

The forgotten political generation

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The election campaign may be under way but new research from The University of Nottingham shows that the parties are in danger of immediately writing off at least four million young working class female voters.

The lead author of the report: 'Lambrini Lady — the forgotten political generation' — is Professor Steven Fielding, Director of the University of Nottingham's Centre for British Politics.

"It may sound like a cliché," says Professor Fielding, "but the fact is Britain's political class is now, more than ever, dominated by men, the middle class, the middle aged and the elderly.

"The figures speak for themselves: Despite 'Blair's Babes', only 20 per cent of MPs elected in 2005 were women, and while they have helped introduce some positive changes for all women, these changes can be fairly described as modest."

The report is co-authored by Rob Ford of the University of Manchester and Matthew Goodwin who will be joining The University of Nottingham in the Autumn.

It shows the problem is caused by a mixture of disengagement on the part of the 'Lambrini Ladies' and lack of genuine interest in such voters' concerns from the parties.

The idea that specific social groups hold the outcome of a general

election in their hands isn't new. In the 1980s 'Essex Man' was said to be vital to Conservative success; in 1997 'Mondeo Man' and 'Worcester Woman' were seen as important to New Labour; in 2001 the 'Pebbledash People' were (unsuccessfully) targeted by the Conservatives; and in 2005 Tony Blair turned his sights toward 'School Gate Mum'. In recent months, it has been claimed that 'Motorway Man' possesses the key to the 2010 election.

This new report identifies the latest generation of potential key stakeholders for the parties — the 'Lambrini Ladies'— as C1/2 and D women of voting age, working full and part-time, usually mums of pre-school or school age children.

The political parties have historically never taken this group seriously, ensuring they were the last to get the vote.

The report shows the 'Lambrini Ladies' remain the group that is probably the most alienated from politics. In fact this group take the least interest in politics, with many already having decided they won't be voting in the 2010 election.

"Many of the women in this group may have decided not to take the election seriously," continues Professor Fielding, "but there are very good reasons why the parties should take them seriously.

"Compared to others in the electorate they are more open to third party appeals, more likely to 'don't-know-who-to-vote-for' — but are less likely to vote.

"If Gordon Brown can enthuse them or David Cameron change their minds or another party somehow connect with them, they might just end up determining who winds up in Downing Street."

While there are obvious gains to be made by the parties in reaching out to this group, the report also finds that responsibility lies with the 'Lambrini Ladies' themselves and that they should think about taking politics more seriously, no matter how patronising the politicians might appear.

"Only then." Professor Fielding adds, "will the parties take them seriously and properly address matters like the low level of minimum wage, the pay gap between men and women and the provision of affordable childcare."

The report insists this is not simply a matter for the 'Lambrini Ladies'. They reflect a broader process of political disengagement in society, and if they can be enthused about [politics](#), then others can too.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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