

Issue Brief: Women/Gender Issues and Party Affiliation

Key Words:

Gender, sex, gender gap, party affiliation, suffrage, equal rights

Description:

This issue brief delves the party affiliation tendencies of certain groups of women and the roles of women within their respective parties. It will also discuss the influence of the “gender gap” on political affiliation.

Key Points:

- Actions taken by women during the women’s suffrage movement foreshadow the future impact of the political affiliation of women
- The United States is a two party system without a major third party catering specifically to women
- Parties actively pursue the female vote
- A gender gap exists
 - Shows that women tend to affiliate with the Democratic party

Issue Brief:

The United States is approximately 50.7% female, and females maintain a 116,525,000 million to males’ 108,974,000 million advantage in voting age population. This indicates that women are a huge block, vital to the election of any candidate. Political parties pander to women in order to capture their vote because women have the potential to influence elections and change the course of government. For this reason, it is vital to understand the relationship women have to political parties.

Women could not vote until 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment. Prior to the amendment’s passage, women exerted political force with the help of their party affiliation. The National Woman’s Party (NWP), though not a major party, exerted copious amounts of pressure on President Woodrow Wilson to ensure that they would be afforded their right to vote sooner rather than later. The NWP used “a revolutionary strategy of sustained dramatic, nonviolent protest,”¹ including daily pickets and arrests at the White House, national speaking tours, and hunger strikes. Although it took some time for women to actually make it to the polls since many women, at that time, believed it “socially inappropriate” for them to vote², when the women finally went to the polls, their impact was felt.

¹ http://sewallbelmont.org/mainpages/aboutus_nwp-history.html

² http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/upfront/features/index.asp?article=f090610_19amend



Photograph 1: National Woman's Party protesting for the right to vote in 1917

Presently, there is no major party within the United States' two-party system that caters specifically to the needs of women, but the two major parties (Democrats and Republicans) and the three major third parties (Green, Constitution, and Libertarian) actively vie for the blessing of the female vote. When Walter Mondale selected Geraldine Ferraro to be his running mate in the Presidential elections of 1984, he attempted to bolster his own popularity and stave off a popular incumbent, Ronald Reagan, by using Ferraro's gender to "galvanize women who [had] drifted away from the Democratic party."⁴ Of course, this could not offset Reagan's almost guaranteed reelection, but it should be noted that, despite the fact that Reagan won seven more percentage points from women in 1984 versus 1980, Reagan won 8.1 percentage points more throughout the entire country – an indication that Ferraro may have had an, albeit small, effect.

The 2008 Presidential election also displays the effect of women on a major party ticket. Hillary Clinton won more primaries during her 2008 campaign for the Democratic Party nomination than any other woman in history; her campaign is frequently cited as the closest a woman has ever been to breaking the highest glass ceiling – the presidency. During her campaign, there were "double-digit gender advantages" in voter turnout, meaning that the female base was mobilized.⁵ After Clinton failed to win her party's nomination, the Republicans attempted to capture her former voters with the nomination of Sarah Palin as the Vice Presidential candidate during the 2008 election. Like Ferraro, her gender and popularity among female voters could not offset her party's unpopularity. Still, Palin is highly influential within her party and could be considered the most visible female Republican.

³http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3f/National_Women%27s_Patry_picketing_the_White_House.jpg

⁴ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/27550213.pdf?acceptTC=true>

⁵ <http://www.womensenews.org/story/campaign-trail/080207/female-democrats-dominate-primary-voting>

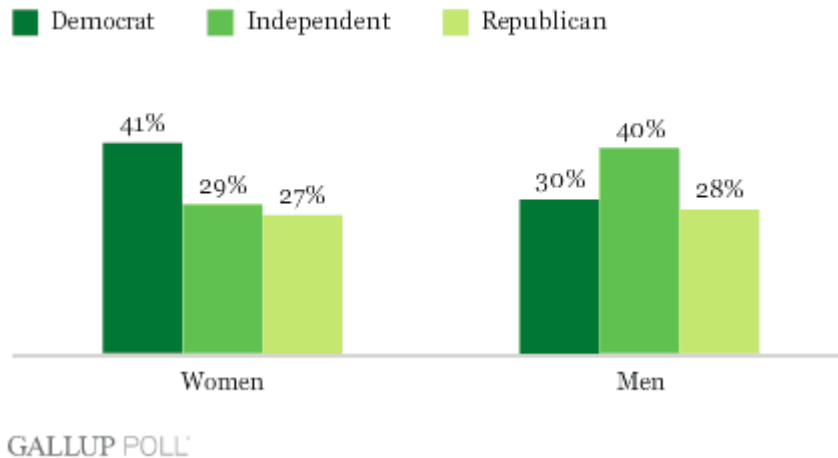
Photograph 2: Women with a negative opinion of Sarah Palin
 Photograph 3: Women with a positive opinion of Sarah Palin



Political parties typically use advertisements on television, radio, and print media to cater to women. In Michigan, pro-choice ads were selected to run in order to bolster female support for gubernatorial candidate Virg Bernero, appealing to younger and unmarried women⁸. Meanwhile, Republicans in California appealed to the compassionate side of the female electorate by running ads featuring U.S. Senate candidate Carly Fiorina speaking about her struggle with breast cancer.⁹

The gender gap is a concept that refers to the analysis of male-female discrepancies in their respective party affiliation. 1964 is indicated as the year that the gender gap became salient with the election of Lyndon B. Johnson.¹⁰ From 1950 to present, the United States has been shifting ideologically to the right; the gender gap derives from the fact that women have moved to the right in far fewer numbers than have men.

Party Identification by Gender, Gallup Polls, First Quarter 2009



⁶ http://www.rumproast.com/images/uploads/alaska_palin_protest_1.jpg

⁷ <http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2008/09/04/re1.jpg>

⁸ <http://www.lansingstatejournal.com/article/20100927/ELECTIONS03/9270330/Michigan-Democrats-woo-female-voters-with-pro-choice-ads>

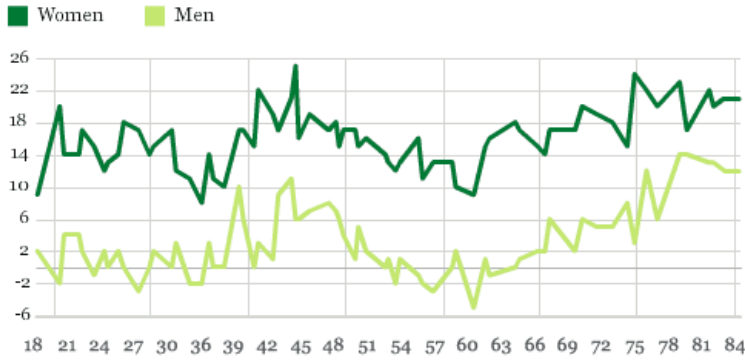
⁹ http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_16379732?nclick_check=1

¹⁰ <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/PSJuly06Kaufmann.pdf>

This gap persists despite variances in age, major ethno-racial groups, and marital status, concluding that “gender difference in political orientation is a fundamental part of today’s American political social scene.”¹¹ With age, there is a tendency for an increase in age to correlate to an increase in Republican Party identification; however, the gap in party affiliation remains constant. From the peak at around age 19 with 48% of women identifying as Democrats to the valley at 79 with 37% of all women identifying as Democrats, the gender gap never relents. Ethno-racial minorities are more likely to be Democrats, but there is still a gap: 10 point

Partisan Gap, by Age and Gender

Partisan gap: % Democratic minus % Republican



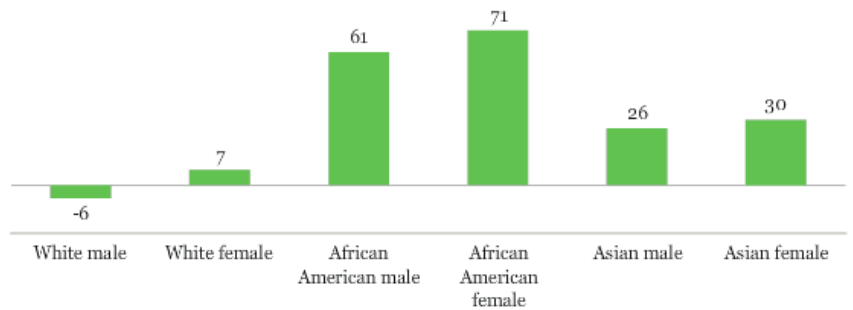
Gallup Poll, January-May 2009

GALLUP POLL

gender gap among African Americans, 6 point among Asian Americans, 13 point among whites. Marital status intensifies the gender gap: a 15 point gap exists between single males and females, a 9 point gap between married males and females, a 6 point gap between separated males and females, a 16 point gap between divorced males and females, a 5 point gap between widowed males and females, and an 8 point gap in domestically partnered males and females.¹² From this data, it is clear that certain factors may change the intensity of the gender gap, but it remains.

Partisan Gap, by Racial Group and Gender

Partisan gap: % Democratic minus % Republican



Gallup Poll Daily tracking, January-May 2009

GALLUP POLL

There are countless theories behind the gender gap. Some propose that divorce is a catalyst as divorce makes women 20% more likely to be a Democrat¹³. A more commonly accepted hypothesis is that the issues that cause the divide among men and women are “those relating to risk and compassion as well as the use of force.”¹⁴ Particularly, this refers to issues of war, abortion, environment, social welfare spending, and education issues. For example, in the 1982 elections, Reagan’s opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, proposed increases to military spending, and decreases to social welfare spending are some issues that explain why Reagan’s approval rating among women was consistently

¹¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/120839/women-likely-democrats-regardless-age.aspx>

¹² <http://www.gallup.com/poll/120839/women-likely-democrats-regardless-age.aspx>

¹³ http://www.ncpa.org/sub/dpd/index.php?Article_ID=6021

¹⁴ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/27550213.pdf?acceptTC=true>

lower than his rating among men.¹⁵ They perceived the Democratic Party to have more compassionate views, a perception that remains today.



Photograph 4: Women protesting for the Equal Rights Amendment

Although the expression “bleeding heart liberals” has been used to pejoratively describe the Democratic Party, it is the reason why they maintain so many female voters. Historically, the Democratic Party has had copious figures that support female rights. Democrat Woodrow Wilson helped females get the right to vote. The Women’s Leadership Forum of the Democratic Party was founded in 1993 in order to facilitate the movement of female issues into public policy. Democrat Nancy Pelosi was the first female Speaker of the House. In the 111th United States Congress, there are 17 women in the Senate, and 13 of those are Democrats; moreover, there are 74 women in the House of Representatives, and 57 of those are Democrats. This female-friendly attitude combined with shared fundamental beliefs make the Democratic Party the most logical choice for most women.



Photograph 5: Women protesting the Vietnam War

¹⁵ <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/27550213.pdf?acceptTC=true>

¹⁶ http://www.gbchrb.org/AARP_photo_gallery_17.jpg

¹⁷ <http://www.corbisimages.com/images/67/CEAFE464-95DB-44F8-947F-283D745D155D/U1580116.jpg>

It should be noted that the gender gap is an aggregate of tendencies among all females and cannot be narrowed to the scope of an individual female in order to make assumptions about her political affiliation. Moreover, the application of the gender gap in the macro sense is viable. The political landscape may be changing and moving towards the right, but, as history has shown that the existence of the gender gap is unchanging. It cannot be said that, in the future, the Democratic Party will hold the majority of female voters, but it is almost unfathomable that women will cease to support the Democratic Party in larger percentages than men. As long as the Democrats keep their fundamental positions, they will always have an advantage in female support.

Relevant Websites:

- <http://gallup.com>
 - A source for a myriad of studies about female party affiliation tendencies
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage_in_the_United_States
 - A comprehensive overview of Women's Suffrage in the United States
- <http://www.democrats.org/people/women>
 - An overview of the Women's Leadership Forum and the Democratic Party's current female-centric initiatives
- <http://www.rncwomen.com/>
 - Website for the female-centric arm of the Republican Party



Photograph 6: Women of both parties in the 110th U.S. Congress

¹⁸ <http://obrag.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/women-in-congress.jpg>