

# Women worldwide know less about politics than men

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Women living in the world's most advanced democracies and under the most progressive gender equality regimes still know less about politics than men. Indeed, an unmistakable gender gap in political knowledge seems to be a global phenomenon, according to a ten-nation study of media systems and national political knowledge funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Women know less about politics than men regardless of how advanced a country is in terms of gender equality, says researcher Professor James Curran, Director of the Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre at University of London. "Our finding that the gap between men and [women](#)'s knowledge of politics is greater in Norway – a country ranked globally as one of the very highest in terms of gender equality – than in South Korea – a country with a much lower equality rating – is particularly striking," Professor Curran points out.

The study also discovered that gender gaps in political knowledge tend to be even wider in so called 'advanced' economies such as the United Kingdom and United States than in less advanced economies such as Colombia.

Professor Curran says: "The fact that throughout the whole world women know less about politics than men and that this is as true for people in Norway as it is in Colombia is really very surprising".

In this study, researchers surveyed men and women's knowledge of

domestic and international [news](#) as well as current affairs in Australia, Canada, Colombia, Greece, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway, the UK and the US. Exploring the reasons for the [gender gap](#) researchers examined both the content of news and the supply of news in all ten nations. Findings reveal:

News coverage is heavily weighted toward male sources even in countries such as the UK and Australia where gender equality ratings are relatively high. Overall, women are only interviewed or cited in 30 per cent of TV news stories in the ten nations.

In all ten countries, female sources tend only to appear in longer news items or articles and are preferred for soft news topics such as family, lifestyle and culture.

"Such under-representation and topical bias of women in news media may curb women's motivation to acquire political knowledge actively, and discourage them from political participation, and even prevent women from engaging in citizens in a democratic society," suggests co-researcher Professor Kaori Hayashi.

### **In terms of the supply of news, findings reveal that:**

- The more national populations watch TV news, particularly news provided by Public Service Broadcasters as opposed to commercial providers, the better informed on politics people tend to be
- News watching/reading/listening is very much a male activity. In Canada, Norway and the UK, men claim to be exposed to TV and newspaper news significantly more than women.
- These are also the countries where [political knowledge](#) gaps between men and women are especially large

"It seems that gaps in exposure to media are related to the gaps of knowledge between men and women," says Professor Hayashi.

The reasons why women watch less TV, read fewer newspapers and listen to less radio programmes in many countries than men could include the discouragingly male bias of much media content, less leisure time because of the greater unpaid work undertaken by women in the home and persistent social norms and expectations inherited from the past.

"Whatever the reasons, our research shows that globally in the 21st century those who are most likely to be knowledgeable about politics and current affairs are older men in advanced industrial nations," Professor Curran concludes.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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