



Australians' views on gender equity and the political parties

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The survey data is available for download through the Australian Data Archive (doi:10.26193/AXQPSE).

Abstract

There has been a vigorous public debate in Australia about issues related to gender including the unacceptably high rates of violence and sexual harassment experienced by women, under-representation of women in senior positions, and continuing economic disparities. These issues have been a focus of the election campaign leading up the Federal Election to be held on the 21st May 2022. This paper focuses on the views of Australians about gender equality, on Australians' attitudes to gender issues, confidence in the different parties on issues related to gender equity and how this relates to voting intentions. It is based on data from the April 2022 ANUpoll which collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over. The data collection occurred between the 11th and 26th of April 2022.

We find that there are differences in voting intentions by gender, with men particularly likely to vote for the Coalition and women more likely to vote for the Greens, as well as be unsure as to who they would vote for. Potentially influencing this decision, there is less confidence in the two Coalition parties (Liberals and Nationals) on issues related to gender equality than in Labor and the Greens. In general, Australians think that men have it easier in Australia than women, though there are also a sizable number of both men and women who think there is no difference. The vast majority of Australians see equality between men and women as being important, with the majority of Australians thinking that equal rights for women have not gone far enough.

1 Introduction

There has been a vigorous public debate in Australia about issues related to gender including the unacceptably high rates of violence and sexual harassment experienced by women, under-representation of women in senior positions, and continuing economic disparities. Economic disparities include the gender wage gap, continuing lower hours of paid employment of women compared to men, and the very high rates of financial hardship experienced by some groups of women including single mothers and divorced or separated older women.

There has also been a focus on politics with Australia having a relatively low proportion of women in the Federal parliament compared to many other countries (57th in the world in terms of women in parliament on 1 January 2022).¹ A number of cases of sexual harassment and sexual assault in parliamentary workplaces have been reported and on the 8th February 2022 a joint Statement of Acknowledgment was delivered in the Australian Parliament. This statement, delivered by Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Andrew Wallace and the President of the Senate, Senator the Hon Slade Brockman, acknowledged “the unacceptable history of workplace bullying, sexual harassment and sexual assault in Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces.”²

On the 10th of April 2022, the Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison set the date of the next Federal Election to be the 21st of May 2022. Issues of gender equality have been very prominent in the election campaign with the political parties having a range of policies designed to address gender issues.

Labor policies include funding homes for older women and women escaping family violence, additional funding for crisis accommodation for women, and passing laws that would require employers to take reasonable steps to eliminate sex discrimination, sexual harassment and victimisation. Examples of other Labor policies on gender equity include making gender pay equity a duty on employers under the Fair Work Act and measures to reduce the costs of child care. The Liberal party election plan statement on women is focused on paid employment and the 2022-23 Commonwealth Budget including funding for a range of measures designed to improve women’s safety, increase work force participation and improve health concerns.

The day after the election was called, the Social Research Centre on behalf of the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods began collection of the 50th ANUpoll³, a long running survey dating back to 2008. The April 2022 survey collected data from 3,587 Australians aged 18 years and over. Data collection occurred between the 11th and 26th of April 2022, with 56.7 per cent of the eventual sample completing the survey between the 12th and 14th of April. The survey data is available for download through the Australian Data Archive.⁴ Details on the survey are available in Appendix 1. Surveys have also been conducted with the same group of respondents since January 2020, just before the COVID-19 pandemic started in Australia. This allows us to track the same group of individuals over time.

The April 2022 ANUpoll, in addition to collecting information on a range of health, wellbeing, and economic measures, included questions about on views about a range of issues related to gender equity including confidence in the various political parties on gender equality and voting intentions.

In this paper we focus on Australians’ attitudes to gender issues, confidence in the different parties on issues related to gender equity and how this relates to voting intentions in April

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2022. The paper also uses the data from ANUpolls conducted between January 2020 to April 2022 to look at how gender patterns in voting intentions have changed over time.

In the next section we look at the extent to which voting intentions differ between men and women. The third section reports data on confidence in the different political parties on issues related to gender and how this relates to voting intentions. In the fourth section, the views of Australian men on a broader set of questions about gender equity in Australia is considered. Section 5 concludes.

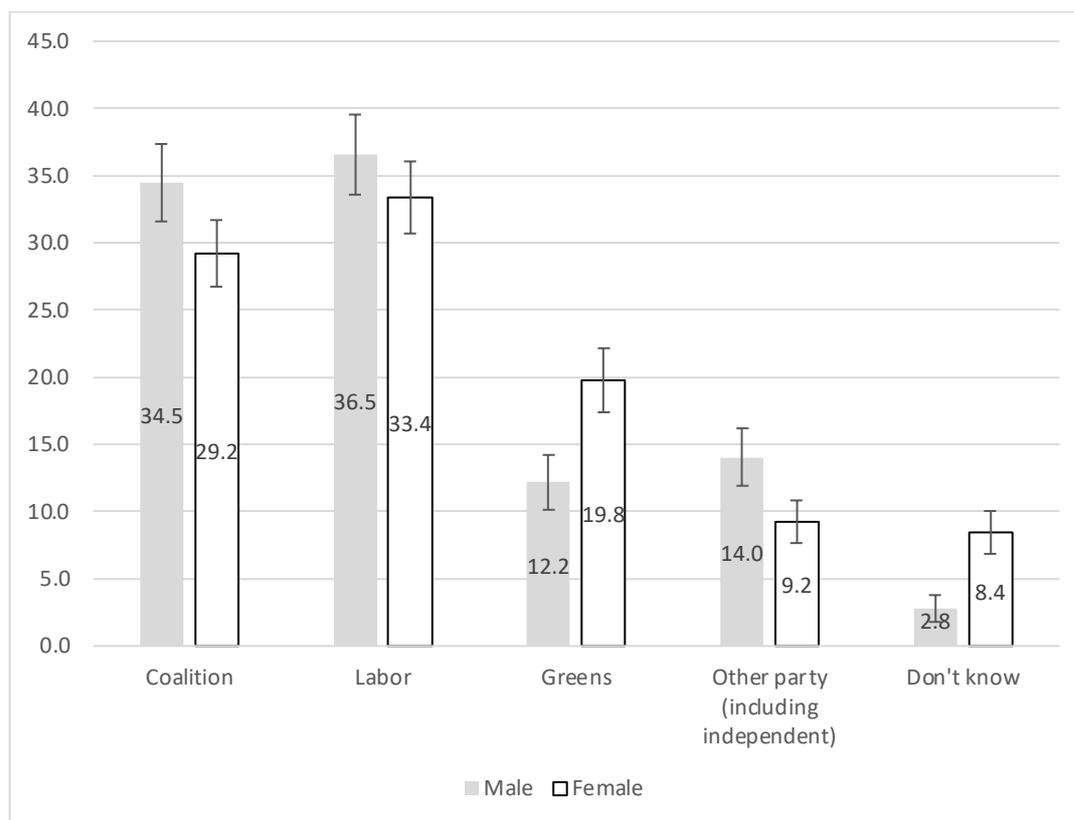
2 Voting intentions of men and women

In the April 2022 ANUpoll after answering a question about satisfaction with direction of the country, respondents were asked 'If a federal election for the House of Representatives was held today, which one of the following parties would you vote for?' As reported in Biddle and Gray (2022), the results from the April 2022 ANUpoll is that 31.2 per cent of Australians say they would vote for the Coalition, 34.3 per cent for Labor, 16.2 per cent for the Greens, 11.4 per cent for another party (including an independent) and 5.6 per cent were undecided.

Figure 1 shows voting intentions of men and women⁵ in April 2022, as well as the per cent of Australians who said they would have voted for another party (which includes an independent candidate) and the per cent who didn't know who they would vote for. There are substantial differences between men and women in voting intentions. Men were more likely to say they would vote for the Coalition (34.5 per cent) than women (29.2 per cent) and men were also more likely to say they would vote for Labor (36.5 per cent) than were women (33.4 per cent). Women were much more likely to say that they would vote for Greens (19.8 per cent) than men were (12.2 per cent), whereas men were more likely to say they would vote for another party (which includes independents) (14.0 per cent) compared to women (9.2 per cent).

Women were more than three times as likely to say that they did not know who they would vote for – 8.4 per cent compared to 2.8 per cent for men. This suggests that how these undecided female voters end up voting may have a major impact on the 2022 Federal election result.

Figure 1 Voting intentions in April 2022 if an election were held that day



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate. Those who did not state their voting intention were excluded from the analysis

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

Figure 2 shows voting intention with regards the major two parties for men and women over the period January 2020 to April 2022. The top panel (Figure 2a) shows the proportion of men and women who said they would have voted for the Coalition if an election had been held at the time of the survey. The bottom panel (Figure 2) shows the proportion of men and women who said they would have voted for Labor.

For all six survey waves included in Figure 2, men were more likely to say they would have voted for the Coalition and they have moved together so when support for the Coalition increased it increased for both men and women and when it decreased it fell amongst both women and men. The differences in the per cent of men and women who said they would have voted for Labor had an election been held at the time of the survey is smaller than for the Coalition and generally a higher proportion of men said they would have voted for Labor than the proportion of women. The only exception to this is in January 2022 when there was a spike in the vote for Labor amongst women.

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Figure 2 Voting intentions if an election were held that day by gender – January 2020 to April 2022

Figure 2a Coalition

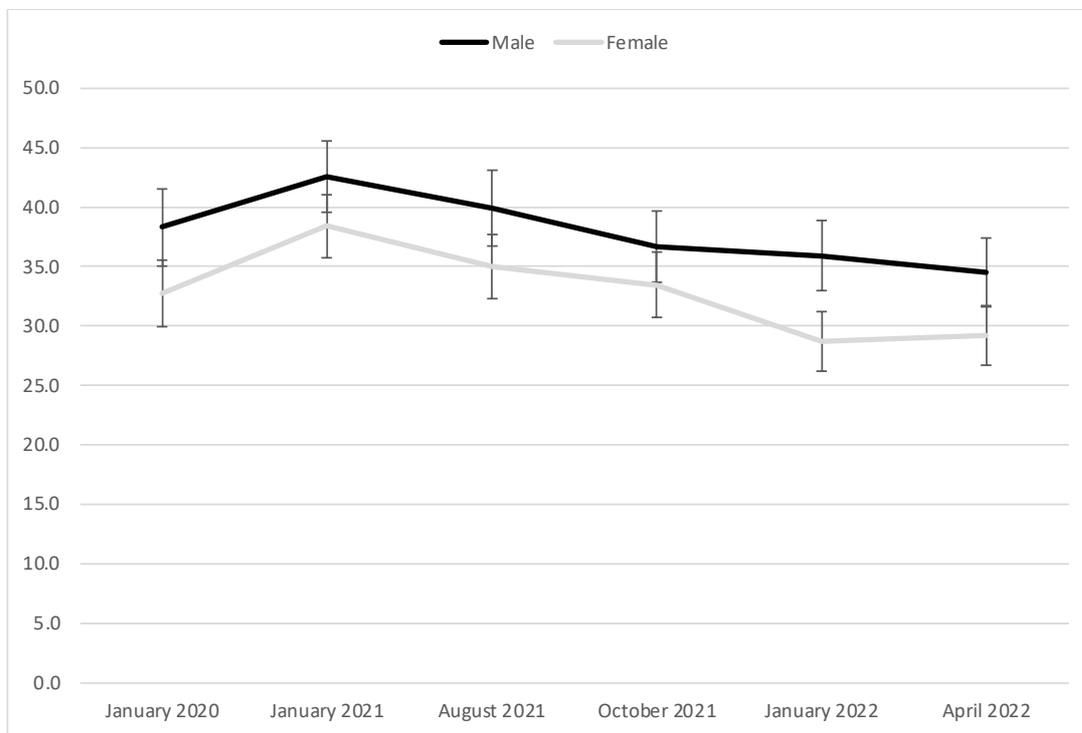
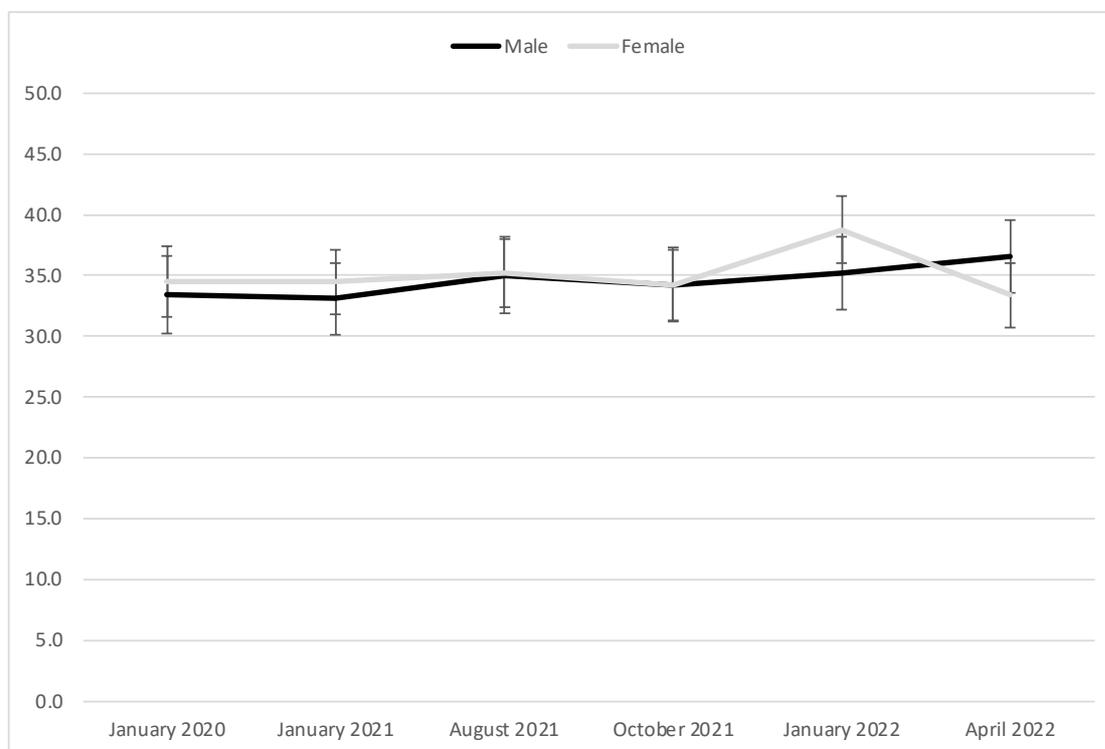


Figure 2b Labor



Note: The “whiskers” on the lines indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate. Those who did not state their voting intention were excluded from the analysis

Source: ANUpoll: January 2020; January, August and October 2021; January and April 2022

3 Confidence in the Australian political parties on issues related to gender equality

The April 2022 ANUpoll asked respondents 'How much confidence do you have in the following political parties on issues related to gender equality?' The parties asked about were: Liberal; National; Labor; Greens; One Nation; and United Australia Party.

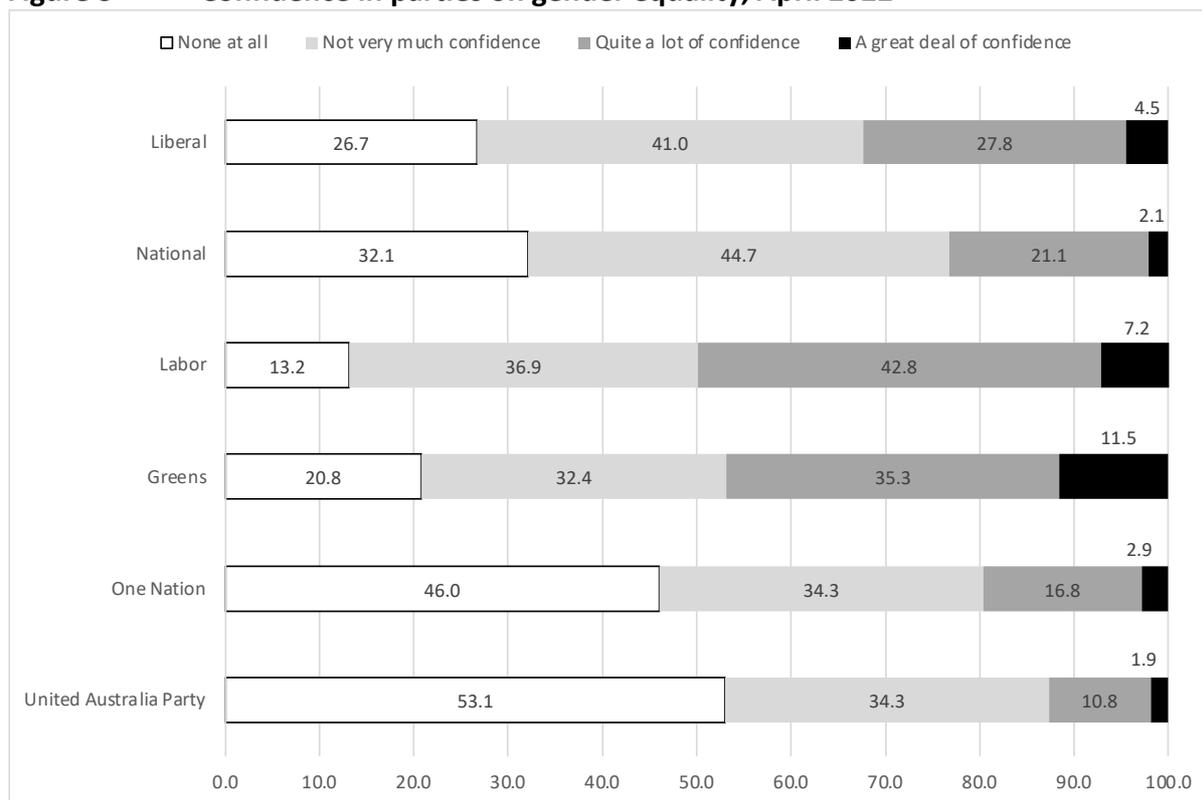
There are substantial differences in the level of confidence in the different parties on issues related to gender equality (Figure 3). For none of the political parties asked about do more than half of the Australian population have quite a lot of confidence or a great deal of confidence and the proportion with a great deal of confidence is low.

The two parties in which the Australian population has the greatest level of confidence with regards to gender equality are the Greens and Labor parties. Just over one-in-ten (11.5 per cent) of Australians have a great deal of confidence in the greens on gender equality and 35.3 per cent having quite a lot of confidence. While there is a smaller per cent of Australians who have a great deal of confidence in the Labor party regarding gender equality (7.2 per cent), there is a much greater per cent of Australians who have quite a lot of confidence (42.8 per cent) which combined means that exactly half of Australians have some level of confidence in the Labor party.

There is less confidence in the two Coalition parties with regards to gender equality. Almost two-thirds of Australians have little confidence in the Liberal party (26.7 per cent with no confidence at all and 41.0 per cent with not very much confidence), rising to more than three-quarters of Australians having little confidence in the National party (32.1 per cent with no confidence at all and 44.7 per cent with not very much confidence).

The lowest level of confidence in relation to gender equality is for the United Australia Party and to a lesser extent, One Nation. Less than one-in-five Australians have confidence in One Nation (2.9 per cent have a great deal of confidence and 16.8 per cent have quite a lot of confidence) with only slightly over one-in-ten Australians having confidence in the United Australia Party (1.9 per cent have a great deal of confidence and 10.8 per cent have quite a lot of confidence)

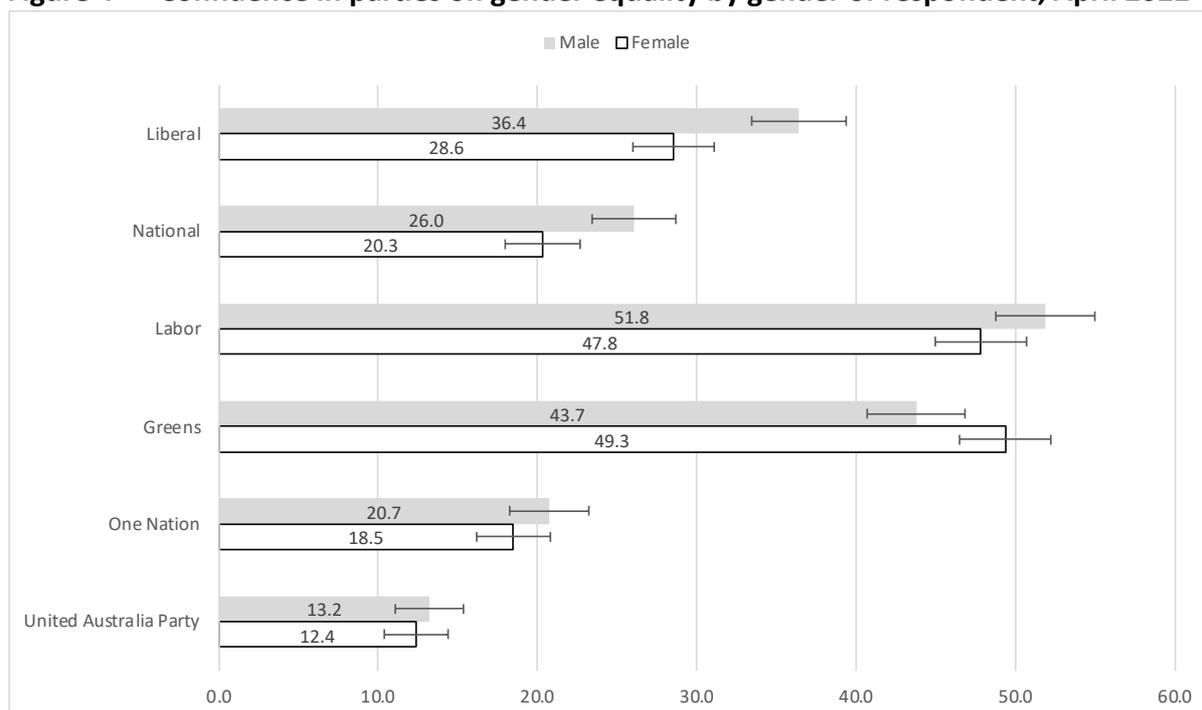
Figure 3 Confidence in parties on gender equality, April 2022



Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

A higher proportion of men have confidence (quite a lot or a great deal of confidence) in the Liberal, National and Labor parties on gender equality than do women (Figure 4). The only party for which women have a greater level of confidence is the Greens party, with 49.3 per cent of women having a great deal or quite a lot of confidence compared to 43.7 per cent for men. A very low proportion of both men and women have confidence in One Nation (about one-in-five) or the United Australia Party (about one-in-eight) and while men have a slightly higher (but not statistically significantly different) level of confidence in these two parties the level of confidence is very low for both genders.

Figure 4 Confidence in parties on gender equality by gender of respondent, April 2022



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

The higher level of confidence in the Greens and Labour on gender equality than on the other parties is consistent with women being much more likely to say they intend to vote for the Greens than men and the substantially higher proportion of women intending to vote for Labor (33.4 per cent) than who intended to vote for the Coalition parties (29.2 per cent).

Focusing on the two largest parties, Liberal and Labor, two-thirds (66.7 per cent) of those who have confidence in the Liberal party with regards to gender equality said that they would vote for the Coalition if an election was held on the day of interview compared to 15.1 per cent of those who did not have confidence. Just over half (53.8 per cent) of those who have confidence in the Labor party with regards to gender equality said that they would vote for the Labor party if an election was held on the day of interview compared to 16.7 per cent of those who did not have confidence.⁶

While this data does not establish a causal relationship, there is a strong correlation between confidence in the political parties with regards to gender equality and voting intentions. This may be due to confidence in the parties impacting on a person’s voting choice, or a person’s voting choice (based on other reasons) influencing their confidence (also known as motivated reasoning).

4 Australian’s view on gender equity

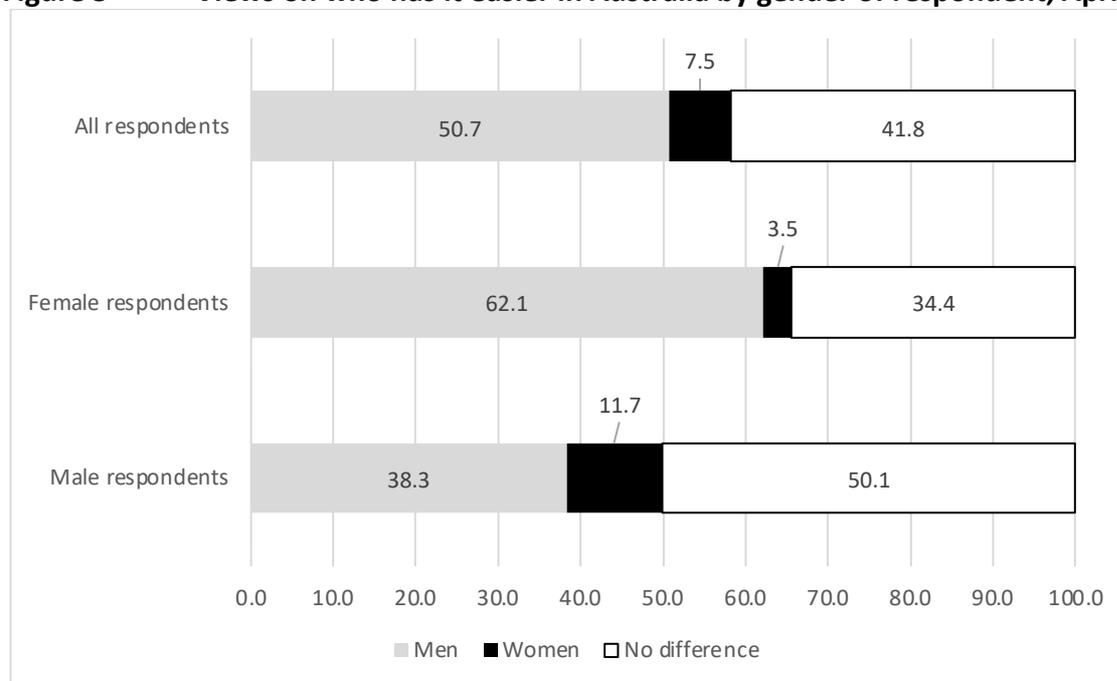
The April 2022 ANUpoll included a set of questions on views about gender equity in Australia (in addition to the question on confidence in the various political parties on gender equity). A number of these questions come from a 2017 Pew Research survey of the American population.⁷ Although the timing of the survey was different, along with sample recruitment, it is still instructive to look at comparisons across the two countries.

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The first question asked in this module was 'All things considered, who do you think has it easier in our country these days?' with possible response options of men, women, or no difference. More Australians thought that men had it easier than women, but responses were quite different depending on the gender of the respondent (Figure 5). More than three-in-five Australian women (62.1 per cent) think that men have it easier, with only 3.5 per cent thinking that women have it easier. A little over a third of women (34.4 per cent) think that there is no difference. Half of Australian men (50.1 per cent) think that there is no difference between men and women, with only 11.7 per cent thinking that women have it easier. This leaves 38.3 per cent of men who think that men have it easier than women.

Comparing to data from the US, fewer Americans in 2017 thought that men had it easier (35 per cent) compared to Australians in 2022 (50.7 per cent). Roughly the same proportions across the two countries thought that men had it easier (9 per cent in America compared to 7.5 per cent in Australia). More Americans thought that there was no difference (56 per cent) than Australians (41.8 per cent).

Figure 5 Views on who has it easier in Australia by gender of respondent, April 2022



Source: ANUpoll: April 2022

Despite gender differences in views on whether women or men have it easier, the vast majority of Australians think that equal rights for women is important. When asked 'How important, if at all, is it for women to have equal rights with men in Australia?', 84.9 per cent of Australians said that it was very important, with a further 11.9 per cent saying that it was somewhat important. Australian women are slightly more likely to think that equal rights are very important (87.8 per cent) compared to men (81.7 per cent).

In the final question in the module, respondents were asked 'When it comes to giving women equal rights with men, do you think Australia has gone too far, has not gone far enough or has been about right?'.⁸ The most common response given by Australians is that equal rights have not gone far enough, a view estimated to be held by 56.4 per cent of Australians. Only 9.8 per cent of Australians think that equal rights have gone too far, with 33.8 per cent thinking that it has been about right.

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Seven-in-ten (70.0 percent) women think equal rights have not gone far enough which is much higher than the four-in-ten (41.8 per cent) men who think this. Conversely, women are less likely than men to think that equal rights have gone too far (6.0 per cent compared to 13.9 per cent) and less likely to think that they have been about right (24.1 per cent compared to 44.4 per cent).

5 Concluding comments

Issues related to gender in Australia have been a key focal point of the 46th Australian Parliament, which concluded on the 11th of April, 2022. It has also been a focus of the election campaign that followed, with Australians of both genders likely to take into account, at least in part, the policy positions of the major and minor parties when making their voting decisions.

The aim of this paper has been to summarise findings from the April 2022 ANUpoll, which took place in the first two weeks of the election campaign, on issues related to gender in Australia. We find that there are differences in voting intentions by gender, with men particularly likely to vote for the Coalition and women more likely to vote for the Greens, as well as be unsure as to who they would vote for.

Potentially influencing this decision, Australians have less confidence in the two Coalition parties (Liberals and Nationals) on issues related to gender equality than they do for Labor and the Greens, with the lowest level of confidence for One Nation and the United Australia Party.

In general, Australians think that men have it easier in Australia than women, though there are also a sizable number of both men and women who think there is no difference. The vast majority of Australians see equality between men and women as being important, with the majority of Australians thinking that equal rights for women have not gone far enough.

It will not be known till after the election whether issues related to gender in Australia played a part in people's voting patterns, or the eventual results. However, it is clear from data collected just prior to the election that voter gender matters and that the records and policy priorities of the different parties are viewed quite differently on this dimension. It is definitely an aspect of life in Australia that needs to be monitored as Australians head to the polls on the 21st May.

References

Biddle, N. and M. Gray (2022). 'Views on policy and politics on the eve of the 2022 Federal Election', ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, Australian National University, Canberra.

Appendix 1 About the survey

Data collection for the April 2022 ANUpoll commenced on the 11th of April 2022 with a pilot test of telephone respondents. The main data collection commenced on the 12th of April and concluded on the 26th of April. The final sample size for the survey is 3,587 respondents. 57.1 per cent of the sample had completed the survey by the 14th of April and the average interview duration was 20.3 minutes.

The Social Research Centre collected data online and through Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) in order to ensure representation from the offline Australian population. Around 3.4 per cent of interviews were collected via CATI. The contact methodology adopted for the online Life in Australia™ members is an initial survey invitation via email and SMS (where available), followed by multiple email reminders and a reminder SMS. Telephone follow up of panel members who have not yet completed the survey commenced in the second week of fieldwork and consisted of reminder calls encouraging completion of the online survey. The contact methodology for offline Life in Australia™ members was an initial SMS (where available), followed by an extended call-cycle over a two-week period. A reminder SMS was also sent in the second week of fieldwork.

A total of 4,364 respondents were invited to take part in the survey, leading to a wave-specific completion rate of 82.1 per cent. Taking into account recruitment to the panel, the cumulative response rate for this survey is around 6.8 per cent. Of those who had completed the April 2022 survey, 2,424 respondents (67.6 per cent) had completed the January 2022 survey

Unless otherwise stated, data in the paper is weighted to population benchmarks. For Life in Australia™, the approach for deriving weights generally consists of the following steps:

1. Compute a base weight for each respondent as the product of two weights:
 - a. Their enrolment weight, accounting for the initial chances of selection and subsequent post-stratification to key demographic benchmarks
 - b. Their response propensity weight, estimated from enrolment information available for both respondents and non-respondents to the present wave.
2. Adjust the base weights so that they satisfy the latest population benchmarks for several demographic characteristics.

The ethical aspects of this research have been approved by the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee (2021/430).

Appendix 2 Regression Tables

Endnotes

1

https://www.apf.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2022/April/Trends-gender-parliament

² https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/parliament_statement_of_acknowledgement_2022_0.pdf

³ The ANUpoll series of surveys is collected on a probability-based, longitudinal panel (Life in Australia™). By using probability-based recruiting (predominantly telephone-based) the unknown and unquantifiable biases inherent in opt-in (non-probability) panels are minimised and it is also possible to quantify the uncertainty around the estimates due to sampling error using standard statistical techniques. This is not possible with non-probability surveys.

⁵ Gender is based on response to the question “What is your gender?” with the response options: man or male; women or female; non-binary; I use a different term; or refused/did not answer. In the April 2022 survey 17 respondents (or 0.47 per cent) selected non-binary, 2 respondents selected “I use a different term” and 2 respondents refused or did not answer the question. These are too small a number of respondents to allow statistically reliable estimates. Therefore, when reporting results separately for men and women we excluded those who do not select “man or male” or “woman or female”.

⁶ A regression model which estimates the factors associated with voting intentions and which includes confidence on gender equality in the different parties as explanatory variables produces results that are consistent with this data and suggests a similar magnitude men and women.

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2017/10/18/in-their-own-words-why-do-americans-say-men-or-women-have-it-easier-in-the-u-s/>

⁸ The order of gone too far/has not gone far enough in the statement was randomised.