

Women in power: it's getting a little easier



The new British Prime Minister Theresa May. PHOTO Andrew Parsons/AFP

The United Kingdom has a new prime minister and it's a woman. Her name is Theresa May and she will be the second female prime minister in the UK's history. To find out if this is a big deal, we sent Crinkling News reporter Dhana Quinn to chat to Dr Lauren Rosewarne, who is a senior lecturer in political science at the University of Melbourne.

Q. Is it significant that a woman has become the new prime minister of the United Kingdom?

Dr Rosewarne: It's always significant when women reach positions of power. In a world where women still earn less money than men, and where all kinds of horrible things happen to women much more often than they do to men, putting women in positions where they can have influence is always important.

Q. In America, Hillary Clinton might become the first female president. Is it getting easier for women to hold positions of power?

Dr Rosewarne: I think we're at a time in history where women are having an easier job campaigning for seats of power than they ever have before. That's not because the world doesn't still associate leadership with men - it still does - but we're in a world that has gotten used to seeing women in leadership positions (not just in politics)

so the idea no longer seems so strange.

Q. How many women are running countries in the world today?

Dr Rosewarne: There are ... 24 female presidents, prime ministers, and other heads of state around the world. This list includes the Queen of England, the Queen of Denmark, Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany and Prime Minister Erna Solberg from Norway.

Q. Why is it important to have women leaders?

Dr Rosewarne: Women need to be equally represented in all sectors of life. Politics is important because it is a job in the public eye and it is one that involves making important decisions. Having female leaders also serves an important role in letting the next generation know that women can - and do - do anything. It also makes the idea of seeing a woman in a position of power seem normal.



Q. How is Australia doing with equal representation of women in politics?

Dr Rosewarne: ... In the last parliament there were 32 women senators out of 76 Senate seats, and there were 40 women in the House of Representatives out of 150 representatives (data all obtained from aph.gov.au). The reality is that we can do a lot better than we are. A government that truly reflects the population would have slightly over 50% of its politicians as women.

Q. There have been some remarkable women leaders in history. Can you tell us about a few?

Dr Rosewarne: As you've said, Theresa May is the second female prime minister of the UK.

Margaret Thatcher was its first. Mrs Thatcher was a conservative leader who served three terms, resigning in 1991 after being in power since 1979. She had the nickname "Iron Lady". She was thought of as very tough.



PHOTO Daniel Janin/AFP



PHOTO Saeed Khan/AFP

Australia has had its own female prime minister, Julia Gillard. Ms Gillard served from 2010 to 2013 and turned the spotlight on sexism in Australia. [She] taught us all the meaning of misogyny in her famous speech. Misogyny means to hate women.



Benazir Bhutto was the first female prime minister of Pakistan and will be remembered as the first elected female leader of a Muslim country. She served two separate terms and was killed by a suicide bomber in 2007.



On top of the world

Each week Crinkling News brings you a little piece of Europe by featuring photographs from Australian photojournalist Dallas Kilponen as he travels around the continent. This week, Dallas is in Chamonix, a resort area where France, Switzerland and Italy meet.

I caught the first cable car up the mountain at 6.30am with all the mountaineers who were heading to the Mont Blanc area on an absolutely perfect day.

I took the Aiguille du Midi cable car (about a 20-minute ride) to the top station at 3482 metres. Then I followed the climbers out through this ice cave that was their entry point to the Alps.

It was just incredible. Each group would spend a good 20 or 30 minutes preparing their crampons - special spiked boots for climbing - and climbing gear. Then they head through a small gate on to a narrow arête, or ridge, to descend carefully about 200m to the glacier that opened up the entire mountain range. It was just so awesome to stand with them all as they prepared and then set out in single-file roped together.