

# Party Polarization: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Gender Gap in Candidate Preference

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## ABSTRACT

Voting in elections is a right and privilege that has been guaranteed to both men and women in the United States since 1920 when women were granted the right to vote through the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Men and women throughout the country turn out to vote in presidential elections for candidates from both the Democratic and the Republican parties. The purpose of my research is to see if a gender gap exists in the political party preference of men and women. Through data collected by American National Election Studies (ANES) from 1948-2012, an analysis was done to examine the existence of gender gaps and the correlation between the year of survey and the gender gap. A separate correlation analysis was done for both the Democratic and Republican parties and their corresponding gender gaps. Through my analyses, it was discovered that a correlation does exist for both parties and that gender polarization is occurring in political party preference. A positive correlation was discovered for support for presidential candidates from the Democratic Party, which suggests that over time women are becoming increasingly more support of the Democratic Party. A negative but weaker correlation was discovered for respondents' preference for Republican candidates, which suggests that over time men are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Republican Party.

## INTRODUCTION

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex" (U.S. Const. amend. XIX). These are the words of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment which granted women the right to vote in the United States. Since 1920, men and women across the country have turned out to vote in presidential elections. My research question revolves around whether or not each respective gender has a certain political party preference in presidential elections. The idea of a gender gap has become increasingly more prevalent in American society in recent years. Gender gaps can be used to describe discrepancies in opportunities, status, or attitudes between men and women. An understanding of gender gaps within our society can lead to a better understanding of gender polarization. The idea of gender polarization revolves around the notion that men and women tend to have very different attitudes and beliefs on certain issues. The purpose of this research is to delve into whether men and women are polarized on political party preference.

Research has been done in the past on gender gaps (see, e.g., Burns, Verba, and Schlozman 2001), but not over a specific time period. Gallup did a research study on gender gap for the 2012 presidential election which displayed the largest ever gender gap in a presidential election. President Obama won the female vote by 12% which is often cited when discussing his victory. The difference between the Gallup study and my research is that Gallup focused specifically on one presidential election whereas I focus on presidential elections over a span of time. Additionally, there have been many studies done regarding gender gap for specific social/political issues. Some of the issues that have been studied regarding gender gaps are education, the environment, abortion, and gay marriage. Significant gender gaps were found on many of the issues, which is what led me to want to take on a research project about gender gap and political party preference.

In this paper, I will explore the correlation between year of survey and gender gap. I created two hypotheses prior to doing my research. My hypotheses were that over time men would increasingly support presidential candidates from the Republican Party, and women would increasingly support presidential candidates from the Democratic Party. In the remaining sections of this paper I will outline the methods that I used during my research, the results of my research, a discussion of my conclusions, and an acknowledgement of the limitations of my study.

## METHODS

My research reviewed quantitative data that had already been collected by American National Election Studies (ANES). The database had statistics on the number of men and women that voted for the Republican and Democratic candidates for each presidential election from 1948-2012. I placed the years (1948-2012) into an Excel spreadsheet in column A. In column B, I have the Voter Preference (Democrat) for women. This is the proportion of women who voted for the candidate from the Democratic Party. In column C, I have the Voter Preference (Democrat) for men. This is the proportion of men who voted for the candidate from the Democratic Party. In column D, I have the Gender Gap in Democratic Voter Preference. This is an actual number that I calculated by taking the proportion of women who voted for the candidate from the Democratic Party and subtracted the proportion of men who also voted for that candidate for each specific year. If the gender gap is positive, that means that more women voted for that candidate. If the gender gap is negative, that means that more men voted for that candidate. If the gender gap is zero, that means that an equal number of men and women voted for that candidate.

In column E, I have the Voter Preference (Republican) for women. This is the proportion of women who voted for the candidate from the Republican Party. In column F, I have Voter Preference (Republican) for men. This is the proportion of men who voted for the candidate from the Republican Party. In column G, I have the Gender Gap in Republican Voter Preference. This is also a number that I calculated and is not a piece of data that I took from American National Election Studies (ANES). As mentioned above I subtracted the proportion of men from the proportion of women. The same standard remains for whether it is positive or negative as I mentioned above.

Utilizing the data that I entered into the Excel spreadsheet, I then created trend lines for the data. I created a separate trend line for each of the political parties. I plotted the gender gap for each year that a presidential election occurred in order to show how the gender gap has changed over time. Anytime the gender gap favored the men, the point was plotted below the line that represented zero, or no gender gap. Similarly, anytime the gender gap favored the women, the point was plotted above the line. My purpose for creating trend lines was to be able to have a visual that really emphasized how the gender gap has changed over time. I also plotted both of the trend lines onto one graph so that it was easy to compare the difference in how the gender gap has changed for each respective party.

The final step in the methodology of my research was a correlation analysis. The correlation was used to test the hypotheses mentioned above that I made prior to doing the research. The correlation analysis was done on the variables of year of survey and gender gap. I did a separate correlation analysis for the candidates from each political party. The scale for a correlation analysis ranges from negative one to positive one, with negative one being a perfect negative correlation and positive one being a perfect positive correlation. For my specific research, anything below zero references a gender gap favoring men (i.e., more men than women support candidates of this political party) and anything above zero references a gender gap that favors women. The closer the correlation is to either end of the spectrum, the higher the correlation and correlations of zero represent the absence of a gender gap in candidate preference. The correlation analysis was important in determining the relationship between the gender gap and the year of survey which helps to prove that the research that I did was statistically significant.

## RESULTS

As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, the gender gap for voter preference for each party varied considerably over time. As mentioned in the methodology section of this report, all of the data in these two tables is taken from the American National Election Studies database besides the gender gap column, which I calculated. Any gender gap statistic that is in the negative favors men and in the positive favors women. Upon first analyzing the statistics that I calculated for the gender gap for each political party, I noticed that in the table for the Democratic Party the gender gap numbers started in the negative and gradually changed to positive. Furthermore, I noticed that in the table for the Republican Party the gender gap numbers remained negative almost throughout the entire time period. These tables were the first step in proving that gender polarization is occurring over time in political party preference.

**Table 1.** Gender Gap in Democratic Voter Preference

Year of Survey	Voter Preference (Democrat) - Women	Voter Preference (Democrat) - Men	Gender Gap in Democratic Voter Preference
1948	28.85	35.76	-6.91
1952	25.15	30.21	-5.06
1956	25.03	33.93	-8.9

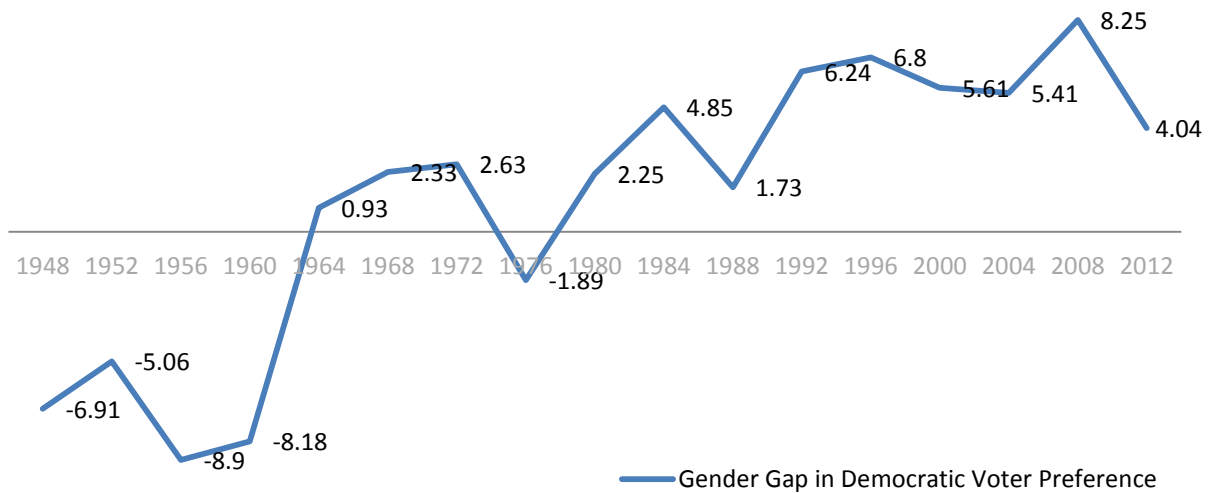
1960	34.06	42.24	-8.18
1964	48.16	47.23	0.93
1968	28.06	25.73	2.33
1972	22.06	19.43	2.63
1976	29.01	30.9	-1.89
1980	24.7	22.45	2.25
1984	27.6	22.75	4.85
1988	28.34	26.61	1.73
1992	34.82	28.58	6.24
1996	38.05	31.25	6.8
2000	35.1	29.49	5.61
2004	35.45	30.04	5.41
2008	47.69	39.44	8.25
2012	44.15	40.11	4.04

**Table 2.** Gender Gap in Republican Voter Preference

Year of Survey	Voter Preference (Republican) - Women	Voter Preference (Republican) - Men	Gender Gap in Republican Voter Preference
1948	25.77	28.48	-2.71
1952	36.5	40.19	-3.69
1956	41.95	43.96	-2.01
1960	38.54	37.94	0.6
1964	21.43	24.89	-3.46
1968	31.62	31.29	0.33
1972	35.07	41.27	-6.2
1976	27.71	30.79	-3.08
1980	27.75	34.39	-6.64
1984	33.6	37.92	-4.32
1988	28.34	34.52	-6.18
1992	22.08	23.4	-1.32
1996	21.56	29.95	-8.39
2000	26.16	33.42	-7.26
2004	32.2	36.04	-3.84
2008	21.32	23.22	-1.9
2012	26.65	30.72	-4.07

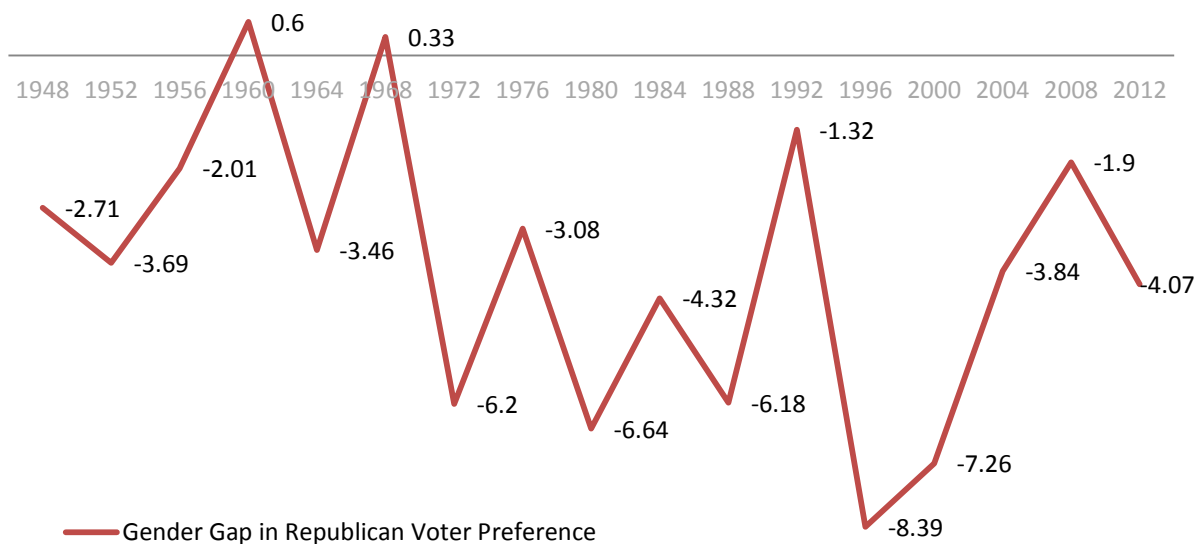
After completing the spreadsheets in Excel, I created trend lines to represent the data in the gender gap column of each table. Figure 1 represents the trend line for the gender gap in voter preference for the Democratic Party. This trend line started with negative values and slowly moved into positive values. It is easy to see through the trend line how women have become increasingly more supportive of the candidate from the Democratic Party in presidential elections. There has not been a year since 1976 where more men supported the Democratic candidate than did women. In recent years, the gender gap has increased and decreased but overall it has still remained largely positive, thus favoring women.

**Figure 1.** Trend Line for Gender Differences in Preference of Democratic Candidates



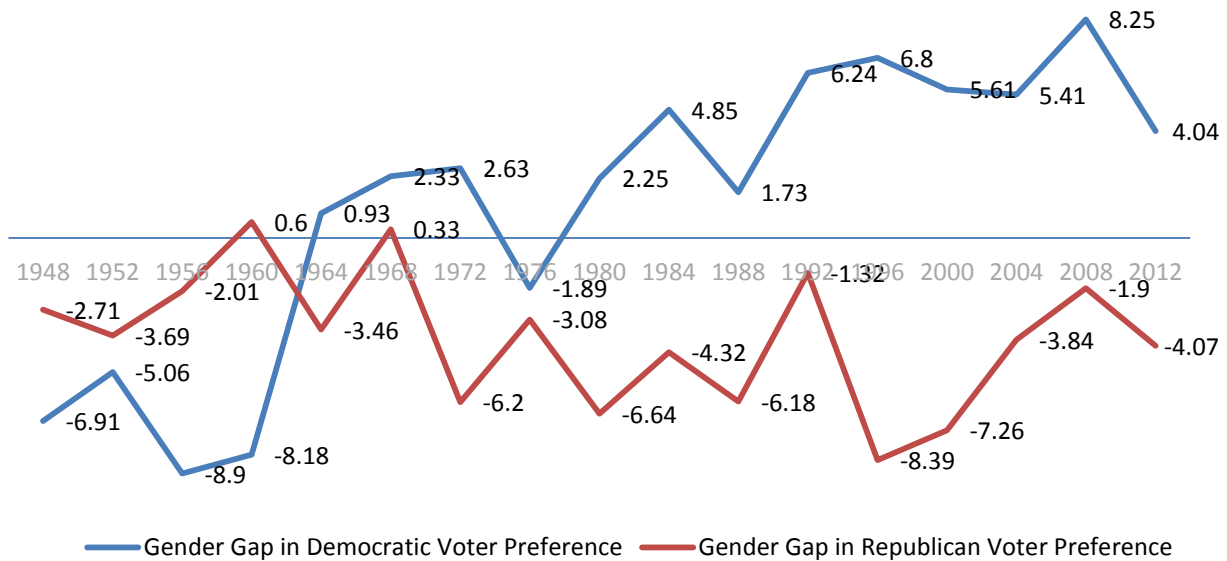
As shown in Figure 2, the results for the trend line for the gender gap in voter preference for the Republican Party is very different from the results displayed in Figure 1. The statistics for this gender gap started with negative values and remained negative almost throughout the entire timespan. There were actually only two presidential elections from 1948-2012 where more women supported the Republican candidate than men did, and it was by a very slight margin on both occurrences. This trend line helps to demonstrate how men have remained more supportive of the Republican candidate and since the line tends to trend slightly downward, over time men have become increasingly more supportive of the Republican candidate.

**Figure 2.** Trend Line for Gender Differences in Preference of Republican Candidates



To compare the two trend lines better, I combined the two lines onto one graph in Figure 3. It is very easy to see how the gender gap for the Democratic Party is trending upward whereas the gender gap for the Republican Party is trending downward. I believe that Figure 3 helps to demonstrate how women are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Democratic candidate and men are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Republican candidate. This table also helps to validate the fact that gender polarization is occurring in the United States for political party preference in presidential elections.

**Figure 3.** Trend Lines for Both Gender Gap Analyses



Following the results of the gender gap calculations and the trend lines, I did a correlation analysis to determine the level of correlation between the year of survey and the gender gap for both the Democratic and the Republican parties. As is mentioned above, the correlation analysis is on a scale of negative one to positive one. The closer the correlation statistic is to each end of the scale, the higher the correlation. I did one correlation for the Democratic Party and one correlation for the Republican Party. The correlation statistic for the Democratic Party was .8541. This number is very close to positive one, and thus proves that there is a strong and statistically-significant correlation between the year of survey and the gender gap in favor of women ( $p = .001$ ). The conclusion that women are increasingly becoming more supportive of the candidate from the Democratic Party could be drawn from this correlation analysis. The correlation statistic for the Republican Party was  $-.3615$ . This number is negative, but is not very close to negative one, and it is not statistically significant at the conventional levels ( $p = .154$ ). This correlation statistic proves that over time men are becoming increasingly more supportive of the candidate from the Republican Party, but the correlation is not nearly as strong as it was for women and the Democratic Party. The values for each correlation analysis are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Correlation Analysis Statistics

	Democratic Party	Republican Party
<b>Correlation Statistic</b>	.8541	-.3615
<b>P-Value (Significance)</b>	.001	.154

Overall, the results of my research project allowed me to draw many conclusions about how the gender gap for political party preference for candidates in each political party has changed over time. The data from the American Nation Election Studies (ANES) was really useful in calculating the gender gap for each year from 1948-2012. Once I had each gender gap calculated, the trend lines gave a visual for how each line was trending. The correlation analyses then helped to prove that a correlation existed for each political party.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence to support my research hypotheses that, over time, men will become increasingly more supportive of the Republican candidate in presidential elections and women will become increasingly more supportive of the Democratic candidate. The results of my research proved that there was a strong correlation in favor of women for the year of survey and the gender gap for the Democratic Party. This can lead to the conclusion that women are increasingly supporting the Democratic Party. Although the correlation was not as strong for the Republican Party, there was still a slight correlation between the year of survey and the gender gap that favored men. This can lead to the conclusion that men are increasingly supporting the Republican Party, but not at as strong of a rate as the women are supporting the Democratic Party. The results of my research have led me to conclude that gender polarization is occurring in presidential elections. The basis for this conclusion is that each specific gender is trending toward supporting opposite parties.

## LIMITATIONS

For limitations in my research, I was very fortunate to have access to all of the data and resources that I needed to complete my research project. The goal that I had for this project was for it to be a first step in a larger research project. The idea was for this first step to include an analysis of the existence of gender gaps and gender polarization in party preference for presidential elections. I limited myself to only researching the correlation between year of survey and gender gap. My plan is to have a second step of this research project, which would aim to include not only the correlation but also the causation. The correlation analysis that I did gave me excellent data regarding whether my variables were correlated, but the correlation analysis does not delve into the causation as to why the variables are correlated. In future research, I would like to attempt to explain why women tend to support the candidate from the Democratic Party whereas men tend to support the candidate from the Republican Party. A possible way of doing this future research would be to add additional columns and variables into my Excel spreadsheet to control for variables such as gender norms or policy support. In the end, I would like to have a research project complete with explanations about both correlation and causation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Ray Block, Jr. for his guidance and support throughout this research project. This research would not have been possible without his instruction and insight. It is because of his influence that I was able to pursue a research topic that I am passionate about. The amount of time that he put into helping me individually meant a lot to me and helped to guide me through this research project.

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