One of the tough things we have to do is convince our members and our colleagues that there is a business case for increasing the number of women in parliament.' Liberal senator Linda Reynolds has compared the situation among Liberals in Australia with that of the Conservative Party in Great Britain which has recently worked to increase its number of female representatives. She has stated, 'Their business case is once their [female] vote falls below 40 per cent, the Conservative Party will not win. They won't win in coalition or in their own right. So they've realised to win, they need more women.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-27/liberal-party-lack-of-women-costing-votes/9175150>

5. Quotas are the most effective means of increasing women's participation within parliament Supporters of quotas for women in parliament both inside the Liberal Party and outside it acknowledge that quotas are the fastest and most effective means of increasing the political representation of women.

On July 13, 2016, the Centre for Ethical Leadership, University of Melbourne, published an analysis titled 'Closing the gender gap in politics'. The report claims, 'Voluntary quotas are some of the most effective mechanisms to increase female representation in parliaments. Countries such as Norway, Iceland and Sweden have some of the highest levels of female representation in their legislative bodies because of voluntary party quotas.'

<https://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au/australia-2016/articles/closing-the-gender-gap-in-politics>

The report refers to an analysis of data from 250 parliaments and legislative bodies in 190 countries about the implementation of reporting requirements, targets and quotas for women. In the first longitudinal analysis of its kind it compares the effectiveness of reporting requirements, targets and quotas for significantly increasing female representation in parliaments, starting from 1996 to 2015. The findings were that countries reserving seats for women in parliament and countries with stronger enforcement mechanisms for their quotas had a significantly larger female representation than countries using reporting requirements or targets. <https://electionwatch.unimelb.edu.au/australia-2016/articles/closing-the-gender-gap-in-politics>

On December 15, 2010, the British edition of The Guardian published a comment by Glenys Kinnock, vice-president of the associate parliamentary group on Sudan and South Sudan and formerly a member of the European Parliament. Kinnock stated, 'Quotas clearly have a positive effect...and will achieve a specified level of representation...

All experience shows that change will not happen by osmosis - there will need to be, in the developing world and elsewhere, mechanisms designed to guarantee that women will be selected in constituencies where they have a strong chance of being elected. Experience has

shown that legislated quotas ensure that political parties will seek, find and train women - an effort they might not otherwise have made.

If we agree that there are potentially as many competent female candidates as there are competent male candidates, then we can only assume that their exclusion is because of discrimination. Quotas are capable of dealing with that discrimination and of ensuring that when there is women's leadership, there will be significantly more support for health education and other quality of life issues.' <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2010/dec/15/women-parliament-quotas-gender-development>

Those supporting quotas also note that not only are they effective, they bring about results quickly. An international overview of electoral quotas for women, produced for the Australian parliament by Dr Joy McCann in 2013, states, 'Electoral quotas have gained international support and have proven to be effective in "fast-tracking" women's political representation to produce equality of results, not just equality of opportunity.' [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1314/ElectoralQuotas)

### **Arguments against the Liberal Party using quotas to put more women in Parliament**

#### **1. Quotas do not result in the best qualified candidates or parliamentarians**

Opponents of quota-based selection argue that it may result in female candidates and parliamentarians with less ability being selected primarily because of their gender. The concern is based on the fear that a quota system would see less qualified women put forward because the party was prevented from appointing men who were more able. Opponents of quotas argue that the best selections are made when the available candidates compete freely and all are judged solely on ability.

There is initial concern that a quota system could result in female candidates of a lower calibre who were less likely to be supported by the electorate. It is also suggested that even where women selected using a quota system were elected to parliament, they may well be less able and effective representatives. When asked, in September, 2018, about the possible impact of a quota system, Liberal senator, Eric Abetz, referred to the impact of this system on the Labor Party. He stated, 'But quotas for the sake of quotas, all I say to you with respect is, have a look at the Labor party side of the parliament and you can see what quotas do and it ain't a good look.' <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/morrison-rejects-gender-quotas-to-boost-female-numbers> Senator Abetz appears to be suggesting that many of the female parliamentarians within the Labor party do not perform well and would not be in their positions had they been subjected to free competition before their positions were filled..

A similar point was made by former Liberal Cabinet minister, Amanda Vanstone, in 2013, when defending Tony Abbott's first cabinet which contained only one woman. Vanstone stressed that cabinet members had to be selected on merit, not gender, and referred disparagingly to the cabinet of the former Labor government. Ms Vanstone stated, 'It didn't help the Labor Party, which had lots of women but was hopeless. I'd rather have good government than have more women in the cabinet for the sake of it.' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/17/bishop-vanstone-defend-abbott-women-cabinet>

Liberal federal MP, Craig Kelly, has summed up the position of many within the Liberal Party regarding merit-based selection relative to quotas. On September 26, 2018, Mr Kelly was reported as stating, 'You either believe in quotas, or you believe in selection on merit, And may the best man or woman, or transsexual, or bisexual or transgender person win the seat. That's how it should be.' <https://thewest.com.au/opinion/why-we-need-gender-quotas-for-women-in-federal-parliament-ng-b88973635z>

There is a related concern that quotas will not only result in less able candidates and parliamentarians, they may also result in more tunnel-visioned ones. Some critics are concerned that quotas designed to see a certain number of women elected may result in parliamentarians who see themselves as representing women rather than the electorate as a whole.

Political columnist and journalist Mungo McCallum has stated, 'When [a party] starts cultivating certain groups at the expense of others, it is inevitably seen to be exclusive rather than inclusive, and those who feel rejected will reject it in return. It is one thing to acknowledge that there are identifiable sections of society which are unfairly disadvantaged and strive to remedy the injustice; but this can't be done by privileging them above everyone else.'

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-10-07/maccallum-where-does-the-madness-of-quotas-end/5002504>

2. With encouragement, experience and perseverance women can earn their place based on merit

It has been argued that women may need to be encouraged to stand for positions and that they may need to develop experience at applying for pre-selection or running for election. Once within parliament, women parliamentarians must expect to have to build up further experience before being considered for cabinet. Opponents of quotas claim that if women are encouraged to run, gain experience and persevere they will achieve success.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison has stated that, rather than quotas, encouragement, mentoring and training are needed at all levels as women attempt to work their way into parliament.

Mr Morrison has indicated that he is working with the Minister for Women, Kelly O'Dwyer, on a 'practical exercise', similar to the training programs that helped a record number of Liberal women get pre-selected at the 1996 election.

Mr Morrison has stated, 'What I am focusing on with Kelly and other members of the team is to ensure that we remove the obstacles preventing women from going forward. It's a matter of supporting women throughout the pre-selection process...then when they get into parliament, ensure they're getting the support they need to do the job.' <https://www.thecourier.com.au/story/5638064/morrison-rejects-liberal-gender-quota/>

Rather than quotas, the Liberal Party has decided on targets, considering a target of 50 per cent female representation in parliament by 2050.

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/liberal-party-report-aimed-at-getting-more-women-in-high-office-20151225-gluyt9.html>

In addition to guidance and support, prominent members of the Liberal Party have argued that women need determination and experience. Former Liberal Senator and House Speaker, Bronwyn Bishop, said of her own entry into parliament, 'I do remember way back when I first stood for the Senate, the first time I stood, somebody said to me, "Mrs Bishop, NSW has never had a woman senator; why should we have one now?" And I said, 'Because I'm the best person for the job'. They didn't choose me then but I didn't go away and whinge about it either. I just worked hard so they chose me subsequently.' <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/bronwyn-bishop-rejects-calls-for-affirmative-action-in-liberal-party-20130917-2tvzq.html>

Bronwyn Bishop also noted that experience would soon see more Liberal women in Tony Abbott's cabinet after 2013. Senator Bishop stated, 'There are many talented women who are in our ranks in the Coalition and although there's only one in the cabinet there are a number on the frontbench as a whole and there are talented people on the backbench, who were fairly recently elected, who will learn more about the parliament and will earn their stripes as it were. You will find that they will come through the ranks.' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/17/bishop-vanstone-defend-abbott-women-cabinet>

Former Liberal Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, made a similar remark, in 2013, regarding the small number of women within the Liberal cabinet. Ms Bishop suggested that with time and experience women currently within the parliament would earn themselves a place in cabinet. She stated, 'The number of women in the ministry will build over time. Currently there are a number of capable, talented women who will be considered for cabinet in due course.'

<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/bronwyn-bishop-rejects-calls-for-affirmative-action-in-liberal-party-20130917-2tvzq.html>

3. Quotas are philosophically unattractive to a party ideologically in favour of competition

Core values stated within the Liberal Party platform such as individualism and the value of open competition are often put forward as reasons why the party cannot adopt quotas to increase the number of women in parliament..

The platform states, 'We believe in the innate worth of the individual, in the right to be independent, to own property and to achieve, and in the need to encourage initiative and personal responsibility.' <https://cdn.liberal.org.au/pdf/FederalPlatform.pdf> This emphasis on 'initiative and personal responsibility' runs counter to the idea of quotas as it suggests that individuals ought 'achieve' through individual effort.

Additionally the party is one which believes in 'equality of opportunity' <https://cdn.liberal.org.au/pdf/FederalPlatform.pdf> rather than equal outcomes. Regarding parliamentary quotas, which are attempts to shape outcomes, Liberal supporters are likely to believe that all candidates for pre-selection and other positions within the party have an equal opportunity of success and therefore no artificial device (such as a quota) should be put in place to advantage one candidate over another.

Finally, the Liberal Party believes in the value of 'competitive enterprise...and reward for effort'. This appears to be more than an economic principal. In regard to entry into parliament, it appears to suggest there should be free competition between candidates with the most able candidate receiving the reward for his or her efforts. The Liberal party, therefore, sees itself and the society within which it operates as ideally a meritocracy, where those with the most ability will rise to the top as a result of individual effort. <https://cdn.liberal.org.au/pdf/FederalPlatform.pdf>

'Alex Dore, the president of the New South Wales Young Liberals, has explained his party's understanding of and attachment to a meritocracy. Mr Dore has stated, 'Meritocracy simply means that people succeed or fail on their merits. It means that people - regardless of gender, race or sexuality - should be considered on their skills; their aspirations; their work ethic.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/liberals-should-place-their-faith-in-merit/news-story/4883eb530474aca8131fe5b87912f541>

Mr Dore offered this definition as a way of explaining why the Liberal party should remain opposed to quotas.

Newspaper columnist, Miranda Devine, opened a piece attacking the possibility of quotas with the Liberal Party by asking ' Since when do conservatives [members of the Liberal party] demand equality of outcome instead of equality of opportunity?' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

Quoting classic economists favoured by the Liberal Party, Devine extended her ideological attack on quotas. She stated, 'As the great free market economists Milton and Rose Friedman put it: "A society that puts ... equality of outcome ahead of freedom will end up with neither equality nor freedom".' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

Critics of quotas within the Liberal Party have also noted that its supporters within the electorate are likely to be so philosophically opposed to quotas that they may not vote for the party if it adopts them. The results of a recent study indicate that conservative voters endorse the Liberal party's support for meritocratic or individualistic principles, a common argument used against quotas. <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/coalition-parties-have-little-incentive-to-introduce-gender-quotas-20180912-p50392.html>

4. Gender quotas undermine the standing of the women pre-selected and elected through them Opponents of quota systems argue that they leave in doubt the real ability of women who have been selected using them. It is suggested that even where quotas result in the appointment of competent women, the women's ability remains open to question because they did not gain their positions in open competition. Therefore, it is argued, rather than help to counter prejudices against women, quota systems entrench them as they suggest that women cannot gain positions without external assistance.

This point was made by Liberal senator Bronwyn Bishop in 2013 while defending the first cabinet of Tony Abbott which contained only one woman. Senator Bishop stated, 'I never want to see affirmative action - that is, you got the job because you were a woman, because that makes you a permanent second-class citizen.' <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/17/bishop-vanstone-defend-abbott-women-cabinet>

Some commentators have argued that quotas are actually an insult to women as they presume that women are unable to gain a place in parliament on ability and instead need to be given a guaranteed entry. Commentator Miranda Devine has stated, '[Women's] hackles [are] raised by the suggestion they should vote on chromosome rather than merit. Women hate being patronised.

Gender quotas damage every woman who has achieved her role on merit. They are an insult to any woman who enters parliament.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

In an opinion piece published in The New Matilda on June 6, 2013, Western Australian Liberal Senator Michaelia Cash similarly stated, 'An artificially contrived quota system which is designed to increase the number of women selected as parliamentary candidates ultimately encourages and leads to the negative and belittling statement "she only got there because she is a woman"...

The Coalition holds the view that the appointment of women to positions for reasons other than merit and excellence could be counterproductive and work against their long term interests. It is clearly discriminatory and unfair to treat women as if they don't have the qualities to reach the top by themselves.' <https://newmatilda.com/2013/06/06/elect-women-merit-not-quota/>

Former Liberal prime minister John Howard summed up this view in a speech given on September 21, 2018. A supporter of more women within the Liberal Party and within the federal parliament, Mr Howard believes that quotas undermine women by assuming they are not independently capable of gaining pre-selection. Mr Howard stated, 'I think that whole notion of quotas is wrong. It's patronising.' <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/john-howard-wants-more-female-liberals-calls-quotas-patronising-20180921-p5059x.html>

Howard had made the same point in 2002 while still prime minister. He stated, 'I think that affirmative action rules are insulting to women. I think quotas are patronising to women and most women I know who are interested in politics don't want the patronising existence of quotas. They want to get there on their own merit.' <http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-12727>

Columnist for The Australian, Janet Albrechtsen, has criticised those female parliamentarians within the Liberal Party who are calling for quotas for women. She condemns them as breaking with Liberal Party beliefs and accepting a second rate status. She argues, 'I've always thought the big difference between the Liberal Party and the Labor Party is that women are happy to get a leg up in Labor, they're happy to be seen as second rate and needing special favours. I had assumed and hoped the liberal side of politics would not give in to that kind of sexism.' <https://www.2gb.com/the-right-of-centre-vote-based-on-policy-not-gender-calls-for-liberal-party-gender-quotas-escalate/>

##### 5. Fewer women than men want a career in federal politics

It has been argued that fewer women than men want a career in federal politics and thus it is not reasonable to expect equal representation of men and women within the Liberal party.

This point was made by Liberal whip, Rowan Ramsey, in September 2018, when attempting to explain the relatively low number of women within the parliamentary Liberal Party. Mr Ramsey stated, 'It is a bit of a mystery why we don't have more women in the Parliament, because in fact we have plenty of women participating right throughout the lay party, very talented people, and maybe it is something about the workplace that is making them reluctant.'

Ramsey then explained further, 'I often think it is probably easier for people who have family to operate in a state parliament than it is to operate in the Federal Parliament'. Ramsey appears to be alluding to the difficulties of maintaining family life as a parliamentarian and especially as a

federal parliamentarian.

Deputy federal Labor Leader, Tanya Pilbersek, who is a mother as well as a parliamentarian, has stated, 'Parliament is absolutely not a great working environment for anyone. The hours are long, there's a lot of time away from home; even when we're back in the electorate there's a lot of night time functions and weekends.' <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/tough-challenging-and-a-struggle-thats-life-for-parents-in-politics-20180228-h0wsan.html> It has been claimed that the difficulties Pilbersek outlines are particularly acute for those with families. Some of Pilbersek's later comments indicate the strain involved on her as a wife and mother. She has stated, 'I really do feel like by doing my job I am leaving a better country for my kids to grow up in and if I didn't feel that I don't think I could stand the time away from home.'

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/tough-challenging-and-a-struggle-thats-life-for-parents-in-politics-20180228-h0wsan.html>  
<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/tough-challenging-and-a-struggle-thats-life-for-parents-in-politics-20180228-h0wsan.html>

Kelly O'Dwyer, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Minister for Women, was the first cabinet minister to give birth while in office. Ms O'Dwyer has stated, 'I FaceTime my children every night to catch up on their day and read them a bedtime story. I also take the time, more often than not it's pretty late at night, to chat with my husband as well. It's obviously a great privilege to do this job, but obviously it does come with sacrifices.'

<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/tough-challenging-and-a-struggle-thats-life-for-parents-in-politics-20180228-h0wsan.html>

Some commentators noting the relatively low number of women parliamentarians in the Liberal Party have argued that the pressures on family life for parliamentarians are greatest for women and thus many women simply choose not to enter parliament.

This point has been made by commentator Miranda Devine. Devine stated, 'The bottom line is that fewer women than men view federal politics as a desirable career. Otherwise, more than 24 per cent of federal Liberal MPs would be women and the Labor Party wouldn't have to force 50 per cent representation through mandatory quotas.'

If most women don't want to become federal politicians, how do you force them into a career they don't want?' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

Devine explained further, 'Most women have children, which is actually necessary for the survival of our species, not an optional extra. And most women don't want to outsource their mothering to strangers...'

Most mothers want to raise their own children because they feel it's the most worthwhile thing they will ever do. Raising good citizens is better for your community than being a backbencher for thirty years, or even a prime minister.' <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/demands-for-liberal-gender-quotas-are-an-insult/news-story/a94e9cddb60627868e571a1c3c2c4d6b>

### Further implications

The movement to increase female participation within the Liberal Party has been in existence since the early 1990s under the leadership of John Hewson. During John Hewson's leadership (1990-94) a Liberal Women's Forum was established to find and promote female candidates. <https://insidestory.org.au/quotas-for-the-liberal-party/> Women in the party sought out and trained suitable women who prevailed in pre-selections and went on to have successful parliamentary careers. It bore significant fruit in the 1996 election which brought John Howard to power and saw a large increase in Liberal seats, many of which were held by women. This period is the current high water mark of female representation within the Liberal Party.

<https://insidestory.org.au/quotas-for-the-liberal-party/>  
<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/menzies-got-the-ball-rolling-on-women-in-parliament/news-story/c70d648a9b18c6567d7096d30e399b68>

Since 1996 there has been a progressive decline in the number of women pre-selected or promoted to ministries or shadow ministries within the Liberal Party. John Howard appointed two

women to his first cabinet, Senators Amanda Vanstone and Jocelyn Newman. However, philosophically, Howard appears to believe there are inevitable limits to the extent to which women are ever likely to be represented in parliament. When asked for his view on women in parliament in 2016, former prime minister Howard stated, 'I would like to see a natural process whereby there are more women, but I don't think you will ever...have 50-50. It is a fact of society that women play a significantly greater part of fulfilling the caring role in our communities, which inevitably places some limits on their capacity.' <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/careers/john-howard-women-have-limits-on-capacity-in-politics/news-story/a0ad49697ac9576755fe8858083f238e>

Following Howard there appears not to have been the focused attempts to promote women that were a feature of John Hewson's leadership. Tony Abbott's ministry in 2013 famously contained only one woman, Julie Bishop. The number of capable women overlooked for cabinet posts has been noted on numerous occasions. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/life/weekend-australian-magazine/why-didnt-tony-abbott-promote-more-capable-women-to-cabinet/news-story/845c9421aed2d0848d9a5a1de4c987cb>

Once the number of women within parliament reaches a significantly low point it becomes difficult to increase as there are few female role models for women in a party's political support base to shape their political aspirations around. Further, when there is only a small female talent pool within the parliament, it becomes easier to justify not finding them places within cabinet. It also creates an atmosphere where, as Labor senator Kristina Keneally has noted, women become rivals competing for ever fewer places rather than colleagues seeking to advance the collective interests of women. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/18/quotas-for-women-maybe-the-conservative-side-of-politics-is-just-more-misogynist>

Some critics of the selection processes currently used within the Liberal party argue that its opposition to a quota system is hypocritical. Sussan Ley, Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories in the Morrison Liberal government, has been quoted as saying that the Liberal and National parties already have unofficial quotas to balance out representation. The ministry is divided up to ensure there is sufficient representation from across the states and territories, and between the Liberal and National parties. 'So why,' Senator Ley has asked, 'can't we find a way of doing this with gender?' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/sep/08/the-meritocracy-myth-has-silenced-liberal-women-but-no-more>

There are those who have suggested that part of the Liberal Party's opposition to quotas may be a substantial majority of male Liberal members of parliament seeking to hold on to their positions.

Ultimately it may well be a matter of political pragmatism whether the Liberal Party decides to adopt quotas or not. The Liberal Women's Forum experiment under John Hewson suggests that even without quotas it is possible to build up significant practical momentum to get more Liberal women into parliament. The current Liberal prime minister, Scott Morrison, supports an increase in the number of Liberal women elected to parliament. He put his backing behind a female candidate for the upcoming by-election in Wentworth, a seat vacated by the former prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull. The local selection committee ignored the prime minister's preference and endorsed a male candidate promoted by John Howard.

<https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/a-plea-for-gender-quotas-in-australian-politics-time-to-give-a-fair-go-to-everyone/news-story/31614f523a5eeaa4887c359c3c27340a> This has been seen as a very public demonstration of the Liberal Party machine's refusal at a branch level to prioritise the pre-selection of women in winnable seats. Former Liberal prime minister John Hewson has urged the residents of Wentworth to use the by-election 'to register a protest vote'. <https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/a-plea-for-gender-quotas-in-australian-politics-time-to-give-a-fair-go-to-everyone/news-story/31614f523a5eeaa4887c359c3c27340a><https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/06/wentworth-byelection-john-hewson-says-seat-ripe-for-protest-vote>

It is not certain what the result of the next election will be regarding attempts to increase the



number of Liberal women in parliament. If the party suffers a significant loss, particularly a loss contributed to by a decline in support from women voters, this may prompt the party to reenergise its efforts to put more women candidates in winnable seats. In the short-term; however, a Liberal Opposition is likely to have very, very few women members.