

# The Glass Cliff: Female representation in politics and business

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Leadership positions in business have proven to be precarious for women. Female business leaders are more likely to be appointed to powerful leadership positions when an organization is in crisis or high-risk circumstances. Researcher Dr. Michelle Ryan, who is publishing her research in a forthcoming issue of *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, proposes that this scenario of "the glass cliff" extends to the political arena.

During the UK 2005 general election, the seats Conservative party female candidates were vying for were considered virtually "unwinnable," and the results were more likely to favor the male Labour party candidates.

The reasons behind voter behavior and [business](#) appointments are difficult to pinpoint and controversial. Ryan proposes that at the root of the issue is the perception that [women](#) are less competent than males, despite evidence that women have broken through "the glass ceiling" and have finally achieved gender equality.

In the EU women make up just over ten percent of the top executive positions in the top fifty publicly quoted companies, and in the U.S. female leaders occupy less than sixteen percent of these positions in the [Fortune 500](#). As women continue to be underrepresented in politics and business, this stereotype is often reinforced and self-perpetuating. Ryan says, "Gender discrimination in politics can be subtle and difficult to identify. Women continue to be under-represented in political office and

often face a more difficult political task than men."

**More information:** To view the abstract for this article please visit [www3.interscience.wiley.com/jpages/0002-6256/abstract/123276529](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/jpages/0002-6256/abstract/123276529)

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