

Harper misses his chance to woo women [CA]^[1]

Author: Bagnall, Janet

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EXCERPTS

Prime Minister Stephen Harper either missed or doesn't believe a recent Canadian study that showed that if as many women had supported the Conservatives in the 2006 election as men, his party might have scraped together enough seats for a majority. Instead, the Conservative party ended up forming a minority government with the smallest share of seats in Canadian history.

Since he did nothing in his cabinet shuffle Tuesday to correct the impression that women are, in his view, trustworthy for only soft, i.e., traditionally female, portfolios such as culture, we can conclude that he apparently thinks he can win a majority without them.

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A gender gap has hobbled the Conservatives - and their precursors the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance - off and on for nearly a decade. In the 2006 election, according to a study by five Canadian academics, there was a six-point gender gap on the right, with men more favourable to the Conservatives than women, and a five-point gap on the left, with women more likely than men to support the NDP. As small as these variances might appear, they had the effect of blocking a Conservatives majority.

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In their study, *Gender and Vote Choice in the 2006 Canadian Election*, the five researchers examined factors that are often used to explain away gender gaps on the basis of age or financial status. But instead of confirming the stereotype of older, wealthier, more conservative women, researchers found that older women were more likely to vote Liberal than Conservative and women who held mortgages were significantly more likely to vote NDP. Having children didn't affect either men's or women's voting patterns.

Researchers found only one social characteristic of any real significance: Protestant fundamentalism. For both men and women, the probability of voting Conservative was 25 points higher for Protestant fundamentalists. The effect of this tendency, interestingly, was to mitigate the gender gap. Without it, the gap would have been even wider.

The gender gap is not, in reality, a function of social characteristics. It is values driven. The Conservatives' political agenda of free enterprise, close ties with the United States and conservative policies on social issues appeals to men more than women. To attract women, the Conservative Party would have to make significant policy changes, the research suggested. For instance, researchers found that almost two-thirds of women wanted a publicly funded daycare system, with only 30 per cent preferring direct cash subsidies to parents. The Conservatives chose to hand out a taxable allowance of \$1,200 a year to parents of children under age 6.

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U.S. research shows that educated people are far more likely to vote than those with less formal schooling. And we all know that women are quickly becoming much more educated than men. Worse yet for the Conservatives is a small but interesting trend reported in a 2005 U.S. study. Research found that female Democratic candidates who faced Republican men strongly benefited from female Republican voters' crossover support.

So all the Liberals and the NDP have to do is field more women ...

- reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Related link: RELATED STUDY: Gender and vote choice in the 2006 Canadian election^[2]

Region: Canada^[3]

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