

Party Polarization, Revisited: Explaining the Gender Gap in Political Party Preference

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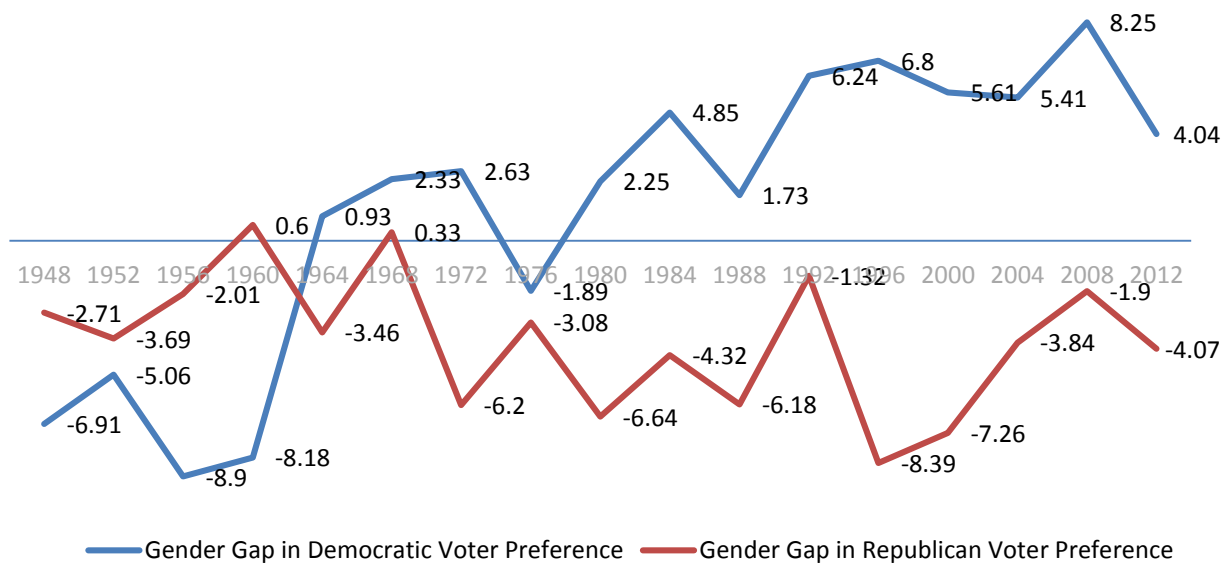
ABSTRACT

In 2015, I wrote a research paper that explored gender gaps in political party preference. I found that over time, women are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Democratic Party and that men are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Republican Party (but to a lesser extent). Although I was able to draw this conclusion, I did not delve into possible reasons as to why this gender gap occurs. Accordingly, the purpose of this research paper is to analyze four potential determinants of both men's and women's support for the Democratic and Republican Parties. These four determinants are education, political climate, the margin of victory in a prior presidential election, and the current party of the president. Through these analyses I was able to conclude that some of these determinants do affect the political party preference of each respective gender. I decided to continue this line of research and find possible solutions to the question that I left unanswered in my first article because I am passionate about politics and issues of gender. Finding possible solutions to the party polarization between genders would help me to better understand the role each gender plays in American politics.

INTRODUCTION

Gender Polarization, or the notion that men and women tend to have very different attitudes and beliefs on certain issues, is very prevalent in politics in the United States. During spring semester of 2015, I wrote and published a research paper on gender polarization in political party preference by proving the existence of a gender gap (Fameree 2015). I used American National Election Studies (ANES) Cumulative Data File (1948-2012) to create trend lines that showed the gender gap between men and women who supported each of the two major political parties, the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. The gender gap was calculated by subtracting the proportion of men who supported each party from the proportion of women who also supported that party. These trend lines helped to demonstrate how the gender gap was changing over time for both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. I also ran correlation analyses between the year of survey and the gender gap for each party to determine whether the relationship between survey year and men's and women's party identification was statistically significant. As shown in Figure 1, I found evidence that party-based gender polarization is occurring. On the one hand, over time women are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Democratic Party. On the other hand, over time men are becoming increasingly more supportive of the Republican Party but to a lesser extent than women are with the Democratic Party. This research helped me to demonstrate that gender polarization is occurring in the United States in presidential elections because the two genders are trending towards opposite political parties.

Figure 1. Trend Lines for Both Gender Gap Analyses



Source: American National Election Study (ANES), Cumulative Data File (1948-2012).

Note: Trend lines replicated from Fameree (2015). Estimates represent the percentage of women minus the number of men who support the Democratic or Republican Party. My measure of the gender gap ranges from -100 (men outnumber women when it comes to support for that political party) to 100 (women outnumber men).

Although I was able to show through my research that a gender gap does exist for political party preference, I did not delve into the causation of why gender polarization is so prevalent. In this paper, I will explore four specific independent variables to gauge their effect on both men and women's support for the Democratic and Republican Parties. The four independent variables that I will analyze are education, the progressive mood in society, the margin of victory in presidential elections, and the political party of the current president. Each of these four variables is mentioned in research on gender politics as a predictor of the party gap. My research question revolves around whether any of these four independent variables has a statistically significant effect on men and women's support for each party to the point of significantly affecting the gender gap. Through this research, I hope to be able to at least give an explanation for why a gender gap exists for both the Republican and the Democratic Parties. 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.

THEORIES

Prior to running my analyses, I made hypotheses about the effect that each independent variable would have on the gender gap for each political party. As shown in Table 1, I made predictions about the gender gap for the Democratic Party. I hypothesized that the gender gap would increase in society as the education level increases for the Democratic Party because I thought that the percentage of women supporting the Democratic Party would increase because as women become more educated they have a better understanding that the Democratic Party supports policies that are relevant to women (Pew Research Center 2012). Next, I hypothesized that a political climate measured using an index created by Stimson (2015) that records America's "policy mood" (or the degree to which citizens support progressive/liberal-leaning policies) would not have an effect on the gender gap. The Democratic Party is known for being the more progressive of the two dominant political parties so I predicted that both men and women's support would increase when the progressive mood in society is high, and the fact that both gender groups increase means that the gender gap would not be affected. I also hypothesized that a greater margin of victory in the most recent election would have no effect on the gender gap. When there is a greater margin of victory, it means that party competition is weaker because one party is soundly defeating the other (Feddersen and Sandroni 2006). This leads me to believe that both men and women's support for the Democratic Party would decrease because I would think that more people would turn out to vote and support the Democratic Party if the party competition was high and the elections were close. Finally, I also hypothesized that when the current president

belongs to the Democratic Party, there will be no effect on the gender gap. My prediction is that both men and women’s support for the Democratic Party increases when the current president belongs to their party.

Table 1. My Hypotheses for the Democratic Party

DEMOCRATIC PARTY	How will the variable affect the gender gap?	Why?
Education	I hypothesize that the gender gap will increase in society as the education level increases.	The percentage of women supporting the Democratic Party will increase because as women become more educated they have a better understanding that the Democratic Party supports policies regarding women’s issues.
Progressive Mood in Society	I hypothesize that an increase in the progressive mood in society will not have an effect on the gender gap.	Both men and women’s support of the Democratic Party will increase because the Democratic Party supports more progressive policies.
Margin of Victory in Most Recent Election	I hypothesize that a greater margin of victory will have no effect on the gender gap.	I believe that both men and women’s support for the Democratic Party would decrease because when there is a greater margin of victory that means that party competition is weaker because one party is soundly winning elections over the other party. I think more people would turn out to support the Democratic Party if the party competition was high and the elections were very close.
Current President is a Democrat	I hypothesize that there will not be an effect on the gender gap when the current president is a Democrat.	I believe that both men and women’s support for the Democratic Party will increase with a current president that is a Democrat.

As shown in Table 2, I also made hypotheses about the effect of each independent variable on the gender gap for the Republican Party. For education, I hypothesized that there would be no effect on the gender gap. As women become more educated, I believe that their support for the Republican Party would decrease because the Democratic Party supports more policies that regard women’s issues and obtaining a higher level of education could help to make women more aware of this. Next, I hypothesized that a more progressive mood in society would not have an effect on the gender gap because both men and women’s support of the Republican Party would decrease. If society is more progressive, I would think that both genders would lean more towards supporting the Democratic Party since it is known more for being progressive. I also hypothesized that when there is a greater margin of victory in the most recent election, there will not be an effect on the gender gap. When there is a greater margin of victory, it means that party competition is weaker because one party is soundly defeating the other. This leads me to believe that both men and women’s support for the Republican Party would decrease because I would think that more

people would turn out to vote and support the Republican Party if the party competition was high and the elections were close. Finally, I also hypothesized that when the current president belongs to the Democratic Party, there will not be an effect on the gender gap. I predict that both men and women’s support for the Republican Party would decrease because I believe more people tend to support the party of the current president.

Table 2. My Hypotheses for the Republican Party

REPUBLICAN PARTY	How will the variable affect the gender gap?	Why?
Education	I hypothesize that an increase in education in society will not have an effect on the gender gap.	As women become more educated, I believe that their support for the Republican Party will decrease because the Democratic Party supports more policies that regard women’s issues and a higher education may make more women aware of this.
Progressive Mood in Society	I hypothesize that as the progressive mood in society increases there will not be an effect on the gender gap.	Both men and women’s support of the Republican Party will decrease because the Democratic Party supports more progressive policies than the Republican Party.
Margin of Victory in Most Recent Election	I hypothesize that a greater margin of victory will have no effect on the gender gap.	I believe that both men and women’s support for the Republican Party would decrease because when there is a greater margin of victory that means that party competition is weaker because one party is soundly winning elections over the other party. I think more people would turn out to support the Republican Party if the party competition was high and the elections were very close.
Current President is a Democrat	I hypothesize that there will not be an effect on the gender gap when the president is a Democrat.	I believe that both men and women’s support for the Republican Party will decrease when the current president is a Democrat.

METHODS/DATA

My research utilizes quantitative data that had already been collected by American National Election Studies (ANES), *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* by James Stimson, and Wikipedia. The ANES database had statistics on the percentage of people who fit into each category of education level. The work by Stimson measured America’s policy mood from 1952-2014. Wikipedia maintains statistics on the margin of victory in each presidential election and also the party of each president. For my research, I created one table for the Democratic Party and one table for the Republican Party. Each table had the four independent variables (education, progressive mood, margin of victory, and current party of the president) in the rows and three columns of dependent variables (voter preference of women, voter preference of men, and gender gap in voter preference).

The numbers in each table are Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression estimates. A regression estimate represents the change in each dependent variable associated with a one-unit shift in each particular independent variable while the rest of the independent variables are held constant(Gujarati 2009). I calculated a regression

estimate for both men and women in the Republican and Democratic Parties. If the regression estimate was positive for the dependent variables of voter preference of men/women, this meant that that gender increased their support for that particular party based on the independent variable that was being measured. If the regression estimate was negative, this meant that that gender decreased their support. Then I calculated a regression estimate for the gender gap for each party which measured the preference of each gender with each independent variable. If the regression estimate for the gender gap in voter preference was positive, it meant that the gender gap favored women, and if it was negative it meant that the gap favored men. I also noted in the table the standard error and whether or not each regression estimate was statistically significant. Using these regression estimates, I was able to make interpretations about the effect that each independent variable had on the gender gap in voter preference for both the Republican and the Democratic Parties.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, the regression estimates for each dependent variable varied greatly. As I mentioned in the methodology section of this report, if the regression estimate for the gender gap in voter preference is positive it favors women and if it is negative it favors men. The Democratic Party is represented in table 3 and the Republican Party is represented in Table 4. In column one of Table 3, we see a shift in education from no college to at least some college contributes to an increase in the percentage of women supporting the Democratic Party (estimate [est.] = .5, standard error [s.e.] = .21, significance [p] < .05). In column two, we see that the same shift in education is associated with a slight—and statistically non-significant—decrease in the percentage of men supporting the Democratic Party (est. = -.21, s.e. = .18, p > .10). Overall, education has the effect of widening the gender gap since the two genders are moving in opposite directions, which is shown through the regression estimate of .71 in column three which is also statistically significant and since it is positive it demonstrates that education really boosts women's support for the Democratic Party.

As shown in columns one and two of Table 3, a shift to a more progressive policy mood in society contributes to an increase in both men and women's support for the Democratic Party (for men: est. = .39, s.e. = .32, p > .10; for women: est. = .43, s.e. = .33, p > .10). These two estimates are very comparable in magnitude and thus do not demonstrate an effect on the gender gap. The regression estimate for the gender gap is -.040 which is not statistically significant, so ultimately we can conclude that policy mood in society does not widen or narrow the gender gap significantly for the Democratic Party.

In columns one and two of Table 3 we can see that a greater margin of victory for a presidential candidate based on the number of votes received contributes to an increase in the percentage of women supporting the Democratic Party (est. = .087, s.e. = .12, p > .10) and a decrease in the percentages of men supporting the Democratic Party (est. = -.12, s.e. = .10, p > .10). Overall, the margin of victory has the effect of widening the gender gap since the two genders are moving in opposite directions, which is shown through the regression estimate of .21 in column three which is statistically significant and since it is positive it demonstrates that a greater margin of victory boosts women's support of the Democratic Party.

As shown in columns one and two of Table 3, when the current president belongs to the Democratic Party, it causes men and women's support for the Democratic Party to increase. When the president is a democrat, women have a regression estimate of 10.3 as shown in column one, and men have a regression estimate of 9.29 as shown in column two. These two numbers are very comparable and thus do not have an effect on the gender gap. The regression estimate for the gender gap is 1.06 which is not statistically significant, so ultimately we can conclude that the president belonging to the Democratic Party does not widen or narrow the gender gap significantly.

Table 3. Gender Differences in Support for the Democratic Party

	(1) Voter Preference (Democrat) - Women	(2) Voter Preference (Democrat) - Men	(3) Gender Gap in Democratic Voter Preference
Education: Some College, No Degree	0.50* (0.21)	-0.21 (0.18)	0.71*** (0.10)
Progressive Mood	0.39 (0.32)	0.43 (0.33)	-0.040 (0.16)
Margin of Victory	0.087	-0.12	0.21***

	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.049)
Previous POTUS was a Democrat	10.3** (3.27)	9.29* (3.36)	1.06 (1.26)
Constant	-7.45 (23.4)	5.62 (21.3)	-13.1 (9.89)
Observations	16	16	16
Adjusted R^2	0.57	0.42	0.78

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

In column one and two of Table 4, we can see that a shift in education from no college to at least some college contributes to a decrease in support for the Republican Party from both men and women (for men: est. = -.40, s.e. = .16, $p < .05$; for women: est. = -.53, s.e. = .18, $p < .01$). These two numbers are very comparable, and thus do not have an effect on the gender gap. The regression estimate for the gender gap is -.12 which is not statistically significant, so ultimately we can conclude that education does not widen or narrow the gender gap significantly for the Republican Party.

As shown in column one of Table 4, a shift to a more progressive mood in society contributes to an increase in the percentage of women supporting the Republican Party (est. = .11, s.e. = .32, $p > .10$). In column two, we see that the same shift is associated with a decrease in the percentage of men supporting the Republican Party (est. = -.12, s.e. = .27, $p > .10$). Overall, a progressive mood in society has the effect of widening the gender gap slightly as the two genders are moving in opposite directions, which is shown through the regression estimate of .23 in column three which is at least somewhat statistically significant. Since this estimate for the gender gap is positive, it shows that the gender gap actually favors women for the Republican Party through a progressive mood.

In column one and two of Table 4, we can see that a greater margin of victory for a presidential candidate based on the number of votes received contributes to a decrease in the percentage of men and women who support the Republican Party (for men: est. = -.20, s.e. = .099, $p < .10$; for women: est. = -.18, s.e. = .12, $p > .10$). These two numbers are very comparable, and thus do not have an effect on the gender gap. The regression estimate for the gender gap is .021 which is not statistically significant, so ultimately we can conclude that a greater margin of victory does not widen or narrow the gender gap significantly for the Republican Party.

As shown in columns one and two of Table 4, when the current president belongs to the Democratic Party, it causes men and women's support for the Republican Party to decrease. When the president is a democrat, the regression estimate for women supporting the Republican Party is -7.21 as shown in column one and the regression estimate for men supporting the Republican Party is -8.64 as shown in column two. These two numbers are very comparable and thus do not have an effect on the gender gap. The regression estimate for the gender gap in Republican Party preference is 1.43 which is not statistically significant, so ultimately we can conclude that a president from the Democratic Party does not widen or narrow the gender gap significantly for the Republican Party.

Table 4. Gender Differences in Support of the Republican Party

	(1) Voter Preference (Republican) - Women	(2) Voter Preference (Republican) - Men	(3) Gender Gap in Republican Voter Preference
Education: Some College, No Degree	-0.53** (0.18)	-0.40* (0.16)	-0.12 (0.072)
Progressive Mood	0.11 (0.32)	-0.12 (0.27)	0.23+ (0.12)
Margin of Victory	-0.18 (0.12)	-0.20+ (0.099)	0.021 (0.068)

Previous POTUS was a Democrat	-7.21* (2.75)	-8.64*** (2.04)	1.43 (1.42)
Constant	38.1+ (17.9)	55.0** (16.1)	-16.9* (6.80)
Observations	16	16	16
Adjusted R^2	0.48	0.57	0.23

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Overall, the results of my research project allowed me to draw many conclusions about which independent variables affected the gender gap in voter preference and which did not. The data from ANES, James Stimson, and Wikipedia was really useful to be able to calculate the regression estimates. Once I had the regression estimates I was able to interpret what effect each independent variable had on the gender gap in voter preference.

CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence to support my initial research question of whether or not the four independent variables that I chose affected the gender gap in voter preference for political party. For the Democratic Party, my hypotheses that education would cause the gender gap to increase, a more progressive mood in society will have no effect on the gender gap, and the current president belonging to the Democratic Party will have no effect on the gender gap were all correct. However, my hypothesis that a greater margin of victory would have no effect on the gender gap was incorrect. I predicted that a greater margin of victory would have no effect on the gender gap because I thought that in a more competitive election more people would turn out to vote so when the margin of victory was high it would cause men and women's support to decrease. In reality, my findings were that the gender gap widened because women's support for the Democratic Party increased and men's support decreased. For the Republican Party, my hypotheses that education would have no effect on the gender gap, a greater margin of victory would have no effect on the gender gap, and the current president belonging to the Democratic Party would have no effect on the gender gap were all correct. However, my hypothesis that a more progressive mood in society would have no effect on the gender gap was incorrect. I predicted that as society became more progressive men and women's support for the Republican Party would decrease because the Democratic Party is known for being more progressive. In my actual findings, women's support of the Republican Party increased and men's support decreased which caused the gender gap to widen.

The results of my research have allowed me to answer the question that I did not answer in my initial research of the reasoning behind the gender gap in political party preference. In my first research paper, I demonstrated that women were becoming increasingly more supportive of the Democratic Party and that men were becoming increasingly more supportive of the Republican Party, but I was not able to give reasons for why this gender polarization was occurring. Through these regression analyses, I was able to show the degree to which each of the four independent variables affected the gender gap in different manners. While there are presumably other factors that affect why men and women choose to support different political parties, at least I can now give some reasoning for the gender polarizations that occurs in American politics. Through the combination of my two research papers, I was able to give a fuller picture of the gender gap, as well as reasons that explain the gender gap.

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