



***AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF
PARLIAMENT GROUP
(Queensland Chapter)***

**ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE
AND STILL COUNTING**

Monday, 9 May 2005

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Nonie Malone: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, members of parliament and ASPG members and guests. Thank you so much all for being here tonight. It is my pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group. For those of you who are new tonight, I will say just a little about the Australasian Study of Parliament Group. It is a group that was formed about 13 years ago with a charter to bring together parliamentarians, academics, senior members of the press, parliamentary staff and other interested members of society to foster further understanding and discussion of our system of Westminster parliamentary democracy. The Australasian Study of Parliament Group, Queensland chapter, meets about four times a year with functions not unlike tonight's function. Some of the functions we have had in the past have explored the roles and appointments of governors and governors-general, the interface between parliament and the Public Service and the role of the media. We have had a few good forums on the issue of media and parliament. Tonight we will be looking at the subject of 100 years of suffrage for women.

It is very exciting to be part of the broader celebrations for the 100 years of suffrage for women. Parliament is celebrating largely over the two weeks commencing this evening. There is to be a display, produced by the Parliamentary Library, which is available for our guests tonight to see, after dinner. There are other functions as well to be held in parliament, including the unveiling of a portrait of Irene Longman, who was the first female parliamentarian.

Our speaker tonight will be Patty Renfrow. Patty is known to many of you. She has been at the University of Queensland for quite some time now. Quite a number of us have been students of Patty. Patty is now a lecturer in public management at the business school of the university. She holds a PhD in political science from Rice University, Houston, in Texas, and she has taught and researched across a wide range of subject areas, including public administration and public policy, gender and politics and American politics.

Patty is the author of *'The gender gap in the 1993 election'*, which was published in *Australian Journal of Political Science* in 1994 and received considerable attention from journalists and politicians. She recently produced an article 'Gender politics' for the 2003 *Cambridge Handbook of Social Sciences in Australia*. During 1997 and 1998 Patty was a research fellow at the Queensland Office of Women's Affairs, where she authored the government report *Survey of Queensland Women*. That study analysed attitudes, views and experiences of 5,000 women aged 18 or over across the state.

Patty is also an active member of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, Queensland division. She has been an elected member of its governing council since 1998 and chaired its subcommittee on research and intellectual and professional development. This evening we are to benefit from the fruits of her labour in analysing electoral results as Patty addresses the topic 'One hundred years of women's suffrage and still counting'.

Patty Renfrow: Thank you, Nonie, for that introduction. I am very pleased to be here this evening to address you all. It has been a lovely evening. What a marvellous setting!

As Nonie said, the topic is 'One hundred years of women's suffrage and still counting'. As many of you know, female suffrage in Australia is as old as the nation itself. With the enactment of the Commonwealth Franchise Act in 1902, the newly established nation of Australia was the first in the world to grant women—or at least white, non-Indigenous women—both the right to vote and the right to stand for election to the national parliament. Only in New Zealand had women attained the right to vote for the national parliament—a right they obtained in 1893. Women's suffrage was decades away for American and British women.

Of course, it does need to be said that Australia's pioneering movement and adoption of women's suffrage had begun 20 years prior to Federation. South Australia and Western Australia, as you might know, led the way in granting women the right to vote—in 1894 and 1899 respectively—and subsequently the other states followed suit: New South Wales in 1902, Tasmania in 1903, Queensland in 1905—our 100-year celebration—and Victoria in 1908. So Australian women, therefore, obtained political rights well before their counterparts in other western democracies—a remarkable achievement. So they have experienced a century of being able to vote and participate in political life. So my remarks this evening are going to look at the patterns of women's voting in Australia.

Voting is one of the most fundamental forms of political participation. Certainly substantial differences amongst electors can have important implications for political parties, for their election campaigns, for electoral outcomes and certainly for public policies. So the question I am going to explore is: how do women vote? More specifically, do they vote differently from men?

This question has a long history within political science, but it has only recently come to prominence, particularly within the last couple of decades, as an issue that is very much at the top of the list amongst political scientists and psychologists. So to explore this question, let me turn back to those early days, around the time of suffrage, and then move forward to a couple of recent federal elections.

I would like to say I could provide you with some Queensland data but, alas, there isn't any. Queensland is very much in keeping with Australia. I don't think Queensland is quite that different. At any rate, when the right to vote was extended to women there was considerable speculation at the time about women's voting. Such speculation occurred of course not only in Australia but in all countries where women's suffrage was achieved. One view, of course, was that women would simply vote in accordance with the views of their fathers or their husbands—that, in effect, there would be no discernible difference in election outcomes after female enfranchisement. An alternative view, of course, was that there was a distinctive women's vote or that a distinctive women's vote might emerge. There are two possibilities for considering the debates about suffrage. For Queensland women, I was delighted to read that in 1894 a prominent politician put it simply, referring to female suffrage—

We will be impaled on the horns of this very awkward dilemma, that women will either vote in accordance with the views of their fathers, their husbands, their brothers or their sweethearts, or they will vote against them. If they vote with them, we are only doubling the numbers of the men already on the rolls. If they vote against them, we are preparing ourselves for a great deal of trouble. We are preparing for ourselves domestic friction and war in the home, the results of which we cannot, cannot anticipate.

I must admit, I do enjoy that. I am glad to see that you have, too.

The basis of this distinctive women's vote—of course, some feminists hoped for it and some male politicians feared it—was that perhaps the newly enfranchised women voters would back candidates who were supportive of a wide range of quite maternalistic policies—social policies in particular, such as protective wage and hours laws or expansive health and housing policies and other types of social provision for women and families. That is to say, women would vote according to so-called women's issues.

The women's suffrage movement had campaigned for policies to enhance the status of women, largely as wives and mothers and homemakers. Indeed, the dominant view at Federation of our women was that the private sphere of home and family was separate and distinct from the public sphere of politics and that the virtues of the domestic sphere were morally superior to the rather shabby realm of politics. And so the early feminists, in keeping with the public-private separation, considered women's interests to be limited in scope but certainly different from men's broader interests. Notwithstanding their demands for access to the formal institutions of politics, many early feminists reassured their opponents that women's suffrage would not lessen women's commitment to their homes and to their families. This public-private distinction was also the basis on which some feminists claimed that female suffrage would project the moral purity of the home into the political sphere. Indeed, one former Queensland Premier was quoted as saying—

It is much better that the other sex should keep out of the troubled scene of politics. They have higher functions to perform other than political ones. And to those functions their attention should be confined.

At any rate, on winning the right to vote some suffragists, or feminists, advocated that women 'stand together as women apart from all considerations of class and political party'. But in the years following women's enfranchisement a distinctive women's vote failed to materialise, or at least did not appear to materialise. Some observers of past elections in those early days claimed that women as a group supported the Labor Party. Other commentators and observers claimed that women as a group were supportive of conservative parties.

It must be recognised, of course, that it is really difficult for us to conclude with any confidence just how women voted in those early days. Essentially, the historical analysis on women's voting behaviour in those early days just isn't there. It is really not there on men's, either, I must say. But if we look at women as a group and we look at Australian political history, as many of you might be aware women were largely written out of Australian history—certainly political history. I was quite struck when I started to look at Manning Clark's celebrated *History of Australia*, which is quite well known. His first edition I think appeared in about 1963. Subsequent editions appeared as late as the mid-1990s. It makes only a passing reference to the feminist movement that struggled for the right of women to vote and of course the campaign and the ultimate winning of that vote. At any rate, it does appear that, having fought so hard for the right to vote, not so long following enfranchisement gender was a distinction without political importance—unlike, for example, socioeconomic class or religion.

If you jump forward a little bit to the 1950s and 1960s, you begin to see some systematic research undertaken to look at the nature of men's and women's political participation. Scholars in Europe, Britain and America in particular began to look closely at women's political participation. This research was quite influential in shaping our understanding of Australian women's political participation as well. The consensus that emerged from these studies was generally that men and women did differ, at least somewhat or slightly, and that they differed in the following ways. Women were less interested than men in politics, women tended to follow the lead of their husbands in politics, as some of those early opponents suggested or hoped, and women were politically more conservative than men. These differences were attributed largely to women's greater family ties, their greater religiosity and their lower levels of work force participation. The participation of women in political life was largely regarded as a cross-national phenomenon. Research in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Australia seemed to also document that Australian women as a group were more conservative than Australian men as a group. In contrast, we found that men were more likely than women to support the Labor Party and, again, women were more likely than men to support parties of the Right.

These gender explanations, however, were quickly challenged. Some scholars argued that the difference in women's and men's voting was really too small to be significant. Others in fact argued that it really wasn't gender, per se, that was the cause of these differences; it was things like work force participation, age or religion. At any rate, in the 1950s and the 1960s we had this picture that seems to be universal: women are politically more conservative than men, they are less interested in politics than men et cetera.

This universality of women's political conservatism, however, was quickly challenged in 1980. It was challenged in 1980 because in the United States, in that presidential election, there was a considerably large gender difference in voting. That is to say, far fewer women than men supported Ronald Reagan, the Republican or Right candidate, and more women than men supported the Democrat candidate. This difference was the largest ever observed between men and women in a choice of presidential candidates, and it was labelled the 'gender gap', referring to a situation in which women were more likely than men to vote for parties of the left of the political spectrum and therefore less likely than men to vote for parties of the Right.

The emergence of such a pronounced, eight-point gender gap prompted considerable interest in the reasons underlying the apparent shift from women's assumed conservatism to liberalism. In fact, that shift has persisted in all American elections since. In fact, in the 1996 presidential election women deserted the Republican Party to vote for Bill Clinton, providing a gender gap of historic proportions—14 percentage points—a difference in fact at that time no longer referred to as a gap but a chasm.

In the last two presidential elections women have also preferred Democratic candidates—Al Gore and John Kerry—to George W Bush by about 10 percentage points. In fact, the US National Organisation for Women claims that of the 20 states John Kerry won in 2004 nine were won because of the feminist gender gap or the liberal gender gap from women. So that is a little scene-setting for us.

If we examine the trends in voting behaviour in Australia—I am drawing on some survey research done in the late 1960s and early 1970s and also some systematic surveys of the elections—we see that Australia has really bucked this recent international trend. Such a pronounced liberal or Left gender gap has not emerged in Australia—a phenomenon that has certainly puzzled academics and, as you can appreciate, certainly bedevilled political party leaders and their strategists. It has particularly, of course, frustrated the Australian Labor Party because of course they look to the US experience in the hope of replicating it here in Australia.

The gender gap which I am going to talk about—this difference between men and women in their vote choice—is typically calculated on the basis of the main left-of-centre party. So in Australia, when I talk about the gap I am talking about the percentage of men who vote for the Labor Party minus the percentage of women who vote for the Labor Party. So positive values would indicate that more men than women vote for the Labor Party. Negative values would indicate that more women than men vote for the Labor Party. So we are talking about the difference—the gap. This is what we have seen emerge not only in the US but also in Britain and some European countries. Of course, if we had equal proportions of men and women voting for the Labor Party we would have no gender difference. And indeed in that case, of course, we might say that gender is not relevant.

In Australia, if we look at the long-term trends in the differences, in the gender gap—in the differences between men's and women's vote choices—we find that in 1967 the gender gap was nine percentage points. That means that more men than women voted for the Labor Party, providing support for women's conservatism. So in 1967 we have this gap of nine which says that more men than women are voting Labor; women are conservative. A nine percentage point difference is a big gap. It can make a difference in an election.

In 1979 that gap diminishes to seven. There are still more men than women voting Labor, but it is a smaller gap. In 1987 it was four percentage points and in 1990 it was two. This downward trend suggested that perhaps within the Australian electorate this conservative gender gap that we had seen was closing. It was perhaps reversing. It was perhaps going to close at the next election and possibly even reverse and become a pro-Left gender gap. In fact, in 1993, if you think back to that election that Paul Keating won, it was higher than it had been in the previous two elections. In other words, we had this downward trend from 1967 to 1990, suggesting that female conservatism is declining, but in the 1993 election it jumps back up to six percentage points—almost equal to what it was in 1979. I will come back to that in a moment. In fact, then, the gender gap was quite high. And we have to ask what is happening here. This downward trend over a couple of decades is rising again. I will come back to that in a moment.

Since 1993, however, this conservative gender gap has once again begun to decline at each of the three successive elections. It was five in 1996, it was three in 1998—again, more men than women voted Labor—and it was negative one in 2001. For the first time at that federal election slightly more women than men voted for the Labor Party. At the 2004 election, however, the gap once more reversed direction and it was two percentage points essentially in favour of the coalition.

So how do we explain this pattern? Well, in previous research I have advanced two explanations of the long-term trend in the gender gap, and these explanations share some common ground in that they both reflect a closing of the gap in the short run at least; however, they differ about the origins and the long-term consequences of the gender gap. Let me just briefly outline these accounts.

One is what I label the convergence thesis, which locates the origins of the gender gap in the disparities between men and women in their social and economic location. According to this account, the so-called conservative gender gap we have seen in Australia will decline as women's socioeconomic location improves through, for example, better access to education and the paid labour force. Convergence, essentially, then, in men's and women's life experience should lead to convergence in political attitudes and behaviour and therefore vote choice. The principal dynamic of this change, of course, would be generational replacement, when cohorts of younger women enter the electorate with greater choices than their forebears as they are more socially and economically autonomous and more oriented towards the paid work force and careers.

The implication of this for party platforms and policies is that the policy preferences of men as a group and women as a group would be quite similar. And if we look at the long-term decline in the gender gap from 1967, say, to 1992, when it went from nine to two points, that suggested some preliminary evidence for the interpretation that we have seen a closing of the gap—that men's and women's political attitudes and behaviours are converging. In fact, I actually speculated in an earlier piece that the gap would be extinguished at the 1993 election. Of course, we saw that it reversed direction and jumped back to plus six percentage points. Since 1993, as I mentioned, the trend has once again been declining. That is to say, women's conservatism is declining.

The alternative account to convergence is of course divergence. What do I mean by this? The divergence thesis of women's electoral behaviour gives primacy to the role of interest and issues as the principal source of women's voting behaviour and the gender gap in particular. In effect, I am talking about an issues based account of voting. According to this view, then, the conservative gap between men's and women's attitudes and behaviour will converge, as we have seen, but then subsequently diverge as younger women, socialised with more liberal views than men, enter the electorate. The principal source of this change is issues and interest, as I have said, and specifically issues of, say, women's equality and women's special needs; for example, child care, reproductive freedom et cetera.

According to this thesis, then, women's traditional interests—those interests of home and hearth—will combine with newer interests, such as equal employment opportunities et cetera, to differentiate their policy preferences from those of men. Now, these policy preferences, particularly associated with some of those so-called newer women's issues, have typically been associated with parties of the Left rather than the Right. So we begin to see, perhaps, that women more so than men would start to vote in greater proportions for parties of the Left, like the Labor Party. Indeed, the trend in the gender gap, as mentioned just a few moments ago, indicates that women's greater conservatism has diminished and we are certainly seeing a closing of the gap, but it has been hovering at about plus two, minus one et cetera. To some extent we can not really make too much of that, given sampling errors with surveys and such. But we are certainly not seeing evidence of a pronounced liberal or Left gender gap in Australia as we have witnessed elsewhere.

So how do we explain this? What is going on with women's voting? Is the basis of the gender gap that we have seen, whatever its directional magnitude, bound in women's and men's different attitudes towards issues? Certainly traditional modest voting behaviour actually identifies attitudes towards issues as one key source of one's vote—the basis for voting—but it also identifies evaluations with the party leaders and also partisanship or party loyalty. Let me just look at those in a couple of recent elections. I will look at 1993 and 1996 to try to capture some of the change that is happening.

If we look at attitudes towards issues, you will recall, then, that, even going back to those early days of the debates about women's suffrage, there is this claim that women may vote on the basis of women's issues, however those might be defined. If we take the 1993 federal election, Paul Keating won; John Hewson lost. The results of that election revealed little difference in the attitudes of men and women across a range of social and economic issues, such as unemployment, interest rates, education, health et cetera. We do not see much difference in attitudes towards some mainstream issues. By and large their attitudes are similar. Only in one type of issue category—that is, the one labelled 'women's issues' such as equal employment opportunities and government support for women in business—do we find a difference, and it is that women are more likely to identify and support those issues than are men. So we do see greater, as it were, liberalism on the part of women vis-a-vis those particular issues. However, when you asked women in 1993 which political party came closest to their views on some key issues, by and large women were marginally more likely than men to identify the coalition's policies as closer to their own—their social policies, I should say, not so much their economic policies. And on the issue of child care—that was one of the most prominent women's issues during the election campaign in 1993—women were more likely than men to view the coalition's policies as closer to their own positions. So that result is quite intriguing.

You might recall that during the election campaign in 1993 the Labor Party made a special appeal to women in its campaign, trying to cultivate the so-called women's vote. It had key women and women's advisers, such as Anne Summers, and it had carefully crafted policies designed to appeal to women, particularly in the areas of women's health and in child care. As you may recall, too, on election night in his victory speech Paul Keating stated—

I give an extra special vote of thanks to the women of Australia, who have voted for us believing in the policies of this government.

Of course, if we look at the election results, particularly the conservative gender gap that emerged in 1993 of six percentage points, we can quite clearly see that Keating's thanks were misplaced. The women did not, more so than men, believe in his policies. These results certainly suggest that on women's issues, while women identified those issues as important and were more left of centre than men on those issues, they clearly were not particularly salient when it came time to cast their ballot. Indeed, on some key social policy issues women were more likely than men to view the coalition's policies as closer to their own.

If we turn to 2004—that is a bit of a jump, I know; about a decade there—we do see some changes in women's and men's attitudes, particularly in their assessments of the political parties on the issues. If we look at the 2004 election, in fact we find that neither the coalition nor the ALP received a net advantage from women on a range of economic, social and foreign policy issues, with one exception; that is, the issue of health and Medicare as it was defined in the survey. On the issue of health and Medicare women were more likely to view the coalition's policy as closer to their own by a gap of six percentage points and less likely to identify with the ALP's policy position. But on a range of social and economic issues women were not more likely to support the coalition in 2004 as they were in 1993. It is also perhaps noteworthy that in 2004 health and Medicare was the issue in the election most often identified as important by women. It was identified as important by men as well but, again, women were more likely than men to see it as the single most important issue. So on a key issue they saw the coalition's policies as closer to their own.

In terms of attitudes towards the issues, in 1993 women were marginally more likely than men to identify with the coalition's social but not economic policies, and in 2004 women were less likely to identify with the coalition's social, economic and foreign policy positions, with the exception, then, of health and Medicare. However, this disadvantage to the coalition from women was not translated into an advantage to the ALP. On most of the assessments of the ALP there is simply no difference on a whole range of social and economic issues between men and women in seeing the ALP's positions as closer to their own.

So 1993 and 2004 are somewhat intriguing in terms of attitudes towards issues. If we look at attitudes towards party leaders, in 1993 and 2004 there was some indication perhaps of the source of the gender gap. It is important to focus, of course, on party leaders, particularly because they carry the banner for the party and, as you will all be aware, we have seen what we often refer to as the presidentialisation of Australian elections, in which there is so much focus on the party leader. So we might find some explanation for the vote choices of men and women in their assessments of the party leaders. Certainly in 1993 I think we did.

In 1993 women were more likely than men to provide positive assessments of each of the party leaders, except for—you guessed it—Paul Keating. That is to say, when asked how much they liked or disliked party leaders, women gave more positive assessments for John Hewson, Tim Fischer and John Coulter than they did to Paul Keating. To some extent, of course, this reflects what was I think a fairly well-documented dislike many women had of Paul Keating and suggests, perhaps, that, given such a pronounced difference, that may be the source of the conservative gender gap that we saw in 1993.

When we move to 2004, however, when asked again how they liked or disliked the party leaders women reported exactly no difference in their views of John Howard and Mark Latham. Voting on a whole range of attributes such as their intelligence, their compassion, their honesty, their trustworthiness et cetera, there was essentially no difference in their assessment of the two major party leaders on those dimensions. However, it perhaps is interesting to notice that women were more likely than men to report favourable views of John Anderson, Andrew Bartlett and Bob Brown. And in 2004 the Australian election study included a couple of other party leaders—George W Bush and Tony Blair. Women were less likely than men to view those two leaders favourably. So we see gender gaps in some of the minor party leaders—Andrew Bartlett and Bob Brown in particular—but women are more likely to prefer those to men. And on George W Bush and Tony Blair we see that men are more likely than women to rate them positively. So in 2004 we do not find much going on in terms of assessments of the major party leaders, or at least John Howard and Mark Latham. We do see some evidence that Paul Keating may have contributed to women's vote choices in 1993.

If we look at partisanship, we do find simply that 1993 and 2004 also have quite similar results in terms of the gap, in terms of the differences between men and women. In 1993 women were more likely than men to identify with the coalition—44 per cent to 37 per cent, so that is a gap of seven percentage points—while men were more likely than women to identify with the Labor Party—47 versus 42, a gap of five. We see essentially the same pattern in 2004 where, again, more women than men identify with the coalition and more men than women identify with the ALP. So these gender differences in partisan loyalty or partisanship are almost exactly replicated in gender differences in the vote, suggesting that partisanship and party loyalty may be explaining the gender gap in the vote.

I might also mention here that women, compared to men, are more likely to identify with the Greens and men, compared to women, are more likely to identify with One Nation, although the numbers of people voting for the Greens and One Nation are so small it is hard to really analyse those results any further.

So what can we conclude from this very brief overview of the patterns in women's voting? More specifically, what does the second century of women's suffrage hold? Earlier I referred to these two accounts of the patterns of women's voting—the convergence thesis and the divergence thesis. Recall, convergence simply states that women's voting behaviour will become similar to men's as women's social location converges to that of men. In contrast, the divergence thesis states that women and men will converge, yes, but following that convergence women are going to move to the left on the basis of these newer women's issues.

So what have we found? In Australia we are certainly observing convergence. We have seen a downward trend in the so-called conservative gender gap with a few little blips or hiccups along the way—possibly it has slowed a bit or been affected by their assessments of the party leaders, as they did with Paul Keating—but then we have seen it has reversed direction again and it is heading down since 1993. At the last couple of elections the gender gap in vote was essentially negligible. So for all practical purposes we are seeing convergence in vote choice of men and women. In effect, this historical tendency that we think we have witnessed for the past 100 years is no longer. The experience and aspirations of women and men are becoming more similar.

What about divergence? Is there any evidence, then, about the divergence thesis? Having said that essentially there seems to be more convergence, in some of the survey results that we have on elections there is some evidence that on some issues, especially women's issues, women do hold different attitudes to those of men. That is to say, there is a gender cleavage on some issues, as we have found in the US and the UK and other countries. Clearly, this gender cleavage on issues is not translating into differences in vote choice. I offer two possible reasons why we do not see evidence of divergence in Australia.

First, the two major party groupings—Labor and the Liberal and National parties—today do not offer significantly different policy platforms on many issues. Consequently, women cannot express, perhaps, those different attitudes towards the issues when it comes time to cast their ballot. Indeed, over so many elections we have seen that sometimes it is the Labor Party that benefits from women's attitudes on the issues and at other times, as we have seen in 2004 and 1993, women are more likely to identify the coalition's policies as closer to their own on so many issues.

A second and I think related reason is that there is really no political party in Australia that can claim, at least without contest, to be the party of women. Since the last decade in particular both the Labor Party and the Liberal and National parties have been working very hard to portray themselves as women friendly and as representing the interests of women. They have put forward a range of policies designed to appeal to women and thereby capture the women's vote. Furthermore, if we look at the major political parties today, they are distinguished of course in 2004 by having significantly greater numbers of women elected to office. At the federal level, of course, there are 25 per cent in the House and 30 per cent in the Senate. So certainly within the major political parties women have a stronger voice than ever before and both claim to represent the interests of women by putting forward not only policies that they think will appeal to women but also attractive slates of candidates.

So in Australia, then, we are at convergence, it seems to me. Australian women's and men's voting behaviour and social and economic location have become quite similar. The interesting question I will leave you with is whether in this second century of women's suffrage we will see women emerge, as they have in other countries, as a group distinct from men and more liberal or left of centre in their vote choices at the ballot box.

Nonie Malone: Ladies and gentlemen, I know how much everyone has enjoyed Patty's presentation so far. I am sure we can enjoy another 10 minutes more of questions and discussion on the topic of 100 years of women's suffrage and on the very, very interesting gender differences in voting patterns.

Question: Has there been any research done on men's issues—in terms of men's voting patterns?

Patty Renfrow: I have not done that research. I think there is some done. Having said that, I am not familiar with any on the Australian electorate, although there could well be. Certainly some of what I have looked at in the past is by looking at men's and women's positions on the issues and their assessments of political parties. I am, of course, focused on the difference between them and whether there are any gaps or disparities between their votes. So in some of that research there would be, indeed.

There has been some research in the US about the gender gap there that suggests that maybe the widening of the gender gap reflects not only the movement of women towards parties to the Left but also the movement of more men than women towards parties of the Right, making that gap not just on the basis of women's movement but men's movement as well. I have not looked at that within the Australian electorate, although I could do so.

Question (Inaudible).

Patty Renfrow: Good question but, no, I have not seen any research on that. I think in large measure we have tended to identify what we call mainstream issues—the bread-and-butter economic and social issues and, relating to that point, policy issues—and then we define women's issues. I have not seen any definition of so-called men's issues, as you suggest. It might be a worthy avenue of research.

Question: It seems to me that one of the issues is sex appeal in terms of Keating and Hawke, for example. Obviously it did not change very much. What you record was a dramatic change in women's attitudes towards Labor Party members. Is that likely to have been reinforced or changed if you have a woman candidate?

Patty Renfrow: I think it probably is, because women were also, compared to men, more likely to support the Democrats, and they had women leaders. Those numbers were small, but that was consistent across so many elections, where we had Cheryl Kernot, for example, and then Natasha. So I think that it could well be. Having said that, though, I also recall that women, compared to men, gave Beazley higher ratings in 1998. I don't think of Beazley as sexy, but I do take your point. You can find sex appeal in female candidates. Certainly the Labor Party, when it cultivated Cheryl Kernot, was taking a very high-profile leader of a political party with the view that that would help them in their appeal to win the so-called

women's vote. So I think, while the Democrats' support has certainly dropped in the last election, over the years women are far more likely, compared to men, to vote for that party and to view their leaders more positively than men as well.

Question: What do you think are the implications of your research for both the Labor Party and the coalition in terms of campaigns? Give us your best guess.

Patty Renfrow: I think it is damned hard. I really, really do. Of course, I am talking about women as a group and we all appreciate that women, like men, have lots of differences within that group. To some extent, certainly back in the mid to late nineties, we saw the coalition's policies that were oriented to women being very much focused upon largely women in their roles as wives and mothers—perhaps in the paid work force, too, but essentially in that sort of family role. We saw, of course, the ALP trying to cater more for women at lower income levels, professional women et cetera but, again, having policies designed in particular to cater to them.

So to some extent I think both the parties have been working hard to try to appeal to women. But it may well be, of course, that a policy designed to appeal to a woman who is staying at home, trying to raise two young children, is not essentially going to appeal to a woman who is out in the work force trying to pursue a career et cetera. Having said that, I think both parties have really elevated women's issues tremendously. They make special appeals to women, they have women's policy launches, they are trying through their own research, I guess, to identify perhaps their model female voter and design policies to catch that vote. I can only say that, I suppose, they can continue to do what they are doing. At the end of the day, though, it may well be that those bread-and-butter issues of interest rates, unemployment and perhaps even foreign policies, like war in Iraq for example, may, as it were, be the most salient issues when it comes time to cast their vote. I do not have any answers for the political parties.

Nonie Malone: We do still have a little more time for questions. I would like to tell you that tonight's proceedings are being recorded by Hansard. I would like to give my thanks to Hansard for doing this. So from here on, when a question is asked I will repeat the question before Patty answers.

Paul Reynolds: I talked earlier to Patty about this, but it seems to me that when we are talking about this there is another issue that is quite separate. The issue is that, where women are involved in government and governance situations, they are much more involved in local government than they are in state and federal government and state and federal parliaments and parties. (*Inaudible*), but the interesting thing is that women have actually gotten involved very heavily in governance situations and gotten involved in local government. There are a number of reasons for that which I will not bore everybody with, but it is an interesting reflection that, where women are coming into governmental situations, they are choosing to come into the local government and then perhaps work their way up or perhaps use that as a research base to go even further. That may be another thing we are looking at in terms women's involvement (*inaudible*).

Nonie Malone: Paul's observation, then, is that to the extent that women are becoming involved in government they are choosing to come through at the local government level and then possibly using that as a platform to explore other levels and areas of government.

Patty Renfrow: I agree.

Roger Scott: You mentioned the fact of replacement of cohorts of voters. What we are seeing is that older cohorts are lasting longer and the women in the older cohorts are lasting longer. Do you see that, in time, women's issues will become associated with the senior citizens issues?

Patty Renfrow: You're absolutely right, Roger. I had not considered that. I must say that, while the account predicts that this is the source of the changing attitudes, women are coming into the electorate who, as it were, benefited from the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. They have, again, such tremendous opportunities—seeing the world in a way more so like men. So the divergence thesis is the basis for generational change. Having said that, when I looked at 1996 and compared vote choice amongst younger and older women in terms of their vote for the ALP, I did not see any difference, which intrigued me. So that is the theory, but I haven't seen it. Certainly your point is that, as the electorate ages, we simply may not see that divergence that the thesis predicts.

We may not see it, too, because I suppose the account might suggest that the parties are static. They are not. They are trying to position themselves in such a way, with policies and programs, that they are going to appeal to the greatest number of electors. So the parties themselves have been working on the women's vote—again, often quite differently, with different views about women's issues and therefore the policies which will respond to those. But I think, again, if you look at Australia compared to the US or the UK, where we see more pronounced gender gaps, our parties here on the Right are not as right of centre as they are in the US. So the parties need to be taken into account as well—the fact that they are not just been static. Certainly we do not have a party here in Australia that is perceived like the Republicans, which by more women than men are seen to be quite adverse for women in terms of their policy positions et cetera.

Lindy Nelson-Carr: I have to say that I am very disappointed to hear the (*inaudible*) details. But I wonder whether you are familiar with the EMILY's List research on gender gap. It would imply that women really, according to that research, are being (*inaudible*). I would be keen to hear what you say in response to that.

Patty Renfrow: I do not necessarily take issue with that. Perhaps I should have said at the beginning that I am relying on the Australian election studies' systematic surveys of the Australian electorate at the times of recent federal elections. Of course, it does not always ask all the questions that we would wish. So certainly in some elections, where we can document where they have asked questions about attitudes towards a range of social, economic, foreign policy and women's issues, we do see some differences in attitudes towards issues. That is to say, women may be more left of centre than men on attitudes to some social and women's issues. But when asked, 'Which party comes closest to your views on those issues?', we are not seeing a pronounced pro-Left response by women. That is to say, women have tended in the Australian election studies to report that they are identifying more with the coalition's policies than they are with the Labor Party's, in general. There are some exceptions on that, as well. I am not suggesting that women may not have more Left or liberal views than men on a range of issues. There are other surveys that document that as well. According to the election studies, which is research on electoral outcomes, we are not seeing that translate into a pro-Left gender gap in the vote.

Recall, too, that when I am talking about the gap I am talking about differences. That may mask the volatility in the level of support. So we may see women over time more likely to vote Labor, but we are still going to have a conservative gender gap if more men are still voting Labor as well. So the gender gap can mask those levels of support but, again, what we have seen elsewhere is the liberal positions and views and attitudes of women really translating into vote choice at the ballot box. We have not seen that here.

Nonie Malone: we will have to leave questions there. I now invite Rachel Nolan to come to give a vote of thanks to Patty. Rachel is the contemporary embodiment—the product—of 100 years of women's suffrage. Rachel was elected to the Queensland parliament in 2001 and at the time was the youngest Labor female member of parliament ever, and she is a member of the Australasian Study of Parliament Group executive.

Rachel Nolan: Thanks, Nonie. Politics has frequently made me feel 100 years old, if that is what you are suggesting, I guess. In giving this vote of thanks I want to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and I want to acknowledge the many MPs who are here. Desley Boyle was with us earlier. I think she may have gone. We also have Andrew McNamara, Lindy Nelson-Carr, Christine Smith, Paul Hoolihan, Lesley Clark, Bonny Barry and Kev Lingard. I desperately hope I have not left anyone out—how doing a good turn very quickly turns into a bad one when you leave people out!

I really very much thank all of you for being at this ASPG function this evening. I want to very sincerely thank Patty for the really thought-provoking contribution that she has made. I think that tonight has been a really good example of the ASPG getting together fantastic speakers and making a really intelligent and often quite cutting-edge contribution to the political debate.

I have been very involved through the year, as have people like Lesley Clark and others, in many functions celebrating the centenary of suffrage in Queensland. They have been fantastic, but they have largely tended to focus on the history of women's involvement as members of parliament in the political process. So we have spent a lot of time this year talking about Irene Longman, Vi Jordan and the women who have come after them. I think it is tremendously important that we should know about those women's roles, but there are two things that we should also be talking about in the centenary of suffrage. One of them is: where do we go from here? Why is it that right now, in 2005, we are in fact, in Queensland politics, beginning to go backwards? I think this year very much should be about taking on that issue lest we in fact let down the female pioneers who came before women like me.

The other issue is that the vast majority of Queensland women do not get to be members of parliament. They in fact do not even become members of political parties, but they are very actively empowered by the suffrage of which we have now had 100 years. They are empowered by the very fact of their vote. So tonight is the first suffrage function I have been to at which we have talked about how 100 years of women's voting matters. I think that is what actually affects most women most of the time, and that is very much what we should be talking about this year.

To you, Patty: what you have had to say has certainly been enormously thought provoking for me. Just from the very quick discussions I have had with others around the room, I am sure it has been very thought provoking for others here as well. I think it is fascinating the extent to which we in fact have the reverse phenomenon from that which exists in the United States. I think that for most people in the room that would come as a genuine surprise. I think that we will now all spend some time thinking about and talking about why that would be the case.

I am sure that it comes as a disappointment for many Labor women that the gender gap, most of the time, in fact goes against us, given that we as women in the Labor Party think that we encourage our party to talk about women and women's issues. But I would have to suggest that it might well be the case—and this was suggested by what you were saying—that, given that women make up 51 per cent of the population, by talking about women's issues we in fact marginalise women and, just by doing that, we put them on the sidelines. In fact, most of the time women are voting on the classic mainstream issues.

I once heard Meredith Bergman say something which has never left me. She said that people ask her: what are the women's issues? Of course, the obvious women's issues are things like abortion and child care, which are never mainstream issues. She said that in her many years in the New South Wales upper house the only issue on which she'd ever seen a significant gender gap was gun control, but no-one ever talks about gun control as a women's issue. I think that is really thought-provoking stuff and it is really dead right.

One Hundred Years of Women's Suffrage and Still Counting

It is hard to talk about women's issues. While we have a system which is as male dominated as the one we do have in Queensland now—while we have a system in which there has never been a female prime minister, there has never been a female premier and, to the best of my knowledge, there has never been a female state secretary or state director of one of the major political parties—we will continue to marginalise women's issues, to talk about these things at the sideline, when in fact women's issues are majority issues.

I think that, while you didn't go that far, what you did have to say did clearly indicate that there is and continues to be a gender gap in Australian voting patterns and in the Australian political discourse. I am sure we will all take our own perhaps a little self-serving interpretations out of that, but we will all take away something to think about. For that, Patty, I thank you most sincerely. It has been terrific.

Nonie Malone: Thank you, Rachel. I would like to add to those thanks to Patty. I would like to make the observation of how lucky we are to have the Australian electoral study data available to us. It is conducted by Patty and her colleagues at Queensland University. The source of that data was home-grown and we have certainly been enriched by Patty's analysis of that data tonight, and entertained indeed.

I would just like to close with some thanks. I would like to thank the parliament for the use of the facilities and I would like to thank everybody for attending. I would also like to invite you to, on your way out, admire the display 'Her Vote, Her Voice' in the foyer of the Annexe. The display has arrived today. It is to be launched on Wednesday by Minister Desley Boyle. It is designed to inspire people about the progress that has been made and the potential for the future as a result of 100 years of women's suffrage. So thank you for joining us this evening. I hope to see you all next time.
