women talking politics

NEWSLETTER OF THE AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND WOMEN AND POLITICS NETWORK

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In this issue:

Women's Voting Patterns: Australia and New Zealand Compared

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Over the last decade there has been a marked increase in interest in what has been labelled the gender gap. While generally there has always been a gender gap in terms of the representation of women and men in the decision-making arenas of politics, the existence and pertinence of a gender gap with respect to voting behaviour and political attitudes is still under discussion. Party strategists and researchers, both in Australia and New Zealand, continue to investigate how the gender gap might manifest itself and what its relevance is to policy proposals and outcomes.

In North America, the gender gap has referred to a greater number of women than men supporting political parties to the left of centre. The term was coined to describe the trends evident in the 1980 presidential election, where eight per cent fewer women than men voted for Ronald Reagan. Historically, such a gender difference in a national election was unprecedented, although it re-emerged with the presidential election of Bill Clinton in 1996 (Curtin, 1997).

The possibility of women increasing their vote for parties of the left was considered a significant turnaround, for women's conservatism in terms of voting behaviour was for many years a feature in Europe and the United States. Certainly in Britain, the Conservatives have consistently done better among women, while Labour has gained more support from men (Curtin, 1997).

So do we see similar trends with respect to Australia and New Zealand? Looking first at Australia, we see that between 1984 and 1998 the percentage of women choosing the Coalition has been higher than the percentage of men supporting the Coalition, the single exception being the 1990 election. While the Australian Labor Party (ALP) received 52 per cent support from women in 1984, this was still four percentage points lower than men's support for the ALP, and by 1993 this gap had increased to 6 points (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Gender Differences in Vote in Australia 1984-1998

	1984		1990		1993	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
ALP	52%	56%	40%	42%	46%	52%
Coalition	42	39	43	43	48	41
Democrats	6	5	14	11	3	3

	1996		1998	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
ALP	34%	39%	39%	42%
Coalition	52	51	44	41
Democrats	8	5	6	5

Sources: NSSS and AES various years (http://ssda.anu.edu.au/).

THE AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND WOMEN AND POLITICS NETWORK

July 2002

This is the first Women in Politics network newsletter to be published by staff associated with the Centre for Women and Leadership at Massey University. Our focus is on election politics so the early date for the forthcoming General Election – while not unexpected – did give the process more urgency!

We're also sending out subscription forms, which are late because of the change in editorship. We hope you will continue to support the newsletter, both financially and with your written contributions.

The Editor for this issue is Susan Fountaine, from the Department of Communication & Journalism at Massey University. Thanks to Margie Comrie, Helen Presland and Sharon Benson for their assistance.

If you wish to contribute to the next newsletter or have any questions please email Susan at S.L.Fountaine@massey.ac.nz Enjoy the campaign!

It is interesting to see an almost opposite trend in New Zealand (see Figure 2). Women have been consistently more likely than men to support Labour, with the difference being particularly marked in the 1996 and 1999 elections. In contrast, men are more likely than women to support National, except in 1999, although the margins are small. With respect to minor parties, there are few significant differences except in the case of ACT, where women showed less support than men in both 1996 and 1999. This is similar to the gendered nature of support for Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party (ONP is currently Australia's main right wing minor party). Men were twice as likely as women to vote ONP in 1998 (Curtin, 2001).

Why then do we see quite different trends across these two countries, which are geographically close and exhibit various similarities in historical development? Part of the answer appears to be the absence in New Zealand of certain structural obstacles found in the ALP. In Australia, the Irish Catholic influence and mateship traditions have dominated ALP party-machine politics, with

Figure 2: Gender Differences in Vote in New Zealand 1981-1999

	1981		1990		1993	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Labour	35%	34%	30%	28%	36.8%	33%
National	39	40	39	40	33.2	36.3
Alliance					18.9	18.3
NZF					8.6	8.4

	1996		1999	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Labour	34.9%	25.4%	36%	27%
National	32.5	34.2	26	24
Alliance	9.4	11.1	6	7
NZF	18.3	18.6	4	3
ACT	4.8	10.9	3	8
Green			3	5

Source: NZES various years (http://www.nzes.org).

institutionalised factions acting as power brokers. In addition, the trade unions, particularly the blue-collar unions, have significantly more voting strength in the ALP than is the case with the New Zealand Labour Party (Curtin & Sawer, 1996).

But part of the answer may also be related to gender and political leadership. In New Zealand, in contrast to Australia, women have carved out an entrenched but recognised position within the major parties, culminating in women as parliamentary leaders of National and Labour by 1997, with both serving time as Prime Minister. Focusing on the Labour Party, women constituted 10 per cent of the membership of Cabinet between 1984 and 1989, and in early 1990 two more women joined Cabinet, raising the proportion to 26 per cent (Curtin & Sawer, 1996). Labour currently has 43 per cent women in Cabinet.

In Australia, two of the minor parties have been led by women in recent elections (the Democrats and Pauline Hanson's One Nation), but both major parties have been considerably reticent in promoting women's rise through the ranks, at the level of party machine or in terms of leadership (although there has been some changes at state level).

The adoption of proportional representation has no doubt facilitated the increased presence of New Zealand women in Cabinet, by virtue of having increased the pool of talented women from which to draw. However, Helen Clark's leadership in itself should not be underestimated. There is evidence to suggest

that party leaders influence vote choice, and we could expect gender effects for female party leaders regardless of ideological leanings. In the case of New Zealand, both gender and leadership evaluations of Helen Clark significantly and positively influenced the vote for Labour in the 1999 election (Banducci & Karp, 2000). Certainly, women's support for Labour was significantly greater than men's in both elections when Clark was leader. It will be interesting to see if the 2002 election yields a similar result.

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Talking About the Women's Vote: An Interview with National Party President Michelle Boag

The following is an edited account of an interview with National Party President Michelle Boag, conducted in May 2002.

If I presented myself to you as a swinging female voter and asked "what has National got to offer", what would you tell me?

I would be talking about our policies because all our research shows that women focus on different policy issues than men. A lot of men vote on what I would call rational policy issues, which are primarily economic in focus, whereas women tend to take more notice of things that affect them emotionally (such as education, health, treaty issues, law and order). So I would be focusing in on those areas as ones which women are going to be most interested in. Probably education would be at the top of the list because most women have children or grandchildren and they are very interested in either quality of education or student loans. And the way to relate to voters initially is to make a connection on the policy level.

So the Party does perceive that there is such a thing as a "women's vote"?

Oh absolutely, we can tell that from various responses. Women are interested in different issues (now there are a lot of men who are interested in education, there are a lot of women who are interested in the economy but in terms of groups…). If you do a gender analysis of the ACT vote you find it's very strongly male with very few female supporters and I think if you do an analysis of the Labour vote you'd find more women than men. So that must mean we're weaker in women than we should be and I know in some electorates we are. We do a lot of electorate polling and it's interesting - we know that in an electorate like Rangitikei where we've got a good, young, local MP, working hard, there's no gender gap. Because he's doing a good job out there in the community, representing the Party and putting forward a face that's obviously of interest or attractive to women voters. But there are some electorates where we don't have an MP and where we have to work a lot harder to get the women's vote.

Returning to what you said about how the ACT vote tends to be dominated by men - do you perceive that this creates problems, even indirectly, for National because the centre right generally tends not to have that female support?

I don't think it needs to be a problem. Historically there have been periods when we've enjoyed very high support from women and our values as a party haven't changed. We are still very strongly committed to family and community but on some of the issues we have a very different focus from the Labour Party and education is a good example.

So given that the Party perceives that there is a "women's vote" and that women respond to different issues, how do you go about targeting them?

For example: tomorrow, in the *Sunday Star Times,* we're distributing the *National Times*[1]. What we're doing here is by association, and in a softer way, introducing women to our policies and what we stand for, and obviously this whole format is designed to look like a local women's magazine. So we are recognising that not only are the policy interests different but the communication needs are different. When we did our economic policy we put it as an insert in the *National Business Review*. Very different look, and probably that was mostly read by men, but this is meant to be a women-friendly view. There are many more women who will take notice of it because it looks like their weekly magazine.

And in terms of using the mainstream media to reach women?

We have a number of women MPs who we use and promote in those areas. For example, Anne Tolley is our spokesman on early childhood education, Katherine Rich is our spokesman on broadcasting - and she is a very attractive young personality because she's young and a marketer, and she's blonde and she's pregnant for the second time, and identifies with a lot of those younger women. Then we've got women like Sue Wood who's just declared herself as a candidate…a huge heritage of involvement in the feminist movement and she was the first woman president of a political party in New Zealand…In the 1970's was what we used to call consciousness raising, when women were into discovering what they wanted, and Sue really brought that into the National Party in a big way. We had our own newsletters and seminars and we'd bring women from all round the country as speakers and we spent weekends analysing policies and it was all very intense, great fun. We also have a woman's vice-president, which seems a bit ridiculous when you have a woman president, but it is a role we've had for a number of years and it's her task to keep in touch with women's organisations. She sits on the National Council of Women, she makes sure that we're represented at women's expos, that we go to various conferences for rural women and that sort of thing. So we actually have someone in the organisation specifically delegated that role.

Is it fair to say though that National tends to come across as quite a male dominated party…I think that less than 25% of National MPs are women and with the loss of Jenny Shipley there is one woman on the front bench…that the public face of National is male although there are women working behind the scenes?

Well, there are, and we do have a lot of women candidates and we will have a lot more. It's difficult to tell because we haven't quite finished selecting, but we'll have somewhere between 15 and 20 women …In terms of our organisation, obviously I'm a woman, of our regional chairs two out of the five are women, on our national management board, four out of eleven. We're probably more democratic about it in the sense that we don't elect women because they're women - the only position in the Party where only a woman is eligible is the role of woman vice-president, everything else is whoever is the best person. But probably the face of National is dominated by men but then it's also a cyclical thing. We had a woman leader for three or four years and now we've a man leader and in the future we'll have a woman leader again. I think we'll gradually improve our ratio of men to women candidates but I can think of many selections where we've had both women and men available, and people just don't look at it from a gender point of view. They just say, "who is the best one?" and that's how it has worked.

Is the Party actively recruiting female candidates as part of its new image and getting rid of some of the old faces?

We always actively recruit women. The Party organisation is driven by women in the sense that women are the natural organisers and do a lot of the work. At an electorate level we have a large number of women electorate chairmen who take on the leadership role because they

[1] This colourful, magazine-style Party publication was distributed through the *Sunday Star Times* and *Rural News*, as well as by electorate organisations. The first issue, in May 2002, had Bill and Mary English on the cover, and contained profiles of candidates, MPs, Cabinet ministers and small business owners. It was distributed monthly in the lead-up to the General Election.

have natural organisational skills which are very useful. So in terms of the Party organisation I don't think anybody ever counts, we've sort of gone beyond that. We're now in a phase where it's actually irrelevant whether someone is a woman or a man. We're probably more conscious of it in the House but I have to say that in terms of the drive to bring new talent in we haven't just looked for women; we've looked for people of talent. We've got some outstanding women candidates. One that springs to mind is a woman called Nicky Wagner in Christchurch - she probably won't get into Parliament by winning the seat, she might get in on the list - but she's just brought so much energy to the job. She's not that young, but she's bright, and she's got her face on the back of buses driving around Christchurch, and her own logo, and great photos and pamphlets. Full of life and energy. And I think women are a point of difference because they do campaign differently, they tend to be more creative and a little bit off the wall. Like the woman candidate we've got in the East Coast, who has walked her entire electorate, from Whakatane all the way round to Gisborne. Now I don't believe a man would do that. Partly because not only wouldn't a man attempt anything that huge, but also I don't know that a man would have the organisational skills required to get back-up, cars, places to stay, food, clothing, people to come with him. But she just did it and I think it would be really tough for a man to try and pull all that together, he'd need a woman to do it for him. So women do campaign differently, no doubt about it.

…

As a general comment I think we are, as a Party, far less focused on issues which we think are only of concern to women. I can remember being involved in the 1970s and 1980s when things like the Matrimonial Property Act and the Human Rights Commission Act came out, and those were all things our National government did, and there was quite a focus on issues that were just women's issues. These days we've sort of moved on. There are still issues that women are more interested in, like women are very interested in the environment, but they tend not to be "women's issues" as such; they might have more of a family or community focus than the issues that some men would be interested in, like transport or ACC. Women just tend to be interested in different issues but I don't think it's true anymore to say that there are women's issues, I think it's beyond that.

Interview by Susan Fountaine

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Useful websites:

Women in politics bibliographic database: http://www.ipu.org/bdf-e/BDFsearch.asp

Homepage of the Inter-parliamentary union: http://www.ipu.org/iss-e/women.htm

International directory of women's political leadership: http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Topic?WomensStudies/GovernmentPolitics/IDPa

Home page of the International Women's Media Foundation: http://www.iwmf.org/about/index.htm

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"Purse Power" in the New Millennium

Doug Ashwell, Department of Communication & Journalism, Massey University

A new political force is rising in New Zealand, one that all political parties will ignore at their peril. "Purse power" and the women that wield it are destined to redefine the rules of engagement for the battle against genetic modification in New Zealand.

On 22nd of May 2002, the Green Party staged a walk out of Parliament after announcing it would not support any Government that lifted the moratorium on the commercial release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The act, seen by some as a show of integrity and others as madness, may have cost the Greens any chance of being in a coalition with Labour, as this issue is non-negotiable and part of a long campaign against genetic engineering (GE). The Greens were calling for a Royal Commission of Enquiry into genetic modification well before the 1999 election and they have continued to campaign against the release of GMOs into the New Zealand environment along with

advocating the labelling of genetically modified food.

Prominent in this campaign have been Jeanette Fitzsimons, the Green's co-leader, and Sue Kedgley, the Green's spokesperson for Safe Food and author of *Eating Safely in a Toxic World* (1998). Both of these women already had strong public profiles before becoming Green MPs, taking part in protest marches, petitions and letter writing campaigns. While they may now rely on "insider" tactics, their mantle of direct action has been taken up by new groups of women determined to keep GE in the lab.

This determination has seen a number of women forming grassroots, anti-GE groups. Two of these groups are RAGE (Revolt Against Genetic Engineering) and more recently MadGE (Mothers Against Genetic Engineering).

The prime driving force behind the formation of RAGE was Mary Anne Howard-Clarke, a South African-born midwife who has been resident in New Zealand for eight years. Howard-Clarke became concerned about this issue through her involvement in the Open Forum for Health. After investigating the topic she was moved to form RAGE in order to inform the public of the potential risks of GE and to lobby the Government and ERMA (Environmental Risk Management Authority) against the introduction of genetically modified food into New Zealand (Southward & Howard-Clarke, 2000).

RAGE argues that there is an undeniable link between our health and what we eat. Many of us would find it hard to disagree, as we are constantly told to avoid excess fat and to eat our 5+ servings a day of fruits and vegetables. Given this link, RAGE questions why we suddenly wish to start eating new, untested and potentially dangerous foods.

This is a view echoed by the newly formed anti-GE group MadGE (Mothers Against Genetic Engineering). MadGE describes itself as a

> growing group of politically non-aligned women who have decided to actively resist the use of genetically engineered organisms in our food and on our land (MadGE, 2002).

MadGE currently has over 800 members and other anti-GE groups around the country are taking up the drive for membership.

Allanah Currie, organiser of MadGe, became interested in food after her sister died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) with its links to eating meat from cattle infected with Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease. After attending a lecture by Professor Arpad Pustzai, whose (now disputed) experiments allegedly showed damage to the internal organs of rats fed a diet of genetically modified potatoes, Currie left feeling "disturbed" and "outraged" that New Zealanders were being treated like human guinea pigs by being exposed to these new foods. As she says:

> I had come home to New Zealand to raise healthy children in clean green Godzone and there I was unwittingly feeding them corn "enhanced with scorpion genes", soy spliced with a soil virus, and soon I would be able to look forward to "designer milk" from cows who had been constructed with human genes and potatoes bolstered with toad genes (Currie in MadGE, 2002).

Currie and her fellow MadGE supporters prescribe "purse power" as the remedy against genetically modified food. Upon joining MadGE, members are supplied with a card that lists all the companies who have committed to being GE-free and on the other side, those who have not. Women are encouraged to buy only GE-free products. This type of approach has had a large impact in Europe with certain supermarket chains refusing to buy any product that has genetically modified ingredients. Safeway, Tesco and Sainsbury Supermarkets in the United Kingdom have all removed GM soy and maize products from their own brand products as well as labelling products that contain GE ingredients. Safeway UK state:

> We listen carefully to our customers' comments and concerns and we have removed GM soya and maize ingredients from our own brand products. This was achieved in 1999.

In addition, MadGE members are encouraged to telephone those companies who haven't gone GE-free to tell them that they refuse to buy their products until they commit to being GE-free. According to Currie, by using this approach MadGE "can empower women and show them

that they're really powerful as shoppers" (Holdom, 2002, p. 9).

"Purse power", if it follows consumer trends in Europe, is destined to be a powerful force against GE food in New Zealand. And consumer power can translate into political power. Currie told Television New Zealand's *Sunday* programme that:

> Women buy 80 per cent of the food, so they've got huge power when they go shopping and if they choose to buy this brand and not that brand they can have massive political power (23 June, 2002).

With the election looming these direct actions may be of more importance than the political position of the Greens, especially if Labour can govern without the aid of a junior coalition partner as some of the latest opinion polls suggest. It may be "purse power" that determines whether or not GE-food is accepted on our supermarket shelves or in our fields.

Finally, although MadGE women declare themselves politically non-aligned, their anti-GE stance closely resembles that of the Greens. If MadGE numbers continue to grow these women may turn "purse power" into "ballot box power". This could lead to all parties (other than the Greens) having to rethink their current stance on genetic modification. It now remains to be seen whether "purse power" will prove to be a potent political force.

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New Zealand's 5th Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women

The Ministry of Women's Affairs is currently revising the draft CEDAW report to reflect public submissions and input from government departments. It is expected that New Zealand will present its report to the CEDAW Committee in July 2003, in which case the final report will be forwarded to the Committee by September 2002. For more information about this process, visit the Ministry's website – http://www.mwa.govt.nz

Other relevant websites are:

http://www.unifem.undp.org/cedaw.htm

http://www.un.org/womenwatch

Interpreting Political Polls: What Do They Really Mean?

Professor Philip Gendall and Associate Professor Janet Hoek, Department of Marketing, Massey University

Despite Jim Bolger's "bugger the pollsters" lament (or was it a call for action?) after the 1996 General Election, opinion polls remain an inescapable and ubiquitous feature of every election. Their results are debated, dissected and disputed on television and radio and in the press almost every day. But, despite all of this attention, how many people know what polls really mean?

Polls, like all surveys, are based on the idea that a scientifically selected sample of people can be used to estimate the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of the whole population. Many people find it hard to believe that this can be

done. How can a sample of 500 or 1000 accurately reflect the views of all New Zealanders? The fact is that a properly selected sample **can** be a small-scale representation - a microcosm - of the population. The ability of the sample to represent the population does not depend on how big the population is, only on how big the sample is (the bigger the sample, the more accurate the results). However, there are many different samples that could be taken to represent a population, and although they will all be very similar, they will not be identical. This gives rise to what is called sampling error, or margin of error.

Suppose that an opinion poll estimates that 50% of the population will give their list vote to Labour. A repetition of the survey taken at the same time, but with a different sample of people, would probably not give the same result. It might, for example, give an estimate of 47%. The possibility of chance variation across repeated samples from a population is taken into account by calculating the margin of error. This is a range within which we are confident the true value lies; the size of the range depends on the size of the sample. For a sample of 400 it is plus or minus 5%, for a sample of 1000, it is plus or minus about 3%. Thus, if we take a random sample of 1000 voters and find that the proportion who say they will vote Labour is 50%, we do not know the true level of support for Labour, but we can be pretty sure it is between 47% and 53% (50% plus or minus 3%).

However, the margins of error quoted for polls are actually the **maximum** error margins for the survey. In fact, there is a **different** margin of error for every sample value between 0% and 100%, and these get smaller as the sample values get closer to 0% or 100%; larger as they approach 50%. For example, the margin of error for, say, ACT, which might have 4% support in a sample of 400 voters, is not 5%, but 2%. Thus it makes no sense at all for commentators to describe ACT's support as "hovering around the margin of error". Yet in every election this sort of comment is made.

The margin of error also means it is sometimes difficult to know who is leading or trailing in polls. For example, a recent poll of 500 people showed Jeanette Fitzsimons "ahead" of Max Purnell in Coromandel, 28% to 27%, a "lead" of 1%. But as we have explained, the error margins for these estimates are around 4%. Thus support for Jeanette Fitzsimons could be as high as 32% or as low as 24%. Similarly, support for Max Purnell could be as high as 34% or as low as 24%. Since these two ranges overlap, we cannot be sure whether either candidate is ahead of the other; the race is simply too close to call.

The same problem occurs when "movements" in party or candidate popularity are described. For example, a recent Colmar Brunton ONE Network News poll claimed that Labour's popularity had dropped 2%, from 53% to 51%. However, the error range for 53% is 50% to 56%, and 48% to 54% for an estimate of 51%. This means we cannot be sure that Labour's support has changed at all; claims that support has moved implies the estimates are more precise than is really the case.

So far, all we have discussed is the statistical interpretation of polls, but there are other important issues we also need to consider, including sample selection, response rates, and the questions used.

If the sample for a poll is not selected randomly, then we cannot be sure that it will represent the population. The sample is said to be biased. Biased sample selection can occur in several ways. For example, telephone surveys based on numbers from telephone directories are biased because anyone with a telephone whose number is not in a directory will not be called.

Survey companies overcome this problem by using what is called random digit dialling. A computer generates a random list of telephone numbers, which means that people with unlisted numbers or new numbers can be included in the sample. However, not every household has a telephone; the households without phones are likely to be in lower socio-economic groups, and lower socio-economic groups traditionally include more left of centre supporters, and so could under-estimate support for Labour, the Progressive Coalition or the Alliance.

Another sample selection problem is that telephone numbers are generally held by households, not individuals (with the advent of cell phones this is changing, but the telephone is still a household item in most homes). This means that people living alone are guaranteed to

be asked for their opinion if their number is dialled, whereas someone who lives in a house with three other adults only has a one in four chance of being selected for a survey. This is an example of biased sample selection in favour of people in smaller households.

So called "phone in" polls are another example of biased sample selection. Only those who can be bothered (or who can afford) to make a call are included. The bias in these polls seems so obvious as to barely warrant comment. However, the media often accord these polls the same status as those that are scientifically conducted and, worse, to uninformed members of the public a phone-in poll of 1000 may seem more credible than a properly conducted poll of only 400.

Non-response in surveys occurs when potential survey respondents either refuse to be interviewed or cannot be contacted. If the opinions of these people are different to those who are contacted and agree to be interviewed, the poll results will be biased. Non-response may or may not be a problem, it depends on whether the views of non-respondents are different to those of respondents, but the more non-respondents there are in a survey, the greater the chance of non-response bias. Poll response rates are rarely reported but are sometimes as low as 30% (which may be why they are not reported). A rough rule of thumb is that unless the response rate of a survey is at least 50%, there is a risk that its results will be biased because of non-response. (By "biased" we mean that the results will not be a true reflection of the views of the whole population.)

In practice, however, most polls do not provide much of the information we have suggested is important. Usually, the only information reported is the sample size and error margin (which amount to the same thing). This is an improvement on what used to happen, but falls far short of what we need to make an informed judgement about the validity of a set of poll results. The problem is not that the reputable polling companies will not supply this information, the problem is that the media seem to believe that the general public could not be interested in these details.

The questions used in a poll can also affect the responses people provide. This is particularly important when polls explore election "issues" as people's knowledge and interpretation of these issues can vary considerably. Work we conducted into the referendum question on crime and violence used in the 1999 General Election revealed interpretations of terms such as "minimum sentences" differed. While some respondents thought this meant criminals would have to spend more time in jail, others thought it meant those convicted of a crime would be imprisoned for the minimum time only (i.e., they would be released sooner). These diametrically opposed interpretations clearly influenced how people voted when faced with this question.

The recent Herald-DigiPoll exploring respondents' views on GM policy seems likely to incur similar problems. This concluded that, "*…66.7 per cent thought GM organisms should be able to be commercially released after a detailed inquiry and under strict conditions."* However, it is not clear what *"commercially released"* means to respondents, nor how they interpreted *"a detailed inquiry"* or "s*trict conditions"*. In other words, in addition to seeking information on the public's views, polls should also explore respondents' knowledge and interpretation of the concepts examined. Without these latter details, we cannot be sure that respondents are reacting to the same issues.

So, how can you tell what polls really mean? Here are a list of questions you should ask yourself when you see or hear poll results reported, to help you assess the validity of the poll and its interpretation:

- What population was surveyed? Were screening procedures adopted to ensure only eligible voters were questioned?
- How was the survey conducted? For example, if it was done by telephone, people without phones would not be surveyed.
- What was the sample size? Samples for polls usually range from 400 to 1000. Other things being equal, the larger the sample the better because larger samples have lower margins of error. However, be cautious of results for subgroups of a sample. For example, the overall error margin for a sample of 400 is plus or minus 5%, but for

200 women in the sample, the error margin increases to 7%.

- What was the response rate? If the response rate is less than 50%, there is a potentially serious risk of non-response error.

- What questions were asked? Without knowing exactly what questions were asked and what response options were given, it is very difficult to know how poll results should be interpreted.

- Who conducted the poll? Independently conducted polls generally have more credibility than polls conducted by political parties or lobby groups, for obvious reasons.

With so many potential sources of error and so many unknowns, it is easy to think that the whole business of polling is a waste of time. However, the fact is that political careers are made or broken, and the fate of the country can be influenced, by the reaction to political polls and other opinion surveys. Important decisions based on correct interpretations of polls may be bad enough, but those based on incorrect interpretations are likely to be even worse.

This piece also appeared in the Manawatu Evening Standard during the 2002 election campaign.

Cyber-politics: Election Campaigning on the Web

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> "...it is impossible to conceive of a general election campaign without the news media playing a pivotal part..." (McGregor, 1995, p.1).

Cyber-politics - campaign communications on-line - is a relatively new political phenomenon (Lapoint, 1999), and the Internet a "new" form of news media. No New Zealand studies have previously been conducted on this topic although use of the Internet in American presidential campaigns has been explored from several different angles. The examination of how candidates use the Internet for campaign communication is therefore ripe for research.

Who has access to the "new" medium?

Critical to the power of the Internet as a campaigning medium is the proportion of voters with access to computers. Information Technology statistics demonstrate that the percentage of households in New Zealand with a computer has climbed from 10% in 1988 to a staggering 42.8% in the year 2000 (Department of Statistics, 2000). Further, a Compaq Poll conducted by the *National Business Review* in February 2000 revealed that 50% of New Zealanders over the age of eighteen now have access to the Internet. It has been observed that youth (ages 15 - 25) are less likely to engage with traditional political campaign media such as newspapers and television. It is also well known that youth, more than any other age group, are high users of the Internet (Norris, 1999). Studies by Theresa Conefrey (1993) indicate that whilst electronic media are available to everybody,

> In practice, the reality may subvert open access…because women are generally lower paid than men, economics may restrict access…Economics may be a special factor for single or uncoupled women without a university or occupational net link.

In a later study, Norris (2000) notes that "The groups who have flocked most readily to the net are the young, the most affluent, and the well educated" (p.7). To influence these important groups of voters in the 2002 general election campaign, political candidates are using this medium in greater numbers. All New Zealand political parties have websites and in the case of the National and Labour parties, about one quarter of the candidates report that they are using individual campaign web sites as well. Candidates for the dominant parties in the Mangere electorate, where there is an overwhelming proportion of voters in lower socio-economic groups, report that they will not be using the Internet as a campaigning tool because their voters simply won't have access to the technology. On the other hand, the National Party candidate for Albany, an electorate which has a large proportion of voters in the highest socio-economic category, reports that "I have experienced a dramatic increase in the numbers

of constituents using the Internet for political purposes".

Cyber-politics and democracy

Of importance in a democracy is the free flow of sufficient, accurate and unbiased information to the people whose responsibility it is to evaluate information in the process of electing their political leaders. The informants, in this case, are the media. Maharey (1996) presents two theoretical perspectives: the concept of "primary definers" and the sociology of journalism. He describes primary definers as those experts who are considered trusted authorities in the field and therefore powerful first sources of information, from which a journalist develops a story or debate. In the case of politics, politicians would be considered "primary definers". Sociology of journalism researchers suggest that while politicians "...play a crucial role in defining and shaping the news" (p.100), the relationship is symbiotic in nature and far more complex. Maharey (1996) advances that each of these perspectives has flaws in practice, which create potential for less than fair and accurate representation of information to the general public. The use of websites by candidates sidesteps the traditional role of the news media as a filter. It allows candidates to talk directly with voters. The Internet offers a new and empowering opportunity for candidates, who will have complete control of their own campaign sites and the messages contained therein. Theoretically, candidates will talk directly to the voters, and will be shielded from any threat of misrepresentation by the media.

However, Shaw (2000) suggests that rather than needing more information to make responsible decisions, people are already suffering from information overload. On this premise, the addition of campaign web sites, as a useful source of information, may turn people off rather than increase their interest in an election campaign. On the other hand, a more optimistic view is presented by Nicholson (2000). Nicholson (2000) attests that

> The Internet is introducing a fundamental shift in terms of both communications and organisation - the two major functions of any political campaign (p.80).

He continues, "The Internet offers interested voters the chance to seek out information aggressively on their own". Internet users have reported that they go on-line to learn more about a news story they have already heard through some other medium. Nicholson (2000) also suggests that the medium is advantageous for candidates as well, who can

> ...shape a message that is better tailored to their target audiences, without having to try to squeeze it into a nine second sound bite for the evening news or even a thirty second TV ad (pp.80-1).

Conclusion

The shortcomings of alternative media to provide journalistic fairness in election campaigns have been well expressed. It is as yet unknown whether the Internet will provide a fairer medium for representing election candidates' views. Yet another unknown is whether the Internet will provide a forum for a more accurate and unbiased flow of information, which Maharey (1996) laments is not always the case with traditional forms of media.

The study of cyber-politics, in the context of a general election campaign, has not previously been undertaken in the New Zealand context. Thus my thesis will make a unique contribution to the wider body of research in political communication and democratic theory.

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Women Trouble: The Framing of the New Zealand First List Controversy

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Framing theory maintains that news frames work by directing attention toward some aspects of an event or issue, and deflecting it away from others. According to Entman (1993), framing selects and makes salient some aspects of reality, thereby encouraging a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or recommendation. During the New Zealand First list controversy, which erupted part way through the 1999 General Election campaign, the "problem" was defined as one for leader Winston Peters, chiefly of his own making. The issue of sexism within political parties was not scrutinised, but was superseded by continued reference to Peters' lack of loyalty and credibility. The moral evaluation apparent in the framing of the list rankings saga was that the party leadership had failed and that the party had reverted to a personality cult, and into chaos. The lack of clarity surrounding Suzanne Bruce's status as a candidate, in the news right up until election day, added to this sense of chaos. Coverage of the New Zealand First list, in conjunction with strong anti-Peters sentiment in newspaper coverage generally, appeared to warn the public against voting for New Zealand First. None of the newspapers examined the issue in terms of what it meant for women politicians or women generally. For example, there was no analysis of what this might mean for women's voting patterns in the election nor was there any attempt to link the issue to structural barriers to women's selection as political candidates. Yet during the same election, another woman – long serving National MP Katherine O'Regan - was also relegated to an unexpectedly low list placing (Nicholl, 2000). It is significant that an event, which may have been explored in terms of the possible sexism political women face, was reversed to become a story about women creating electoral difficulties for men.

The list is announced

After the 1996 election (New Zealand's first under MMP), New Zealand First entered into an ill-fated coalition government with National. It was a turbulent introduction to MMP politics. The agreement eventually broke down in August 1998, and – to the public's dismay - several MPs defected from the Party and continued to support National. Among the small number who remained loyal to their Party and leader were one-time Cabinet minister Robyn McDonald and MP Jenny Bloxham. However, this loyalty went unrewarded when on 3 November 1999, New Zealand First announced its party list and electorate nominations for the 1999 election. Both McDonald and Bloxham had been relegated to unwinnable positions on the party list.

A late edition of *The Evening Post* was first to cover the women's relegation, in an article headlined "MPs upset at low list rank". The following morning there was a shift in emphasis, from "MPs" to "women MPs", when *The Dominion* led with a story headlined "Peters dumps his women MPs". At this stage, *The Dominion* was the only newspaper to suggest gender lay behind the dropping of Bloxham and McDonald. The other newspapers conveyed it predominantly as a personal issue, mainly between Bloxham - who attacked Peters' lack of loyalty, called him a "dickwit", and labelled the party a "boys' club" - and her party leader.

Overall, the tone of initial coverage was supportive of Bloxham and McDonald, although when Peters and Party President Doug Woolerton refused to comment on the reasons, the reporters did note earlier blemishes on the women's parliamentary records (e.g. McDonald's controversial trip to Paris, Bloxham's office postal budget used to pay her car registration). The *Otago Daily Times* reported Bloxham's belief that the reason for her

low ranking could be her challenge to the "male domination thing" in the party, where women had to wait for the call but men "pop in on each other".

Peters defends himself

In subsequent days, the fallout for New Zealand First continued with Peters forced to defend the rankings and his ability to work constructively with women. A front-page article in *The Dominion* on November 5, headlined "Peters: I have no problem with women", began

> Prime Minister Jenny Shipley has questioned the ability of Winston Peters to work with women as the fallout continues over the demotion of the two women MPs on the NZ First party list. But Mr Peters dismissed criticism from Mrs Shipley and other party leaders as "cheap political humbug."

Shipley was quoted as saying Peters should explain why he found it so difficult to recognise the ability of his women colleagues, and Clark said the women had been treated badly despite their loyalty. On page 3, *The Dominion* also published a photograph of McDonald, addressing a Youth Speak conference from behind a podium decorated with the billboard advertising the newspaper's previous edition - "Dumped because I don't have a penis".

PHOTO: *The Dominion*, 5 November 1999

Also on November 5, *The Press*, who initially downplayed the gender aspect of the MPs' low list ranking, ran a page 3 lead headlined "NZ First women 'last'". It began:

> New Zealand First's two women MPs, facing an end to their political careers after being relegated in the party list, are livid at leader Winston Peters' urging them to accept their placings. The country's two woman leaders, Helen Clark and Prime Minister Jenny Shipley, have weighed into the argument along with ACT leader Richard Prebble, saying New Zealand First is guilty of sexism.

However, the comments made by Shipley and Clark were regarded less as genuine statements about the sexism women politicians face, and more about the women leaders' unwillingness to work with Peters to form a coalition government. The *New Zealand Herald* viewed Shipley's questioning of Peters' ability to work with women as a personal issue:

> A bad-tempered slanging match over New Zealand First's party list blew up last night into a personal row between leader Winston Peters and Prime Minister, Jenny Shipley…Despite the renewed hostility between the two leaders, today's *New Zealand Herald*-DigiPoll survey shows they may have to work together. NZ First continues to hold the balance of power, with National and Labour each unable to form a government without Mr Peters' support.

On the following day, 6 November, former New Zealand First cabinet minister Deborah Morris joined the fray, speaking out about the women's "raw deal". *The Evening Post* published an editorial on the women's demotion, labeling it a public kneecapping without anaesthetic. The editorial questioned the loyalty and accountability of Peters and his party, rather than attributing the decision to sexism. Similarly, on 8 November, the *Otago Daily Times* published a column by the newspaper's political editor, entitled "Winston Peters embarks on a power trip but his credibility is in tatters". Political editor Dene Mackenzie began by asking, "Is there anyone in this country who

does not believe New Zealand First is the 'Peters Party'?"

The problem worsens

On November 12, in a front page story headlined "NZ First woman faces GST charges", the New Zealand Herald broke the news that the Party's top female candidate, Suzanne Bruce, was facing tax fraud charges. Her gender was a salient factor – mentioned in the headline and the first sentence of the story – because of the previous ructions over the dropping of Bloxham and McDonald.

Coverage over the next two days centred on Bruce's charges, and the lack of clarity surrounding her subsequent resignation (it was too late to have her name withdrawn from the ballot paper). On 13 November, *The Dominion* published a front-page lead, headlined "Women trouble: Triple strife for harassed Peters". According to political reporter Helen Bain, Peters was staring down the barrel for three reasons: a poll had put him in second place in his Tauranga seat, behind National candidate Katherine O'Regan; McDonald had said she would take legal action against the party for her low list ranking; and the highest ranked woman candidate, Suzanne Bruce, had resigned after GST charges were laid. The story was illustrated with a cropped photograph of Peters, head and shoulders photographs of McDonald, O'Regan and Bloxham, and a full-length posed photograph of Suzanne Bruce, wearing a red suit with a short skirt, and knee-length black boots. Bruce appeared in several large front-page photographs in this time period, possibly a result of the attractive appearance and striking dress sense that had apparently made such an impression on male party selectors (Vowles, 2000). In fact, content analysis data shows Bruce was the most photographed non-leader politician during the 1999 campaign. It is also noteworthy that Bruce was described as a 39-year-old grandmother who runs a dairy farm (in the *Evening Standard*), and "Xena dairy princess" (in the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Sunday Star Times*).

Women trouble

The gender dimension to the initial controversy involving Bloxham and McDonald formed a "news peg" for coverage of Suzanne Bruce. As two women had already "caused problems" for the New Zealand First leader, Bruce was portrayed as another difficult woman, confused about her status and constantly changing her mind about contesting the election.

PHOTO: *The Dominion*, 13 November 1999

Furthermore, the fact that a woman candidate was polling ahead of Peters in his Tauranga seat allowed the four women to be grouped together, with gender the common element. Other than this obvious symbolism (women causing trouble for men), there was no reason why Bruce and O'Regan's gender should be a salient factor in news coverage.

The Dominion editorial on 16 November continued its theme of Peter's women troubles. Showing a framing problem definition and moral evaluation, the editorial began,

> Winston Peters, once known as "Luigi" or "Winston Pizza", whose plausibly Italian looks and double-breasted dapperness have helped win many a female voter, is having a spot of woman trouble. And not just the one woman, either, but several. One is bitter, one is blaming, one is baffled and one is

> beating him in the polls. It could have all been so different. (p.8)

The editorial, clearly defining the problem for Peters as "women trouble", suggested the dropping of Bloxham and McDonald was the catalyst for his current problems and hence – in a moral evaluation - self deserved. The behaviours of the women were reduced to simplistic categories - bitter, blaming, baffled – which said more about their relationship to Peters than their situations *per se*. This is consistent with the framing of the issue as a problem for Peters. On the same day, the *Waikato Times* also ran an editorial about Peters and his "problem with women". This newspaper, like *The Dominion*, noted the irony in the fact that he had always won over women voters with his good looks and charm (and suggesting that women base their voting decisions on such criteria!) but now faced the prospect of women ruining his chances of being the "man most likely to call the political shots".

Conclusion

While "women trouble" was the overall problem defined by the media, a further difficulty was identified as confusion over the status of Bruce's resignation. As electoral rules said she did not have to resign, and the Party could not enforce a resignation, Bruce's mixed comments about her intentions were regarded as a problem for the democratic process. A dislike of Peters and New Zealand First (as well as small parties generally), and criticism of MMP were common themes in newspaper editorials and cartoons during the campaign (Hayward & Rudd, 2000). The two are entwined, as the negative attention paid to Peters during the election campaign reflected reservations about MMP generally. Consequently, the news media presented the Party's controversy as evidence of MMP's failings, and a political system which many hoped would advance gender equality ended up deflecting attention away from women's issues.

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Assisting Female Parliamentarians

Edited account of a speech delivered by Labour's Dianne Yates to a conference on gender sensitising Commonwealth parliaments (2001).

Women Members of Parliament have a dual responsibility in politics - to represent their electors but also to represent the specific interests of women. I believe that equality is important but when we start from an unequal economic and power base we need equity and affirmative action policies to reach that balance. Some of the ways that we can apply the principles of equity are through training and supporting women candidates and members of parliament.

General background

New Zealand's present day women in parliament have to thank nineteenth century women and the suffrage movement for gaining the vote. This was done through women's organisations including the Women's Christian Temperance Movement. The vote was achieved through women meeting together, using the print media available in those days, and presenting a massive petition to parliament with signatures collected by women travelling around the country, often on horseback.

We can also look to our education system for educating girls and boys equally, after some years of struggle. This struggle included sensitising the public to gender specific curriculum (i.e. moving away from teaching girls cooking and boys woodwork, away from gender specific reading materials, and away from gender specific stereotyping and role modeling). Much of this was done as a result of

the 1970s women's movement. The bumper stickers and slogans of the day were "women can do anything" and "women's place is in the House - of Representatives". The introduction of women's studies at universities, and political activism within, around, and independent of, political parties built the women's voices into a chorus that could not be ignored. State Sector education programmes in the 1970s insisted on gender inclusive language and this has been taken up, generally, by schools.

New Zealand's health system, social services and economic conditions have meant fewer disparities between men and women than in some other Commonwealth countries. While we have a relatively high standard of living in New Zealand there is still a pay gap between men and women's wages and this problem demands a political solution. We had pay equity legislation in 1990, which was reversed by an incoming conservative government that believed market forces would create pay parity. Ten years later, this has not happened. This and other issues, such as paid parental leave, are on the present Labour/Alliance Government's agenda.

I would also stress the roles of women in sport and outdoor activities. From our mountain climbing Prime Minister to "Xena Warrior Princess" in the movies, young New Zealand women have role models that encourage them to take part in non-traditional roles in sport and work.

The other major factor that has contributed to a greater number of women in parliament and new ways of working within parliament is the introduction of a system of proportional representation - the Mixed Member Proportional voting system. This has given us, after two elections under the new system, a mixture of constituent and list members of parliament, a greater number of women members of parliament and more members from indigenous and minority ethnic groups.

Inter-party co-operation

It cannot be assumed that because women have many things in common that we are biologically determined or that we think the same. Women are as partisan as men but there are issues when, matriarchy, like the old patriarchy, bonds together. The old girls' network kicks into motion around issues where there are common interests. An example of this in New Zealand was the co-operation we achieved in recent years between women of all parties over superannuation. There was a national referendum on the matter and women from all parties worked together in parliament, and in public, to discredit the proposal - and won.

We also have an unwritten agreement in New Zealand that when we have delegations to international conferences, that there is a male/female balance and that Maori members be included wherever possible.

While proportional representation has resulted in more women in parliament, we also have more parties. With more parties a trend seems to be developing - a contradiction - that means women are becoming more entrenched within their parties, and the discipline imposed by those parties is becoming manifest in less cross-party cooperation by women.

Working at an interparty level is not easy and there are always tensions and a degree of mistrust. Not all issues that could be perceived as women's issues achieve the degree of unanimity that the superannuation referendum did. There are current debates about the guardianship of children, family law, and relationship property which have polarised the women who hold extreme views. There is still a middle and workable ground among most parties. There are widening gaps on what were once agreed social platforms on policy for women and children. Women may often agree in principle on issues, such as laws on sex, alcohol and gambling. Men regard these as conscience issues requiring individual votes rather than party issues. Votes in parliament on sex, alcohol and gambling legislation are usually taken as individual conscience votes and party whips are not exercised - women members generally do not agree with this and believe that their male colleagues should be called to account within their parties on these matters.

Coalition governments, such as ours, require greater party management, greater liaison between parties and groups within parties. Consultation, negotiation and compromise are more common in the corridors of power than in the debating chamber. There are arguments still raging in New Zealand about the merits and demerits of the new system. A Select

Committee of Enquiry on proportional representation has attracted more submissions in favour of retention of the new system than rejection, however.

The Minister of Women's Affairs calls a joint meeting of all women members of parliament of all parties at least once each parliamentary session. These meetings may take the form of briefings on up-coming legislation and/or inquiries involving Ministry staff or discussions about procedural internal matters. The emphasis has been on policy rather than on mutual personal support - the latter being regarded as an intra-party matter. One very good meeting was held when representatives of major women's organisations were also invited. This provided network opportunities and a basis for focusing on commonalities.

Intra-party co-operation

The political or parliamentary wing of the New Zealand Labour Party works in close conjunction with general party officials, staff and members. Nowhere is this truer than in the relationship between the Parliamentary Labour Women's Caucus and the Women's Council of the party. The Labour Party has a paid Women's Co-ordinator who attends women's caucus meetings and liaises with the Party's Women's Council. All women members of parliament are invited and expected to take part in the Women's Council meetings and do so when their schedules permit.

The Labour Women's Caucus, that is, all Labour women members of parliament including Cabinet Ministers, meets weekly when parliament is sitting and discusses legislation currently before the House and monitors those bills which have a particular impact on women - such as family law, property law, violence, crime, laws on prostitution, abortion, environmental issues, human rights issues etc. This Caucus Committee discusses both policy content and strategy around the introduction and progress of bills, as well as public consultation and media treatment of issues. The women's caucus, when appropriate, speaks as one voice when reporting back to the main party caucus. In this way the intra-party mechanism both protects and advocates the views of women within the party and acts as a support base for the individual women members who present their collective views. Support can come overtly through backup speeches or in simple ways such as sitting beside a colleague when she is speaking in the debating chamber of parliament.

There is still a good deal to be done to achieve political, economic and social equality in New Zealand. I have described the pay gap. Despite having excellent role models of women in top jobs, women throughout the country as a whole, particularly indigenous women, do not hold 50% of the top jobs. We have only 30% women parliamentarians (5 Maori, 1 Polynesian and 1 Chinese). We need at least another 20% to achieve equality. Women still do the greatest percentage of household chores in our society, and in a recent poll at least 50% of New Zealanders felt that women were still discriminated against. Given that women are around 50% of the population that is not surprising! Women in parliament are making deliberate attempts to be on committees that will not typecast them into "women's" or health and social service roles. It is more difficult for women to get a hearing on economic and commerce matters. The adage that "a woman has to be twice as good to go half as far", still holds true - which is why our leading women are so very, very good and such wonderful mentors and role models.

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Interesting Websites

Korean Institute for Women and Politics:
http://www.kiwp.or.kr/eng/main/

Centre for American Women and Politics:
http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance:
http://www.int-idea.se/gender/index.htm

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