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The Gender Gap Revisited: Polarisation, Progress, and Party Politics in Contemporary Australia

March/April 2025

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24th April, 2025

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Extended Abstract

The 2022 federal election in Australia saw gender emerge as a defining issue, driven by the rise of high-profile female independent candidates and public debates on women's treatment in politics and the workplace. In the lead-up to the 2025 federal election, this paper draws on new data from Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS) with a sample of 3,608 respondents, building on results from earlier waves and the April 2022 ANUpoll, to examine shifts in public opinion on gender equality, sexual harassment, candidate preference, and the political implications of these attitudes.

Australians continue to express strong support for gender equality, but the intensity of support has declined. The share who view gender equality as "very important" fell from 84.9 per cent in 2022 to 70.3 per cent in 2025, while those who believe Australia has gone "too far" in promoting equality has doubled to 19.0 per cent. These shifts are particularly pronounced among men. Beliefs about who has it easier—men or women—remain gendered, though the perception that women have it easier has increased across the population.

Attitudes towards gender equality are strongly predictive of political preferences. Controlling for views on gender, women are more favourable towards the Liberal Party and less favourable towards Labor—reversing simple bivariate relationships. This suggests that gendered political attitudes, rather than gender alone, explain partisan alignments.

Confidence in political parties on gender issues remains highest for Labor, while confidence in the Liberal Party and the Greens is now broadly equivalent. This represents an improvement in confidence for the Liberal Party and a decline in confidence for the Greens.

Australians are more likely to say that they would be very likely to vote for a female candidate than a male candidate. Younger Australians, older Australians, and those that only speak English at home are most likely to say they would vote for a female candidate. Differences in support for female candidates are also closely linked to party favourability.

Drawing on additional survey items from the Pew Research Center, Australians are more likely to believe that women have made progress over the past two decades than men, though concerns persist—particularly around romantic relationships and leadership roles. While most Australians view changing gender roles positively, a growing share perceive negative impacts on men.

These findings suggest that gender remains a key dimension of political polarisation in Australia, with implications for party strategy, policy communication, and electoral outcomes in 2025.

1 Introduction and overview

The 2022 Federal Election was fought across multiple issues. It was conducted in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, with large-scale lockdowns of whole cities and states a recent memory, and the Morrison Government's perceived too-slow vaccine roll-out partly blamed for the delay in public health restrictions being lifted. Others maintained anger in the opposite direction, critical of vaccine mandates and what it meant in terms of restrictions of freedom of choice.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine placed defence and international security at the front of people's minds. Furthermore, the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership was only eight-months old, and was trumpeted by then Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Defence Minister Peter Dutton as an agreement that could only have been achieved by the Coalition, and would be put at risk by a Labor Government if elected.

Although the Labor Party would end up forming a majority government, perhaps the biggest surprise in May 2022 was the 'Teal wave' of female independent candidates that won a number of inner-city seats, long considered to be very safe for the Liberal Party. Some of these wins were against very high-profile Coalition members, including the Treasurer Josh Frydenberg.

According to a summary (Murphy 2022) just prior to the election, what united these independent candidates was 'their top issues (climate, integrity, gender equity), their political targets (mostly sitting moderate Liberals) and their funding source (the Climate 200 fund of Australian businessman and political activist, Simon Holmes-a-Court).'

It was not just the Teal candidates that focused on gender issues in the 2022 election. Cameron et al. (2022) noted that 'In 2021, an allegation of sexual assault in Parliament House put the spotlight on women's treatment in politics, leading to major women's protests in cities around Australia.' According to the introduction to *Watershed: the 2022 Australian federal election*, Gauja et al. (2023) noted that gender issues were 'more prominent than in any election since 1972. The Morrison Government had seemed incapable of dealing with issues of sexual misconduct in the parliamentary precinct and this served as a touchstone for women's disenchantment with the government on a range of issues.'

Analysing data from the 2022 Australian Election Study (AES), Cameron et al. (2022) noted that 'there were considerable gender differences in voting' and that 'Women increasingly prefer parties on the left, and men parties on the right.' However, they also noted that 'The gender gap in voting for the Coalition peaked in 2016 and 2019 ... [and] In 2022 the gap narrowed slightly.'

Since the 2022 Election, the focus and narrative around gender equality has continued to shift and evolve. The gender of the two main Presidential candidates in the 2024 US Election was again particularly salient, with the Democrats represented by the country's first female Vice-President (Kamala Harris) and the eventual winner and Republican nominee Donald Trump being found liable for sexual abuse in a civil case less than 18 months before the election. According to the American Communities Project¹ 'The gender gap in American politics has become a chasm in recent years and 2024 was no exception... Donald Trump won male voters by 12 percentage points, while Democratic

nominee Kamala Harris won female voters by six percentage points. That adds up to an 18-point gender gap.’

If the 2022 Australian Election led to an increased focus on the experience of women in Australian Parliament in particular but society more generally, then one could argue that the US election centred the experience of men to a much greater extent. In introducing a survey that we will come back to in this paper, the Pew Research Center in the US argued after the election that ‘the status of men in American society has been at the center of recent national political conversations. Some people have spoken out about what they perceive to be attacks on traditional manhood, while others have warned about what they see as “toxic masculinity.” More broadly, many have expressed concern about how men are doing socially and economically’ (Horowitz and Parker (2024)).

Only a few weeks out from the 2025 Australian Election, it is unclear as to how much issues around gender equality, different outcomes for men and women, and different priorities will shape the eventual result. To help understand views on gender related issues and their relationship to voting intentions, just as the 2025 Federal Election was being called the Australian National University (ANU), in partnership with the Online Research Unit (ORU), conducted the third wave of data collection for the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS). Data collection commenced on Thursday the 26th of March with a pilot data collection. Full data collection commenced on Friday 28th March, the day the 2025 Federal Election date of May 3rd was announced, and finished on the 8th of April with 3,608 respondents. This follows data collection in October 2024 (Wave 1) with 3,622 respondents, and January/February 2025 with 3,514 respondents.

One of the unique aspects of the EMSS is the tracking of a large number of respondents across multiple waves of data collection. In total, 2,404 respondents or 66.6 per cent of Wave 3 respondents had completed at least one of the two previous waves of the EMSS. Specifically, 2,053 (56.9 per cent) had completed Wave 1 and 3, 2,186 (60.6 per cent) had completed Wave 2 and 3, and 1,835 (50.9 per cent) had completed Waves 1, 2, and 3.

In the first report on the 2025EMSS (Biddle and Gray 2024) we looked amongst other things at views towards the main political parties in Australia. We found that 5-6 months out from the election, none of the political parties and none of the party leaders had a favourability rating that was 5 or above on a scale of 0 to 10.

In the second report (Biddle 2025a) focusing mostly on Wave 2 data collection, we outlined how ‘Life satisfaction has dropped to its lowest level since COVID-19 lockdowns ... Financial stress remains high ... Public trust in government institutions has eroded ... [and] Australians are becoming increasingly pessimistic about both their personal circumstances and the broader future of the country.’

In the third report (Biddle 2025b), we brought together those two strands of analysis. We considered the extent to which optimism/pessimism for the present relative to the past, and the future relative to the present, is predictive of political attitudes in the lead up to the 2025 election campaign.

The fourth report (Biddle 2025c) introduced findings from Wave 3 2025 EMSS. It focused on measures of wellbeing and societal satisfaction/confidence, views towards parties and party leaders, voting intentions, and policy priorities ahead of the election. That paper touched on some differences in party favourability, and policy prioritisation by

gender. In this report, we dig much deeper into these gender differences, including with a number of targeted questions repeated from the April 2022 ANUpoll, just prior to the last Federal Election.

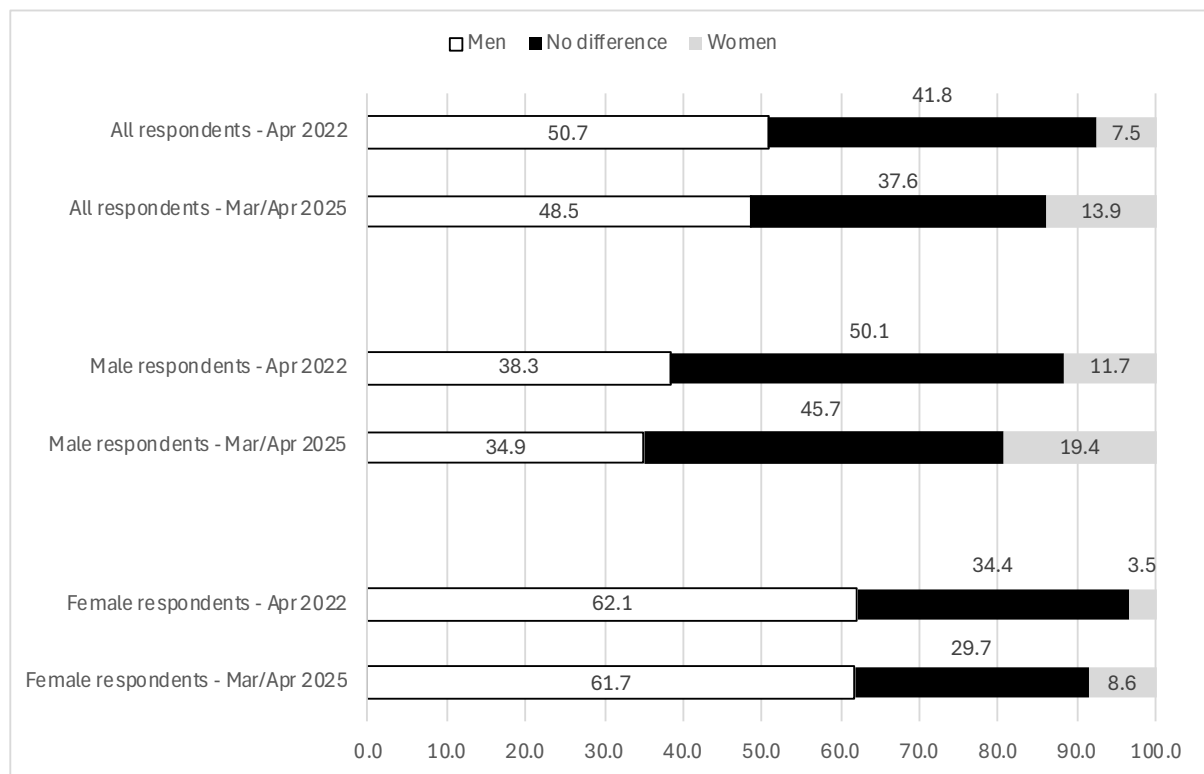
2 Views on gender equality

In the April 2022 ANUpoll, and in the March/April 2025 EMSS, respondents were asked ‘How important, if at all, is it for women to have equal rights with men in Australia?’ In both years, very few Australians thought that it was not too or not at all important – 3.2 per cent combined in April 2022 and 6.1 per cent combined in March/April 2025. There was a significant drop in the per cent of Australians that thought it was very important (from 84.9 to 70.3 per cent), but an increase in the per cent that thought it was somewhat important (from 11.9 to 23.6 per cent).

In the April 2022 ANUpoll, and in the March/April 2025 EMSS, respondents were asked ‘All things considered, who do you think has it easier in our country these days?’ Figure 1 shows that amongst all respondents (men and women), almost half of Australians think that men have it easier (48.5 per cent). This is a slight, but not statistically significant decrease from April 2022 (50.7 per cent). There was a much larger change in the per cent that thought women had it easier, increasing from 7.5 to 13.9 per cent. This was counterbalanced by a drop in the per cent that thought there was no difference (from 41.8 to 37.6 per cent).

Amongst male respondents, there was a larger drop in the per cent that thought men had it easier – from 38.3 to 34.9 per cent. There were still far fewer men that thought women had it easier (19.4 per cent) than thought men had it easier, but there was a convergence over the period, alongside a drop in the per cent that thought there was no difference. Amongst female respondents, there was a steady per cent that thought men had it easier (62.1 and 61.7 per cent). However, there was an almost 2.5 times increase in the per cent that thought women had it easier – from 3.5 to 8.6 per cent. The latter is still lower than the male per cent, but the growth has been much faster.

Figure 1 Views on whether men or women have it easier, April 2022 and March/April 2025



Source: April 2022 ANUpoll and Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

The gender of the respondent is not the only factor that influences the belief as to whether or not men or women have it easier in modern society. Table 1 summarises a regression analysis that also looks at the relationship with age, education, broad country of birth, language spoken at home, and the type of area a person lives in (based on the classification of their electorate). The first model is a binary variable for whether or not the respondent thinks men have it easier. The second model is a binary variable for whether or not the person thinks women have it easier.

Younger Australians are more likely to think that men have it easier in Australia today, and less likely to think that women do. However, one of the largest differences in the model is by education. Those with a degree are more likely to think that men have it easier, and less likely to think that women do. Whether or not a person speaks a language other than English at home is also statistically significant, but has an association in the opposite direction. Finally, there are large differences by geography with those that live outside inner metropolitan areas (the base case) more likely to think that men have it easier, but less likely to think that women do.

Table 1 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with views on broad gender equality, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Men easier		Women easier	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.328	***	-0.221	*
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.251	***	-0.014	
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.125		-0.018	
Aged 55 to 64 years	-0.164	*	-0.043	
Aged 65 to 74 years	-0.020		-0.283	**
Aged 75 years plus	-0.123		-0.202	
Female	0.693	***	-0.519	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.002		0.004	
Has a degree	0.257	***	-0.127	*
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.018		-0.182	*
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.093		-0.019	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.293	***	0.202	**
Outer metropolitan electorate	-0.156	**	0.299	***
Provincial electorate	-0.230	***	0.124	
Rural electorate	-0.072		0.141	
Constant	-0.342	***	-0.895	***
Sample size	3,489			

Notes: Probit regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

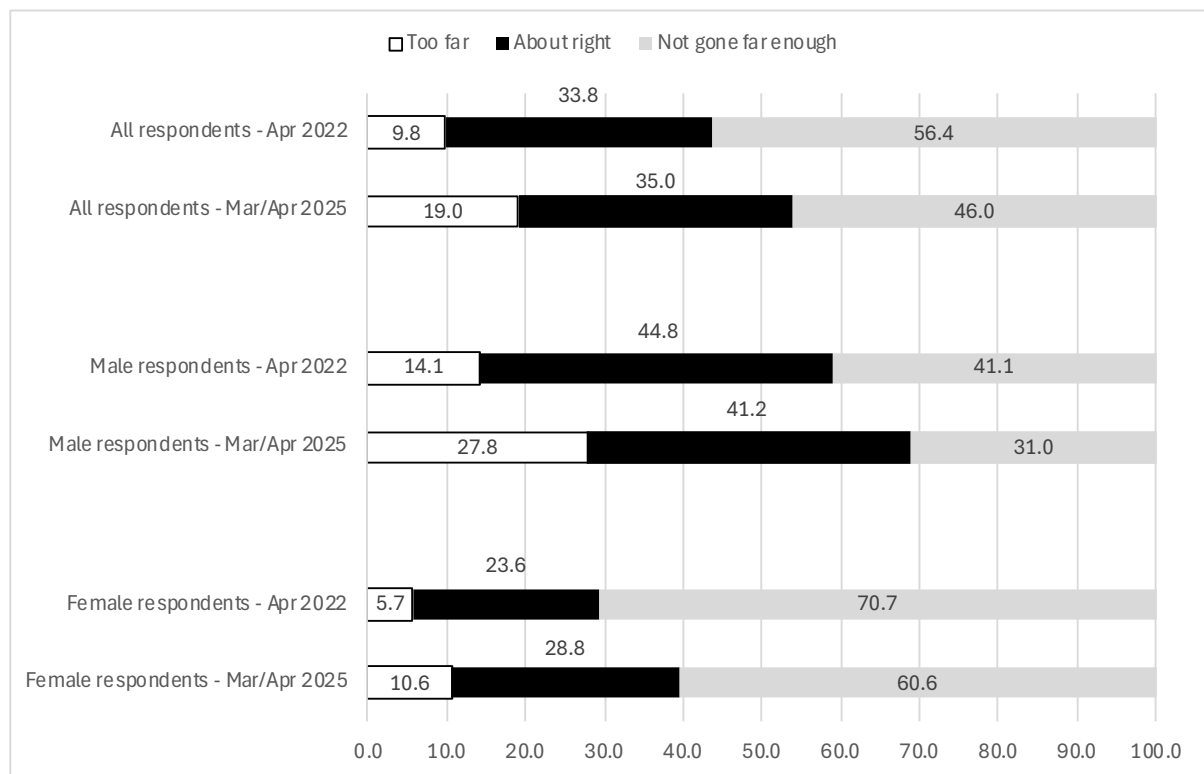
Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

Although there has been a reasonably steady per cent of the population that think that men have it easier in Australia, there has been quite a substantial drop in the per cent of Australians that think giving women equal rights to men has not gone far enough. This is based on the question ‘When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, do you think Australia has gone too far, has not gone far enough, or has been about right?’

Amongst all respondents (men and women combined), there was a drop from 56.4 to 46.0 per cent in the per cent that thought Australia has not gone far enough. There was a commensurate increase in the per cent that thought Australia had gone too far (from 9.8 to 19.0 per cent).

In March/April 2025 there is now almost as many men that think Australia has gone too far (27.8 per cent) as think that Australia has not gone far enough (31.0 per cent) in terms of gender equality. The modal or most common category for men though is that things are about right (41.2 per cent). There has also been a drop in the per cent of women that think Australia has not gone far enough (from 70.7 to 60.6 per cent), but this is still the modal category in 2025.

Figure 2 Views on whether gender equality has gone too far or not far enough, April 2022 and March/April 2025



Source: April 2022 ANUpoll and Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

In the first paper released using data from Wave 3 of the EMSS (Biddle 2025c), we noted that there were quite substantial differences in favourability towards the major parties by gender of respondent. Respondents were asked ‘We would like to know what you think about Australia’s main political parties. Please rate each party on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10 means that you strongly like that party. If you are neutral about a particular party or don’t know much about them, you should give them a rating of 5.’

In a simple regression model when we control for age, education, country of birth, and location there was no difference in favourability towards the Labor Party between men and women, but women are less favourable towards the Liberal Party than men. Although we didn’t present it in the paper, we also found that women are more favourable towards the Greens Party than men.

In Table 2, we can see that responses to the two questions summarised in Figures 1 and 2 are highly predictive of party attitudes. However, what is perhaps most interesting, is that when we included these responses in a regression model, differences in views towards the political parties by gender of respondent shifted quite considerably.

Specifically, we add variables for whether people think men or women have it easier and whether gender equality has gone too far to the models that were included in the analysis in Biddle (2025c). In the analysis with those additional variables, we find that those that think women have it easier and to a lesser extent those that think there is no difference are less favourable towards the Labor Party, more favourable towards the Liberal Party and less favourable towards the Greens (relative to those that think men have it easier).

In addition, those that think gender equality has not gone far enough or is about right are more favourable towards the Labor Party, less favourable towards the Liberal Party, and more favourable towards the Greens (compared to those that think gender equality has gone too far).

When we control for those two questions though, there are some changes in party favourability by gender. Specifically, **for someone with the same view on gender equality**, women are less favourable towards the Labor Party and women are more favourable towards the Liberal Party.²

Table 2 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with favourability, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Liberal Party		Labor Party		Greens Party	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Respondent thinks women have it easier	0.763	***	-0.778	***	-0.702	***
Respondent thinks no difference between men and women	0.653	***	-0.376	**	-0.729	***
Respondent thinks equal rights gone too far	1.421	***	-1.609	***	-1.657	***
Respondent thinks equal rights about right	0.979	***	-0.480	***	-0.743	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	-0.001		0.952	***	1.411	***
Aged 25 to 34 years	-0.059		0.320	*	0.633	***
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.113		-0.242		-0.372	*
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.431	*	-0.320		-0.999	***
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.917	***	0.057		-1.465	***
Aged 75 years plus	1.794	***	-0.901	***	-2.230	***
Female	0.232	*	-0.401	***	0.231	**
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	0.073		-0.030		0.136	
Has a degree	0.116		0.262	**	0.278	**
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	-0.188		0.287		0.170	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	0.154		0.372	*	0.509	***
Speaks a language other than English at home	0.253		0.163		0.112	
Outer metropolitan electorate	-0.039		-0.285	**	-0.024	
Provincial electorate	0.071		-0.337		-0.294	
Rural electorate	-0.300		-0.421	**	-0.321	*
Constant	3.291	***	5.936	***	5.006	***
Sample size	3,339		3,342		3,344	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual thinks men have it easier and that equal rights have not gone far enough. Further, the individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

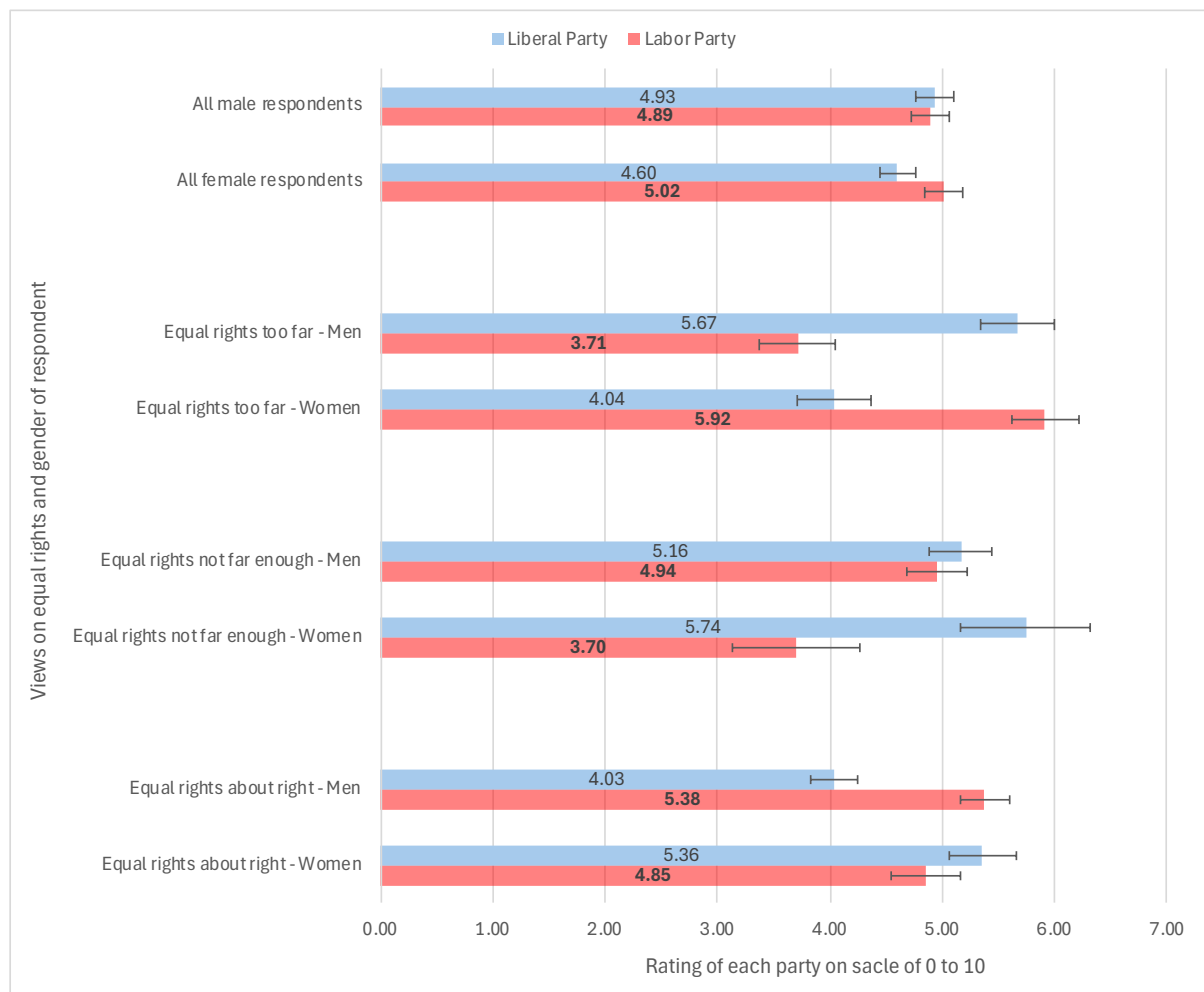
Regression models like those presented in Table 2 provide robust measures of associations between two variables (for example favourability and respondent gender), whilst controlling for other characteristics (for example broad views on gender issues). However, they can be quite abstract and difficult to interpret. We can see a similar finding a little bit clearer in Figure 3. Here, we use two of the same outcome variables (favourability rating of the Liberal and Labor parties), and give averages by gender **and** views on whether the respondent thinks equal rights have gone too far/not far enough.

If we look at the top part of the graph, all men in Australia have on average a more favourable view towards the Coalition than women, but a slightly less favourable view towards the Labor Party. This pattern holds amongst the small proportion of Australians that think equal rights have gone too far. However, amongst the other two groups, a very different pattern emerges. Amongst those that think equal rights have not gone far enough, men are less supportive of the Liberal Party than females, but more supportive of the Labor Party. Similarly, amongst those that think equal rights are about right, men are also less supportive of the Liberal Party and more supportive of Labor.

It is difficult with cross-sectional data to make causal claims, and political views are likely to be jointly determined with attitudes towards gender issues. However, the associational results presented in this paper fit within a large body of international research that suggests that individual gender, while significant, is often a less precise predictor of political attitudes than gender-related beliefs and values. Attitudes towards gender roles, equality, and power tend to offer stronger explanatory power for political preferences than gender alone, or at the very least, additional explanatory power (Schaffner and MacWilliams 2020; Egan 2020, Cassese and Holman 2019, and individual chapters in Celis and Childs (2024)). Much of this research emerged after the 2016 US Presidential election where gender was central to understanding the election outcome.

Taken together, the results in this paper suggest that in Australia gender on the surface appears to be predictive of views towards the two major parties. But, this is mostly because of the way in which gender shapes views on equal rights and current levels of equality. If we are interested in a more accurate prediction of how someone thinks about political parties in Australia, and by extension how they vote, it is necessary to ask them about their views on gender issues, rather than simply their own gender.

Figure 3 Views on political parties by gender and whether thinks gender equality has gone too far or not far enough, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

3 Sexual assault and harassment

One of the specific, and one could say totemic stories that led to the perception of the 2022 Federal Election as having a particular focus on gender was the experience of Brittany Higgins and her allegation of rape against Bruce Lehrmann in Parliament House. While Higgins alleged the rape occurred in March 2019, the allegation did not make news until 2021.³ Between then and the next election there were multiple claims about who knew about the allegation (including the communication between then Prime Minister Morrison and then Defence Minister Linda Reynolds) and whether adequate protections were in place for political staffers and others working in Parliament House (Sawer and Maley 2024).

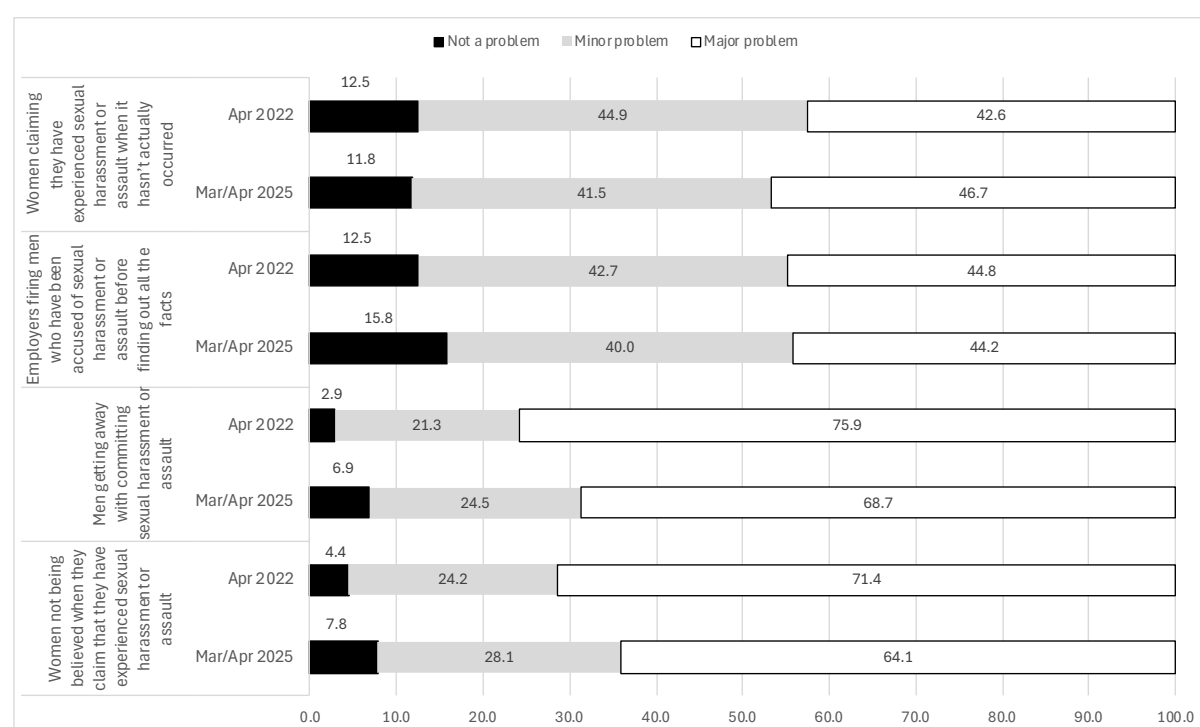
Since the May 2022 election, the alleged perpetrator was put on trial in the ACT, with multiple instances of the trial being delayed or aborted due to media reporting, juror behaviour, and the health of the alleged victim.⁴ Outside of the criminal justice system,

Mr Lehrmann sued Channel 10 for defamation, with the judge in that case ultimately ruling against the claimant, and concluding that Mr Lehrmann did (in the Judge's view) rape Ms Higgins in 2019.⁵

The details of this very complex case are ultimately beyond the scope of this paper. However, they do highlight the complexity around sexual assault and harassment in the workplace, and the way in which it can touch on political attitudes. Different media reporting of the case also highlights how narratives around the rights of alleged victims and perpetrators are not shared across the population. Results presented in Figure 4 suggest that general views on sexual assault and harassment have shifted around the margins in between the lead 2022 and 2025 elections, but that broad conclusions haven't shifted.

For both surveys, respondents were asked 'When it comes to sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace today, how much of a problem, if at all, would you say the following are? With four possible issues in the workplace and three response options. In both 2022 and 2025, Australians were more likely to think that women not being believed and men getting away with sexual harassment/assault was a major problem, compared to those who thought women making false claims or employers unfairly firing men was a major problem. There has, however, been some convergence over the last three years. This was particularly driven by a drop in the per cent that thought women not being believed/men getting away with harassment/assault was a major problem.

Figure 4 Views on sexual assault and harassment in the workplace, April 2022 and March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

We can combine these four questions into a simple additive index. Specifically, if we reverse-code the first two responses (higher values mean a person thinks they are not a problem), the index broadly captures concern for alleged victims of sexual assault who

tend to be women (higher values) versus concern for alleged perpetrators who tend to be men (lower values). The most common value is 8 (on a scale of 4 to 12), with an average value across the population of 8.52 (slightly to the right of the mid-point).

By creating a single index, we are also able to look at the factors associated with perceptions of the risks for women compared to men in the workplace. Using a regression approach, we can see that, compared to those aged 35 to 54, younger and older Australians are more likely to think the rights of women rather than men are a major concern. This is also true for female respondents compared to males, and those with a degree compared to those with lower levels of education. On the other hand, those who speak a language other than English at home, and those that live outside of inner metropolitan areas are more likely to think the rights of men are a major problem.

In the second model presented in Table 3, we can see that controlling for demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic characteristics, those who intend to vote for the Coalition are more likely to think the rights of men are a major problem compared to those who would vote for the other parties, as well as those who don't know who they would vote for.

Table 3 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with views on sexual assault and harassment in the workplace, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coeffic.	Signif.	Coeffic.	Signif.
Labor voter			0.617	***
Other Party Voter			0.716	***
Didn't know who would vote for			0.484	***
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.293	**	0.226	*
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.304	**	0.262	**
Aged 45 to 54 years	-0.058		-0.034	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.021		0.097	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.254	**	0.339	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.103		0.291	**
Female	0.774	***	0.743	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.024		-0.027	
Has a degree	0.378	***	0.382	***
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.094		0.063	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.149		-0.147	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.276	***	-0.262	***
Outer metropolitan electorate	-0.147	**	-0.137	*
Provincial electorate	-0.208	**	-0.212	**
Rural electorate	-0.067		-0.088	
Constant	8.025	***	7.610	***
Sample size	3,093		3,071	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

4 Political parties and gender

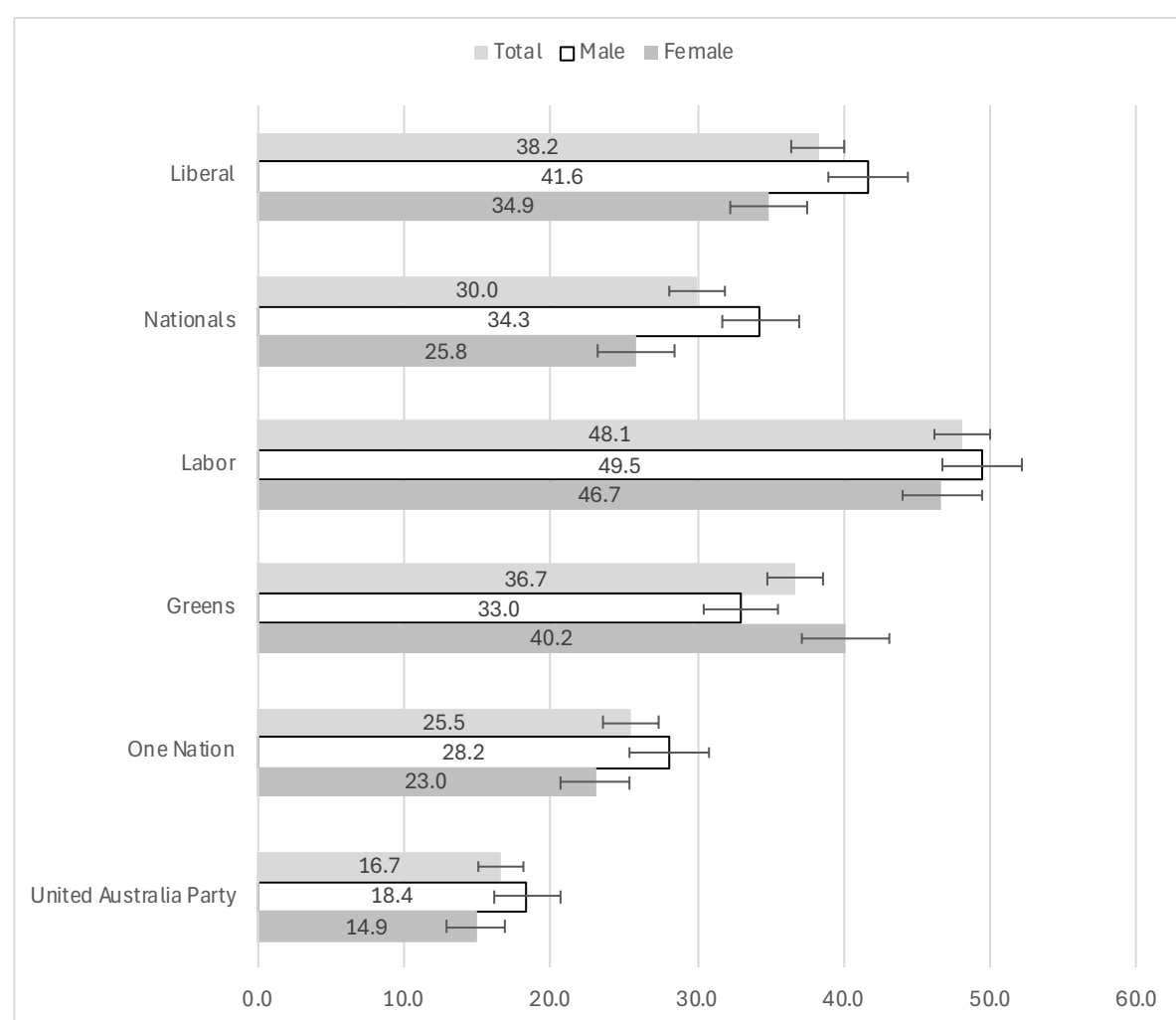
4.1 Confidence in parties

In the first paper summarising results from Wave 3 of the 2025 EMSS, we examined confidence in a number of key institutions, noting that the Federal Government is less trusted than State/Territory governments and the public service, but that trust for the Federal Government has improved slightly between Wave 2 and Wave 3. Immediately following the question on confidence in institutions, respondents in both the April 2022 ANUpoll and the March/April 2025 EMSS were asked ‘How much confidence do you have in the following political parties on issues related to gender equality...?’ Response options were A great deal of confidence, Quite a lot of confidence, Not very much confidence, and None at all.

Australians were most confident in the Labor Party in 2025 with regards to gender equality, with 48.1 per cent having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence. This was similar to the 49.9 per cent in April 2022. The lowest level of confidence was for the United Australia Party (16.7 per cent)⁶, One Nation (25.5 per cent), and the Nationals (30.0 per cent).

In the middle of the distribution were the Liberal Party (38.2 per cent) and the Greens (36.7 per cent). There are two major differences though, despite these similar averages. First, there has been an increase in confidence for the Liberals (32.3 to 38.2 per cent), but a decrease in confidence for the Greens (46.8 to 36.7 per cent). The other difference is that women are far less confident in the Liberal Party (34.9 per cent compared to 41.6 per cent for men) whereas women are much more confident in the Greens (40.2 compared to 33.0 per cent).

Figure 5 Confidence in parties regarding gender equality, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

4.2 Candidate preference

Although there has been a long-term trend towards a more even distribution of Australian Parliamentarians by gender, there is still less than 50 per cent representation of women relative to men. According to the data compiled by the Parliamentary Library,⁷ 44.9 per cent of all members were women (combining the House of Representatives and the Senate).

The values for the entire Parliament hides substantial differences by party. For the Labor Party and Greens parties, the majority of members were women (52.9 and 53.3 per cent

respectively). For the Liberal and the National parties, on the other hand, less than one-third of all members are women (29.7 and 28.6 per cent respectively). Amongst Independents, there is a positive skew towards female representatives with 64.7 per cent of current Independent members being women.

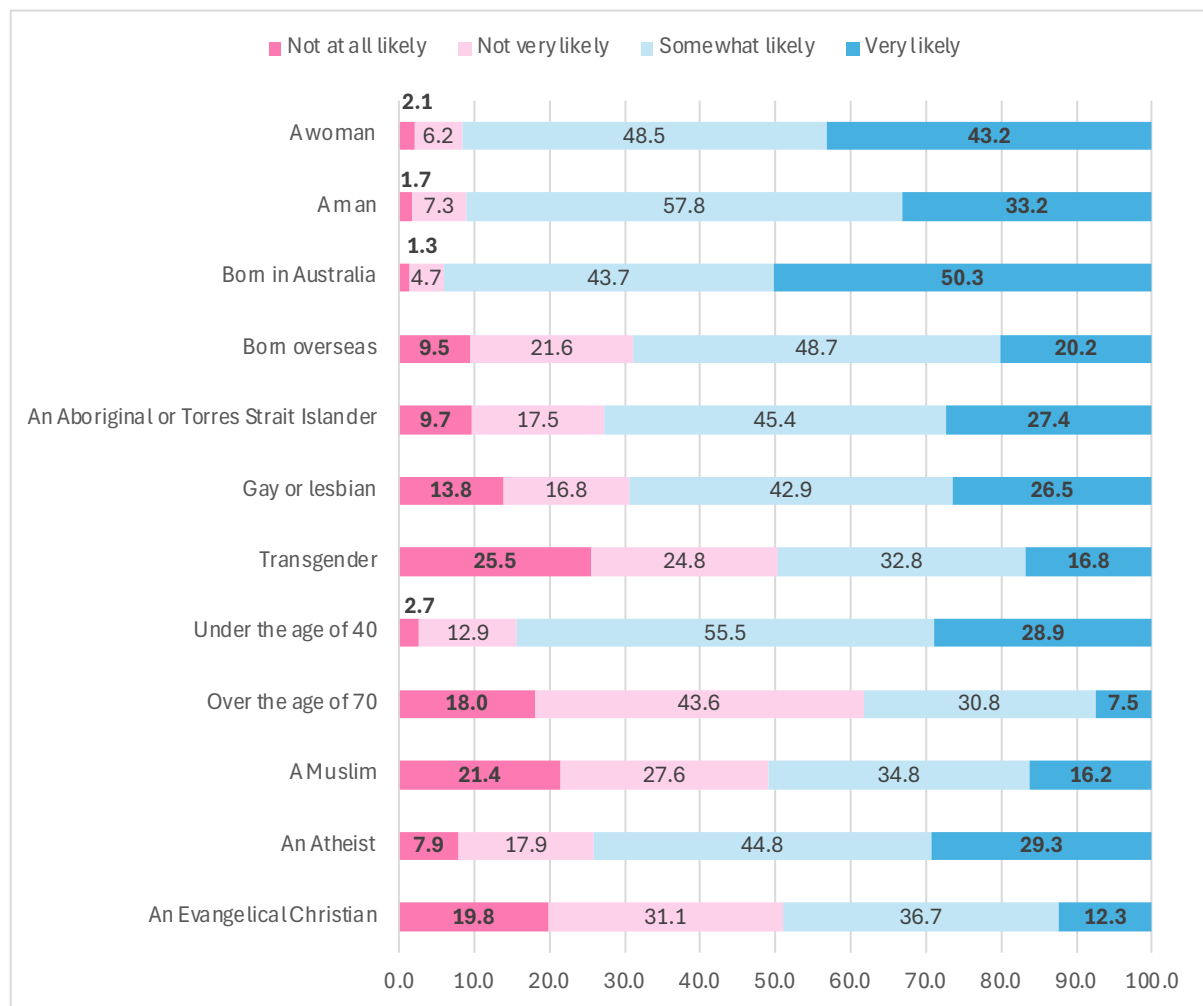
It is unclear what the composition of the Parliament will be post 2025 election. However, in an analysis of candidates leading into the election Barr et al. (2025) concluded that ‘the 2025 federal election sees some progress in gender and diversity representation compared to last election.’ However, it was also noted that the “glass cliff” effect remains a significant barrier for female candidates ... [in that] women across both major parties are still disproportionately placed in unwinnable or high-risk seats.’

One of the reasons for this distribution of candidates by chance of winning is that there may be a perception that voters are less inclined to support an otherwise identical female candidate. However, the data from Wave 3 of the EMSS does not support this.

Respondents were asked: ‘Between now and the 2025 Federal election, there will be discussion about the qualifications and characteristics of political candidates – their education, age, religion, race and so on. If the party you would normally vote for nominated a generally well-qualified person who happened to have the following characteristics, how likely would you be to vote for that person?’ There is a distinct possibility of social-desirability bias with this question, and there are open questions as to whether all of the parties would conceivably field a candidate with some of the characteristics. Nonetheless, with a confidential, self-completed survey, the responses in Figure 6 do give some indication of people’s stated preferences.

Australians are most likely to say that they would vote for a candidate born in Australia (50.3 per cent very likely), followed by a woman (43.2 per cent very likely). Australians are least likely to say they would vote for a candidate over the age 70, (only 7.5 per cent very likely), an Evangelical Christian (12.3 per cent) or a Transgender candidate (16.8 per cent).

Figure 6 Likelihood of voting for a candidate with particular characteristics, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

There is some evidence in Wave 3 of the 2025 that Liberal Party supporters are less likely to say they would vote for a woman than supporters of the Labor Party. There is likely to be some circularity (reverse causality) in this relationship, as there are fewer female candidates for the Liberal Party and they tend to be less likely to be in safe seats. This means that those who say they would vote Liberal may be less likely to say they would vote for a female candidate, because there is less likely to be a female candidate representing running in their electorate.

One way to get around this particular complexity is to use party favourability rather than voting intentions as our main explanatory variable. When we do so (Table 4), we find the consistent result that those who give a higher rating for the Liberal party compared to the Labor Party are less likely to say that they would vote for a female candidate than someone who gives a higher rating for the Labor Party than the Liberal Party.

Specifically, in Table 4, the dependent variable is the self-reported likelihood of voting for a woman, with higher values indicating a greater likelihood. As this is a categorical variable, we estimate the model using the ordered probit model. The base case for our main explanatory variable is someone who gave a higher rating to the Liberal Party

compared to the Labor Party. We then include a dummy variable for those that gave a higher rating for the Labor Party, as well as a separate dummy variable for those who gave the same rating for both parties. The first of these dummy variables was negative and statistically significant, whereas the coefficient for the second was not statistically significant.

We also find in the analysis that younger and older Australians were more likely to say they would vote for a female candidate, as are female respondents, and those with a degree. Those who speak a language other than English at home are less likely to say they would vote for a female candidate compared to those that speak English only.

Table 4 Regression model estimates of the factors associated with likelihood of voting for a female candidate, March/April 2025

Explanatory variables	Model 1	
	Coeffic.	Signif.
More favourable towards Labor Party	0.293	***
Equally favourable towards Labor and Liberal parties	-0.059	
Aged 18 to 24 years	0.203	**
Aged 25 to 34 years	0.018	
Aged 45 to 54 years	0.034	
Aged 55 to 64 years	0.138	
Aged 65 to 74 years	0.273	***
Aged 75 years plus	0.151	
Female	0.267	***
Has not completed Year 12 or post-school qualification	-0.060	
Has a degree	0.105	*
Born overseas in a main English-speaking country	0.020	
Born overseas in a non-English speaking country	-0.083	
Speaks a language other than English at home	-0.320	***
Outer metropolitan electorate	0.026	
Provincial electorate	-0.030	
Rural electorate	0.020	
Cut-point 1	-1.795	
Cut-point 2	-1.111	
Cut-point 3	0.513	
Sample size	3,348	

Notes: Linear regression model. The base case individual is male; aged 35 to 44 years; born in Australia; does not speak a language other than English at home; has completed Year 12 but does not have a degree; and lives in an inner metropolitan electorate.

Coefficients that are statistically significant at the 1 per cent level of significance are labelled ***; those significant at the 5 per cent level of significance are labelled **, and those significant at the 10 per cent level of significance are labelled *

Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

5 General views on women and men in Australia

Although the 2022 Election had a particular focus on the experience of women as parliamentarians, and in the case of Brittany Higgins, the experience in Parliament House as a workplace, there are of course more general debates about how the experience of men and women may be converging or diverging in a society and economy in flux. In some ways these debates are more heightened in the US (particularly because of the campaign and election of Donald Trump). However, they have also impacted on political discourse in Australia.

Although it appears that the Opposition Leader has pulled back during the campaign from some of the statements and suggestions he was making as President Trump was about to be or had just been inaugurated, the impression of Peter Dutton as being more open to arguments around men's declining place in society than the Prime Minister and the Labor Party. For example, in a podcast recorded in late January just after President Trump took office for the second time, the Opposition leader was quoted⁸ as saying "I think there's just a point where people are fed up. They're pushing back and saying, 'well, why am I being overlooked at work for a job, you know, three jobs running when I've got, you know, a partner at home, and she's decided to stay at home with three young kids, and I want a promotion at work so that I can help pay the bills at home' and so I think all of that has morphed."

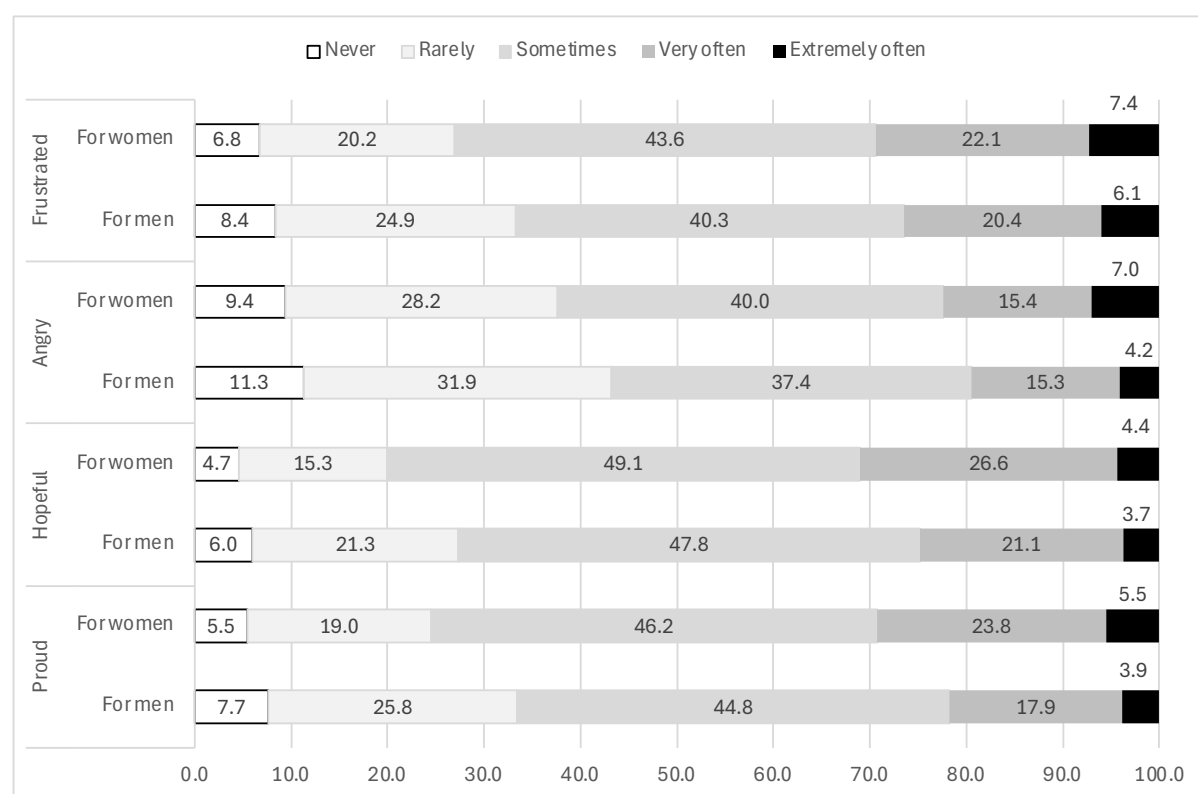
In addition to repeating a number of questions from the April 2022 ANUpoll, we also asked a number of questions on gender equality from the Pew Research Center's survey on *How Americans See Men and Masculinity*,⁹ from the American Trends Panel. Like Wave 3 of the 2025 EMSS, the Pew survey was conducted in the lead up to the Federal Election, in their case from the 3rd to 15th of September 2024 (the US Election took place on the 5th of November, 2024).

The first question we asked was 'When you think about how things are going for women/men in Australia overall these days, how often do you feel each of the following?' Questions were asked separately about how things are going for women and men (with the order randomised), with four descriptors of how people might feel and five response options for each.

The modal category for each of the descriptors (for both men and women) is 'Sometimes', indicating that for many Australians issues of gendered experiences and outcomes is important, but not front of mind.

Leaving aside this modal category, it is interesting that Australians are more likely to experience both positive and negative emotions with regards to how women are going, compared to these same emotions regarding how men are going. 29.4 per cent of Australians say they very or extremely often feel frustrated about how things are going for women, compared to 26.5 per cent for men. They are also more likely to feel angry about how things are going for women (22.4 per cent) compared to how they are going for men (19.5 per cent). However, Australians are also more likely to feel hopeful about how things are going for women than they are for men (31.0 compared to 24.8 per cent) and more likely to feel proud (29.3 compared to 21.7 per cent).

Figure 7 Views on how things are going for men and women, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

The patterns observed in Australian data are quite similar to those that were observed in the US. Specifically, American respondents to the corresponding survey were more likely to feel frustrated and angry about how things are going for women than men, but they are also more likely to feel hopeful and proud.

There are some differences in levels between the two countries, but for the most part Australians are about as likely to have the feelings asked about in the questions as US respondents are. The largest differences are that Australians are less frustrated with how things are going for women (29.4 compared to 33.0 per cent in the US saying they have the feeling very or extremely often), but also less proud about how things are going for women (29.3 per cent in Australia compared to 32.0 per cent in the US)

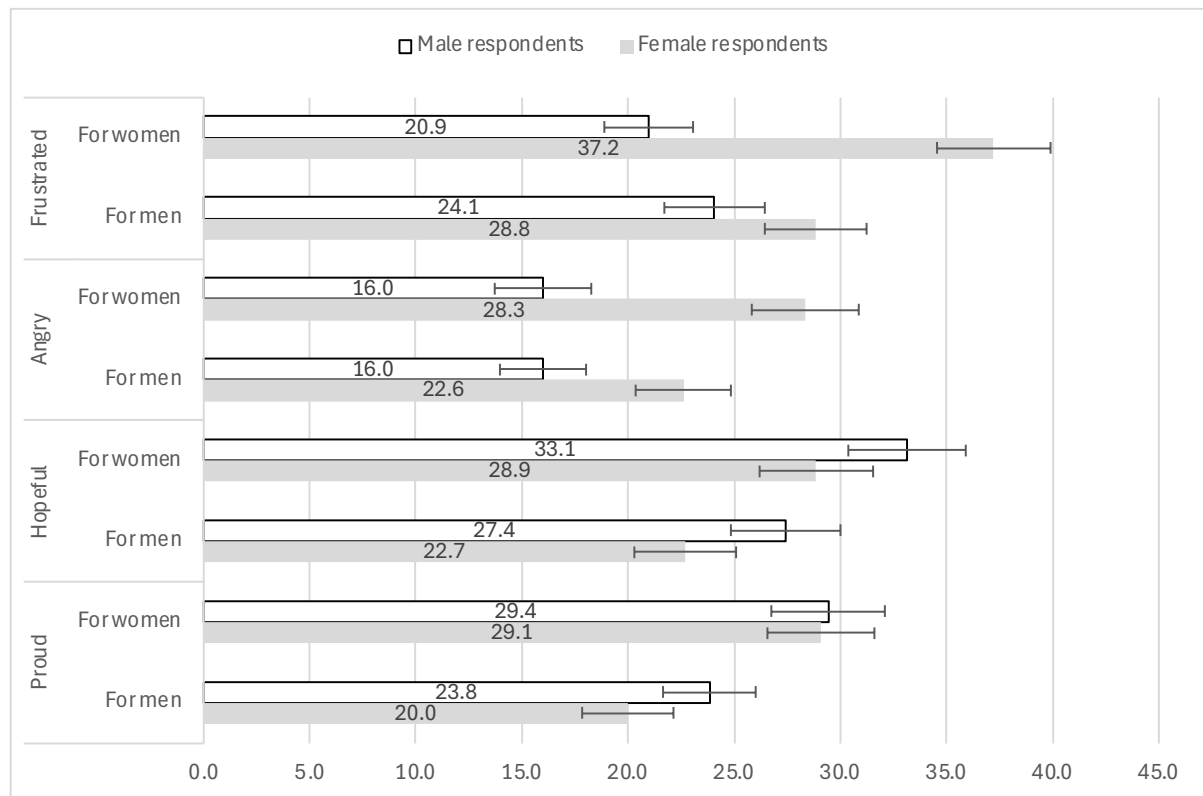
When we look at the views of men and women separately, we find quite large differences, particularly with regards to the two negative emotions. The differences are greater when asked about how things are going for women compared to men, but they are in the same direction for both.

Women are far more likely to say that they are frustrated with how things are going for women than men are to say they are frustrated (37.2 per cent compared to 20.9 per cent), and they are also far more likely to say that they are angry with how things are going for women (28.3 per cent compared to 16.0 per cent). Women are also more likely to say that they are frustrated and angry with how things are going for men, but this difference is a fair bit smaller.

With regards to the positive emotions, women are a little more hopeful with how things are going for women (33.1 per cent for female respondents compared to 28.9 per cent for

male respondents), but the difference is not statistically significant. Women are, however, also more likely to say they are hopeful with how things are going for men (27.4 per cent for female respondents, 22.7 per cent for male respondents), and this difference is statistically significant.

Figure 8 Views on how things are going for men and women, by sex of respondent, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

The second question that was repeated from the Pew survey was ‘Thinking about how women/men in Australia. are doing these days compared with 20 years ago, would you say women/men are doing better or worse in each of the following areas?’ Again, we randomised which order people received the questions (roughly 50% were first asked about how women are going now compared to 20 years ago, the other 50% were first asked about how men are going). There were seven areas that we asked about, with five potential response options

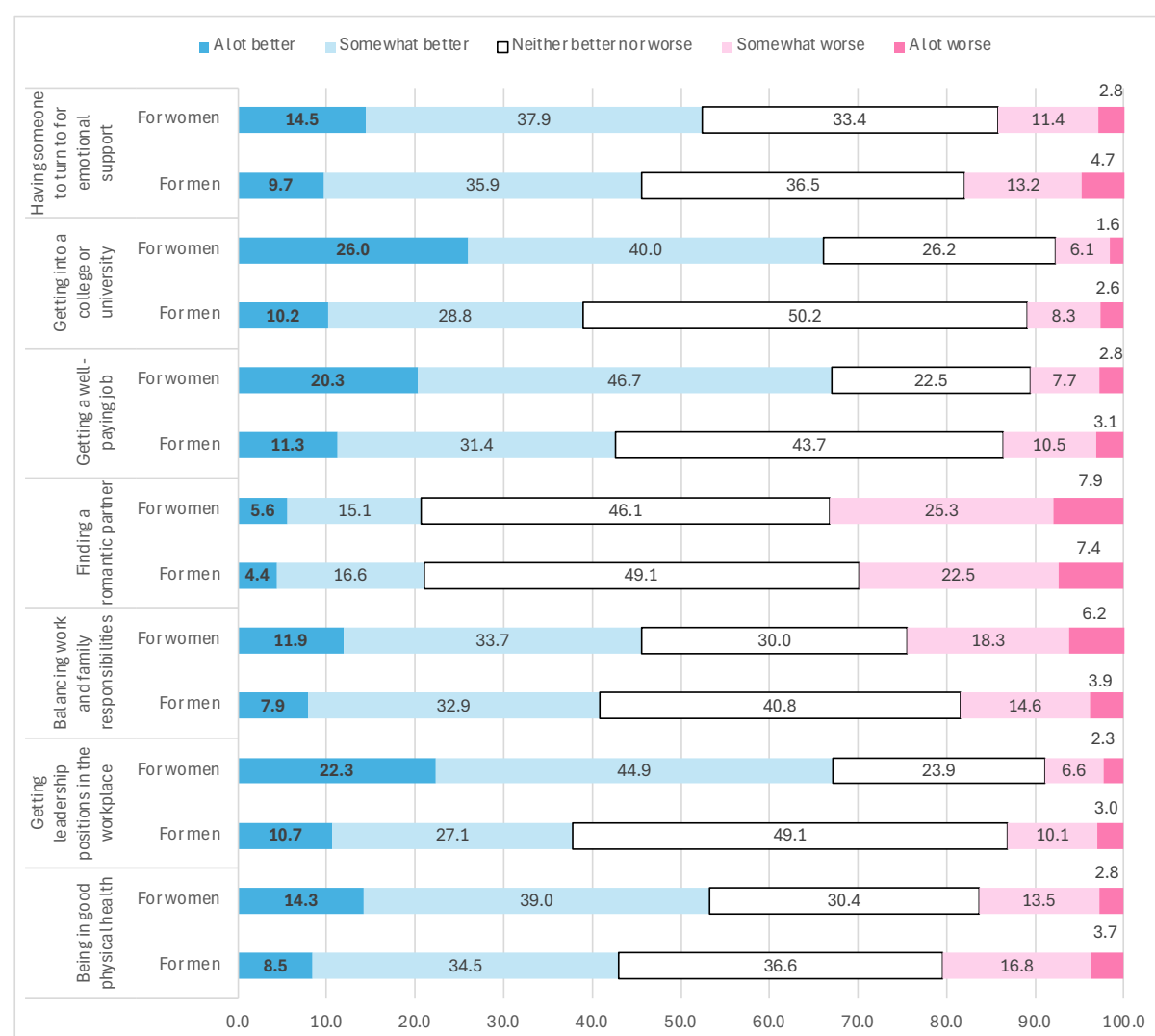
In general, Australians are more likely to think that things are better for both men and women, than they are to think things are worse. The only exception to this is finding a romantic partner, with Australians more likely to think that things have gotten worse than better, both for men (21.0 per cent thinking it has gotten better compared to 29.9 per cent thinking it has gotten worse), but particularly for women (20.7 per cent thinking it has gotten better compared to 33.2 per cent thinking it has gotten worse).

For the other six areas of life, Australians are also more likely to think things have gotten better for women more than they think things have gotten better for men. The largest gaps are for ‘Getting leadership positions in the workplace’ with 67.2 per cent of Australians

thinking things have gotten better for men compared to 37.8 per cent that think things have gotten better for men. There are also large gaps for ‘Getting into a college or university’ and ‘Getting a well-paying job’

While the levels are slightly different, the patterns are quite similar to the US.

Figure 9 Perceptions of progress for women and men, March/April 2025

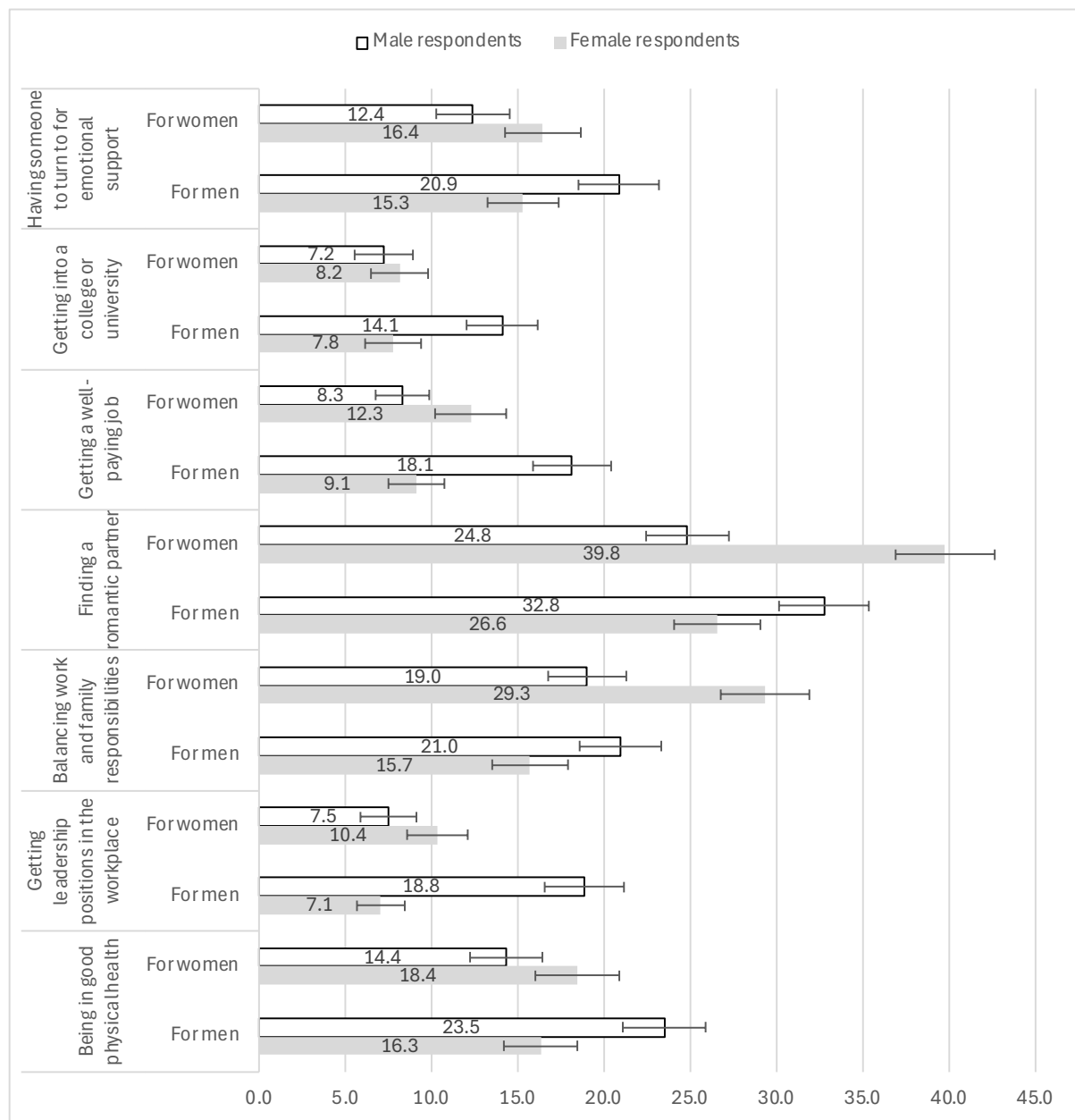


Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

In general, male respondents were more likely to think things have gotten worse for men than female respondents are, and female respondents are more likely to think things have gotten worse for women than male respondents.

The largest gap in one direction is for finding a romantic partner. 39.8 per cent of women think it has gotten worse for women compared to 24.8 per cent of men that think it has gotten worse for women. In the opposite direction, the largest gap is for ‘Getting leadership positions in the workplace.’ Amongst male respondents, 18.8 per cent think it has gotten worse for men, compared to only 7.1 per cent of female respondents.

Figure 10 Perceptions of whether things have gotten better or worse for women or men over the last 20 years, by sex of respondent, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

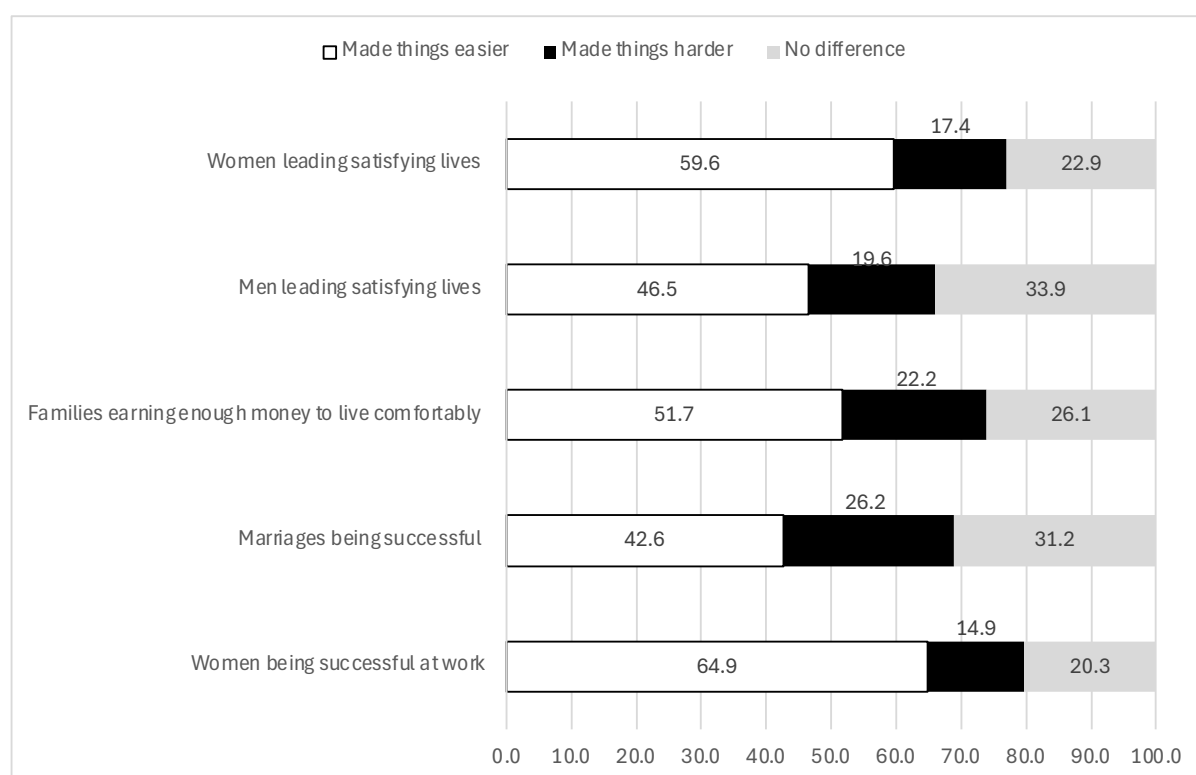
Note: The “whiskers” indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate

Although there has not been anywhere near complete convergence over the last few decades, women’s and men’s roles at home and in the workplace have shifted substantially over the last few decades. In the final question discussed in this paper, we consider the perceived impact this has had on outcomes in Australia. Following the Pew Research Center question framing, we begin with the following statement: ‘As you may know, more women now work outside the home and men are more involved in household chores and childcare than in the past.’ We then ask, ‘In general, what type of impact do you think these changes have had when it comes to each of the following?’ There are five areas of life in Australia that may have been impacted, and respondents are asked to

identify whether the changing domestic/workplace roles have made things easier, made things harder, or have not made much of a difference.

On balance, Australians are far more likely to think that more women working outside of the home and more men being involved in domestic work has had a positive impact. Australians do think that the impact on women has been more positive than the impact on men. However, there are still very few Australians (around one-in-five) that think these changing roles have made things harder for men to live satisfying lives. The area with the lowest perceived positive impact (42.6 per cent) and the highest perceived negative impact (26.2 per cent) is marriages being successful.

Figure 11 Perceptions of impact of changing workforce and domestic roles, March/April 2025



Source: Wave 3 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series, March/April 2025

6 Summary and implications for the 2025 election

Gender remains a key axis of political alignment, social identity, and public policy concern in Australia. This paper revisits and expands on evidence from the April 2022 ANUpoll, drawing on the most recent wave of the Election Monitoring Survey Series (EMSS) conducted in March and April 2025, just weeks before the federal election. A series of repeated and newly introduced questions asked of a representative sample of 3,608 Australians shed light on changing attitudes, partisan alignment, and broader social narratives around gender, power, and equality.

Public support for gender equality remains high but has softened at the margins. While 70.3 per cent of Australians in 2025 say gender equality is "very important," this is down from 84.9 per cent in 2022. At the same time, the proportion who say Australia has gone

“too far” in promoting gender equality has nearly doubled—from 9.8 per cent in 2022 to 19.0 per cent in 2025. This shift is especially pronounced among men, with 27.8 per cent now holding that view, almost matching the 31.0 per cent who say Australia hasn’t gone far enough. A majority of women (60.6 per cent) still believe more progress is needed, though this has declined from 70.7 per cent in 2022.

There are two main potential reasons for this shift. First, there has been an increase in female representation over the last few Parliaments (and even more so over the longer term).¹⁰ The 44th Parliament, which commenced in late 2010 was 28.3 per cent female. This increased to 30.8 per cent for the 44th Parliament (2013), 32.3 per cent for the 45th (2016), 36.6 per cent for the 46th (2019) and 44.5 per cent for the 47th Parliament, which commenced in mid-2022.

The Parliamentary trends are mirrored in society more broadly. For example, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reported¹¹ that ‘between 2016 and 2024, there was an 89% increase in the number of women holding seats on boards (399 vs. 755). In 2024, more than two thirds (69%) of boards have at least 30% women, compared to 18% in 2016.’ These two sets of data highlight that two things can be true at once – there has been substantial improvement in female representation in positions of power and influence, but large gaps still remain.

A second reason for the shifts in attitudes presented in this paper is that other issues have become more salient over the last few years. In particular, using the same datasets as we used in this paper, a previous paper (Biddle 2025c) showed that ‘Reducing the cost of living’ was the policy priority area that had the largest increase in salience between 2022 and 2025 – seen as a top priority for 72.0 per cent of Australians in 2025, compared to 64.7 per cent of Australians in 2022.

These attitudinal shifts map onto partisan divides in the electorate. Multivariate regression models show that Australians who believe gender equality has not gone far enough are more favourable towards Labor and the Greens, and less favourable towards the Coalition. Conversely, those who think women have it easier or that gender equality has gone too far express significantly stronger support for the Liberal Party and lower support for Labor and the Greens.

Once these gender-related beliefs are included in the analysis, the association between gender itself and party favourability reverses: women are more supportive of the Coalition and less supportive of Labor than men with the same gender-related views. This underscores a key finding of the paper—that gender differences in political preferences are largely mediated by attitudes towards gender equality, rather than gender identity *per se*.

Attitudes towards sexual assault and harassment in the workplace also remain gendered, though there are signs of modest convergence. In both 2022 and 2025, Australians were more concerned about women not being believed and men getting away with harassment, than about false accusations or unfair dismissal of men. However, the gap has narrowed slightly. An index capturing these views shows that female respondents, younger Australians, degree-holders, and Labor supporters are more likely to prioritise the rights and experiences of alleged victims (typically women). In contrast, Coalition supporters, speakers of a language other than English at home, and those living

outside inner metropolitan areas are more likely to emphasise risks to alleged perpetrators (typically men).

Confidence in political parties to handle gender equality issues also varies considerably. Labor continues to enjoy the highest levels of public confidence on gender (48.1 per cent in 2025, consistent with 2022). The Liberal Party has improved in this domain (rising from 32.3 to 38.2 per cent), while confidence in the Greens has declined (from 46.8 to 36.7 per cent). Gender differences persist, with women more confident in the Greens and less confident in the Liberal Party than men. These party-level confidence gaps may shape perceptions of credibility and trust in the lead-up to the election, especially among undecided or swing voters.

Importantly, the survey results challenge the notion that voters penalise female candidates. When asked about the likelihood of voting for a “generally well-qualified” woman, nearly half of respondents indicated they were very likely to do so, more than the per cent that say they would be very likely to vote for a man. However, favourability towards the Liberal Party is associated with a lower stated likelihood of voting for a female candidate, even when controlling for demographics. This may help explain the persistence of gender imbalances in party candidate lists—particularly within the Coalition—and suggests that voter attitudes may be shaped as much by partisan cues as by explicit gender bias.

A broader set of questions drawn from the Pew Research Center's US survey highlights the complexity of contemporary views on gender roles and outcomes. Australians are more likely to feel both frustration and pride about how things are going for women than they are for men. They also perceive more progress for women than men across six of seven domains over the last 20 years, with the exception of finding a romantic partner—where perceptions of decline are most pronounced, especially among women. These perceptions may not always align with objective measures of equality, but they reflect the lived and emotional realities that underpin political behaviour.

Finally, when asked about the impact of changing gender roles—more women working outside the home, more men involved in childcare—Australians are largely supportive. The majority believe these changes have made things easier, especially for women. Only a small minority believe they have made things harder for men, though this concern is more common among those who already express scepticism towards gender equality policies.

Implications for the 2025 election

The 2025 Federal Election is being contested in a context of shifting, and in some cases polarising, views on gender. The Teal wave of 2022, driven in part by a backlash to the Coalition's handling of gendered issues, may not be repeated in the same form. But the underlying gender divide in attitudes, trust, and party favourability persists—and may even have deepened.

Labor appears to have retained its advantage on gender equality issues, but with some softening of support. The Greens have lost ground, while the Liberal Party has modestly improved its standing, particularly among male voters. However, the gender gap in confidence and party favourability—when adjusted for gender attitudes—suggests that

voter views are not merely reactive but embedded in broader beliefs about societal fairness, identity, and power.

For parties, candidates, and strategists, the key message is this: views on gender equality are more predictive of political behaviour than gender itself. Understanding how these views intersect with social background, region, education, and ethnicity may be crucial in identifying electoral battlegrounds. The rise in perceptions that Australia has gone “too far” on gender equality—especially among men—may signal an opportunity for conservative appeals. But equally, there remains a strong core of Australians, particularly younger and more educated voters, who continue to demand progress on gender equity.

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Appendix – Survey details

Data collection for Wave 1 of the 2025 Election Monitoring Survey Series commenced with a pilot survey on Monday 14th of October. Full data collection commenced on the 15th of October, with data collection finishing on the 25th of October. There were a total of 3,622 respondents with a median survey length of 17 minutes. Those who completed the survey between the 14th and 17th of October were incorrectly not asked the last question in the survey on language spoken at home. After this date, this question was added to the survey, and those that missed that question were re-contacted for their language details.

Data collection for Wave 2 of the survey commenced with a pilot collection on the 29th of January. Full data collection commenced on the 31st of January and concluded on the 12th of February with 3,514 respondents. Of these respondents, 2,380 also completed the October 2024 survey, a retention rate of 65.7 per cent (relative to Wave 1).

Data collection for Wave 3 commenced on Thursday the 26th of March with a pilot data collection. Full data collection commenced on Friday 28th March, the day the 2025 Federal Election date of May 3rd was announced, and finished on the 8th of April with 3,608 respondents.

Survey weights were used in the analysis, using the iterative proportional fitting or raking method, implemented in STATA.¹² Population benchmarks that are used for weighting purposes are age, sex, education, and current employment. The first two of these measures comes from population estimates from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the third (education) from the 2021 Census, and the fourth (employment) from the September 2024 Labour Force Survey.

Only those that stated their age and sex were included in the analysis. Those that gave a sex other than male or female were included in analysis apart from sex-based cross-tabulations, with the weight for those that reported they were either Non-binary or that 'I use a different term' based on the sample proportion. Missing values for employment and education were imputed for weighting purposed only using the *mi impute chained* command in STATA, with random seed set to be 10121978. A separate weight was calculated for those 2,380 respondents that were in both the October 2024 and January/February 2025 surveys.

The ethical aspects of data collection for all three waves of the EMSS have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://www.americancommunities.org/anatomy-of-the-womens-vote-in-the-2024-presidential-election/>
- ² We find broadly similar results when we use voting intentions as the dependent variable. However, with a binary (0 or 1) dependent variable, there is less variation to model and therefore more uncertainty around the estimates.
- ³ <https://theconversation.com/view-from-the-hill-linda-reynolds-feels-the-lash-after-scott-morrison-says-he-was-blindsided-by-rape-allegation-155400>
- ⁴ <https://theconversation.com/lehrmann-retrial-abandoned-because-of-a-significant-and-unacceptable-risk-to-brittany-higgins-life-195805>
- ⁵ <https://theconversation.com/judge-finds-bruce-lehrmann-raped-brittany-higgins-and-dismisses-network-10-defamation-case-how-did-it-play-out-225891>
- ⁶ Although the United Australian Party will not be contesting the Federal Election, a closely associated party – Trumpet of Patriots – will be, and is chaired by Clive Palmer. We used the United Australia Party terminology for consistency with the previous election.
- ⁷ https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/Quick_Guides/2024-25/Gender_composition_of_Australian_parliaments_by_party_a_quick_guide#:~:text=Following%20the%20general%20election%20held,60%25%20of%20the%20Legislative%20Council
- ⁸ <https://www.news.com.au/national/politics/peter-dutton-warns-men-have-had-enough-of-diversity-hires/news-story/8826192e181e20d007242c1ce0dd2295>
- ⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/10/17/how-americans-see-men-and-masculinity/>
- ¹⁰ <https://handbook.aph.gov.au/StatisticalInformation/GenderCompositionOfParliament>
- ¹¹ <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/asx-corporate-gov>
- ¹² <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2018/01/26/how-different-weighting-methods-work/>