

# Exploring why young women in Australia are reluctant to enter politics

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Despite growing momentum to increase female representation in Australia's national parliament, it continues to be a male dominated domain. New research from Monash University explores why young

women still feel reluctant to become a member of the national parliament.

The research, now [published](#) under the title "Investigating the ambitions of [young women](#) to run for national [parliament](#): the case of Australia" in the *Australian Journal of Political Science*, found that for many young women the appeal of becoming an MP was significantly curtailed by beliefs that the institution maintains stereotypical gender norms as well as a masculine, misogynistic culture. Many women were also more likely to doubt their ability to participate in politics than their male counterparts.

Dr. Zareh Ghazarian, Head of Politics and International Relations at Monash University, said gender-based inequality of opportunity is diminishing the political ambition of young women.

"Our research shows that young women feel parliament is not a place for them. Social constraints, sexism and toxic parliamentary culture is contributing to entrenched [gender disparity](#)," Dr. Ghazarian said.

The research used data from the Our Lives longitudinal research study that follows a large cohort of young Queenslanders from adolescence into adulthood. The cohort of 28- to 29-year-olds were interviewed in the weeks prior to the May 2022 election. Of the 47 participants, 27 were female and 20 were male.

The interviews focused on participants' views on Australian politics as well as their thoughts on women's representation. The interviews also explored the ambitions of young people to be active in Australian politics.

With misogyny and gender-based violence prominent issues in the lead up to the 2022 election, participants were deeply concerned about how

safe the national parliamentary workplace was, particularly for women. Recent allegations of sexual misconduct in parliament was the issue that most concerned women and had a significant impact on their political ambition.

While the research found participants were critical of the status quo, there was a concerning degree of acquiescence about the situation. Participants were reluctant to stand up to, and tackle, the issues from within. Instead, they preferred to avoid such a toxic environment altogether.

"This highlights a deeply unhealthy element in Australian politics whereby individuals, especially women, are choosing not to participate in democratic processes. It is critical that greater efforts be made to advance the political ambitions of women to stand for election to the Australian Parliament," Dr. Ghazarian said.

The research concluded that greater efforts be made to advance the political ambitions of women to stand for election to the Australian Parliament. This may be done through building the confidence and opportunities for women to participate, while changing broader attitudes to the role of women in politics. Recommendations included targeted school-based education programs, as well as advocacy projects that empower young people, particularly women, to engage with, and participate in, politics from an early age.

"Without addressing these entrenched issues, women's political under representation and an exclusionary masculine culture will continue to mar young people's political ambitions and the practical operation of Australia's liberal democracy."

**More information:** Zareh Ghazarian et al, Investigating the ambitions of young women to run for national parliament: the case of Australia, *Australian Journal of Political Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/10361146.2023.2269866](https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2023.2269866)

Provided by Monash University

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