

SEX AND VOTING BEHAVIOR IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

By Elizabeth Monk-Turner

Since 1964, more women than men have gone to the polls to vote for President of the United States. Females in 1964, cast one million and three-quarters more votes than men, a margin that doubled by 1972 (Baxter and Lansing, 1980). While females exhibit an increasing tendency to vote, particularly employed and black females, the American electorate, as a whole, has voted at a lower rate in presidential elections since 1964. Females outnumber males in the U.S. population. In 1964, there were 1.8 million more females than males aged 18 and over; by 1972, this figure increased to 6.5 million. Projections for the year 2000 indicate that there will be 9 million more females than males in the U.S. population over the age of 18. These trends make the attitudes of women voters particularly significant in helping us to forecast future directions in U.S. policy.

Sex Differences in Voting Behavior

The Nineteenth Amendment, passed in 1920, legally enfranchised women. However, existing social norms, one of which held that a woman's place was not in politics, did not encourage women to vote, and in the 1920 election only one third (34.7%) of eligible females voted, while 66% of all men did vote. Women still vote at a slightly lower rate than men. However, due to their numerical majority in the population, females have outnumbered males since 1945, women constitute an "invisible" voting majority, in the sense that they do not see themselves as a voting bloc. The most likely female voter has some college education, works, has a family income in the upper third of the national distribution, is between the ages 31-60, and lives outside the South. Changes are apparent in a number of these areas. Particularly we should examine two areas — education and work.

Females continue to enter the higher educational system in large numbers. Aggregated data show that 50.9% of those enrolled in higher education in 1979 were women (Randour,

et al., 1982:191). Disaggregated statistics show women are in a majority only in two-year institutions of higher education. Many suggest females will continue to enter the higher educational system in record numbers because the rate of return to their educational investment is high — higher, in fact, than it is for men (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979:117; Randour, et al., 1982; Monk-Turner, 1982). Thus, as women acquire more education, their rate of political participation may well increase. Educational attainment shapes the political behavior of females more so than for males. Today, it is more likely that a college educated female will vote than a college educated male (Baxter and Lansing, 1980).

Female labor force participation is also on the rise. In 1948, less than a third of all females worked outside the home, if one includes all those aged 16 or more, working for pay at least one hour a week, or working at least 15 hours a week on a farm or in a family business. Female labor force participation has steadily increased, and, since May 1978, over half (50.1%) of all females over the age of 16 were in the labor force (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1978). This rate is, however, deceptively low because of the relatively large proportion of the female population which is over the retirement age, as a result of low female mortality rates. Thus, in 1978, 58.5% of women between the ages 20-64 were in the labor force (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979: 8, 37).

In the past, the peak participation periods for women were among women aged 45-64 and those aged 18-19. Older women returned to work after rearing children, to help pay for additional family expenses, like children's college tuition, while younger women worked before entering their child bearing and rearing years. Since 1963, the most dramatic growth in female labor force participation has been among women aged 20-34 (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979:17). Thus, by 1978, the familiar double peak in female labor force participation virtually disappeared. Females are entering the labor force in increasing numbers and, more importantly, they are not dropping out of the labor force during their child bearing and rearing years. This indicates that employment continuity, as well as participation, is increasing among women (Lloyd and Niemi, 1979:70,73) Projecting patterns of change observed in the 1970s into the future, Lloyd and Niemi (1979) suggest that the

shape of the female age-participation profile might well be transformed into the inverted U shape exhibited by male profiles.

Employed females are more likely than homemakers to vote (Baxter and Lansing, 1980). Anderson (1975) compared changes in political participation for three groups, working females, males, and housewives, between the years 1952-1972. He found a much higher percentage increase in political participation for working females (32%) than for males (7%) or housewives. Therefore, increases in female labor force participation should positively affect the trend toward increased female political participation, with the result that women are likely to continue to hold the balance of voting power.

The Women's Vote — A Bloc Vote?

Women have not been generally thought of as an organized, or potentially organizable, political group. In the past, analysts have concentrated on factors such as religious, regional, educational, occupational, racial, and class differences which cut across sex lines, rather than identifying and studying factors which distinguish women voters from male voters. Males and females do agree on a wide range of political questions, however, clear differences by sex currently emerge on issues related to war and peace, and generally on "aggression" issues.

Male/female differences in political attitudes appear most consistently around humanitarian issues, especially issues of war and peace. These differences have become more apparent since WWII (Baxter and Lansing, 1980). As a group, females are less likely than men to seek military solutions to political and international problems (Freeman, 1979). Females are far more likely than males to view U.S. entry into both World Wars, the Korean War, and the Indo-China War as a mistake. More females than males were opposed to the Cambodian invasion in 1973. More women classify themselves as being doves than do men (64% of females in a 1969 Gallup poll said they were doves).

Females generally favor non-military foreign aid, especially where clear-cut humanitarian goals are identified. After WWII, females, on average, favored continued rationing so that more resources could be made available to war-damaged and less-developed economies. Besides these concerns related to war

and peace, females are also less supportive than males (by 6-17%) of the death penalty, even for convicted murderers, and of the development of nuclear energy (Baxter and Lansing, 1980); Stockard and Johnson, 1980). Females are more supportive than men of social welfare programs. Indeed, women, particularly young educated women, are generally reported to be "less conservative" than their male peers (Soule and McGrath, 1977;187-190; Frieze, et al., 1978; Baxter and Lansing, 1980).

Many explanations have been advanced to account for differences observed in political attitudes between men and women. In general it has been suggested that females are less prepared than males to support socially sanctioned violence; that females are more concerned than males with "moral behavior" and the "preservation of life"; and that females are instinctually less "aggressive" than males, and less ready to resort to violent behavior to defend themselves against violence.

One might conclude that females are less supportive on aggression issues because they are less concerned about violence than are men. Zellman (1978) argues that this is not a correct perception; rather women are sensitive to violence and feel threatened by it. They are more likely than men to perceive any increase of crime in their own neighborhoods. They are also more likely to be afraid of walking home alone or being at home alone than are men. By the mid-1970s, 68% of women reported such fears, while only 26% of men did (Frieze, et al., 1978: 343).

Much research supports the contention that females are more concerned than males with moral behavior and the preservation of life (Frieze, et al., 1978; Baxter and Lansing, 1980). Baxter and Lansing (1980) argue that because women give birth they are more concerned than men about its preservation. Females are more likely than males to feel that parents who abuse their children should be jailed. Also, females favor laws against drunken driving and are more supportive of the police (but, only when police activity does not involve direct physical reaction or "violence") (Frieze, et al., 1978).

Another hypothesis that has been expounded to help explain male/female differences on "aggression" issues holds that ob-

served differences in aggressiveness* may be biologically based. Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) research shows that in every known society men exhibit more aggressive behavior than do females. Male nonhuman primates are also more aggressive than their female counterparts (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974: 222-43). Much research shows that males of all ages engage in more physical aggression, real and imagined, than do females. In general, aggressive, dominant qualities are more important in male than in female groups (Tavris and Offir, 1977).

Sex differences in aggression appear early in life. Little boys left to play with a Bobo doll (a large inflatable doll that rights itself after being punched) were shown to be more likely than females to hit the doll repeatedly (Tavris and Offir, 1977). Feshback and Feshback (1973) found that boys struck the doll, on average, 28 times, whereas the girls in the study hit Bobo only 4.5 times during a play period. Such sex differences appear early in children's lives, before culture has "socialized" males to higher levels of aggressive behavior.

In general, there exists some agreement that biology influences the development of aggressive behavior in males. Therefore, it is easier to socialize men to exhibit aggressive behavior patterns. To argue that a tendency toward aggression is influenced by biology, however, does not mean that social roles are determined by them (Stockard and Johnson, 1980: 142).

Sex differences are apparent in analyzing how males and females perceive aggression issues. I argue that this difference can be understood, in part, by looking at biological differences by sex in aggression. Even if one does not accept this argument, the fact remains that on issues of war and peace, capital punishment, nuclear energy, and social services, females and males, on average, disagree. Thus far, attempts to organize women along these lines, or others, to form a voting bloc have not gained much success. Should a women's voting bloc materialize, it could exercise substantial power. Many elections are close. Richard Nixon lost in 1960 by the equivalent of one vote in every precinct. Given that women are in a political majority in the U.S. today, and the increasing tendency by females to vote, the potential political power of an organized women's voting bloc is apparent.

* Please note that aggression, which is hostile in intent, should be distinguished from assertiveness, which is the ability to make one's interests and desires known to others.

A Gender Voting Gap?

An unusual degree of polarization between men and women (and blacks and whites) is evident in analyzing approval of the Reagan administration. In 45 years of Gallup polling, never has there been greater disagreement on performance of a U.S. President (Gallup, 1981). Typically, there has only been 2 or 3 percentage points difference by sex in presidential approval ratings. In analyzing differences in approval of the Reagan administration, as much as a 14 percentage point difference exists between men and women — women are not as likely as men to support this Administration (Gallup, 1981). Polls this past summer showed less than 50% approval of the Reagan administration by both men and women with a significant gender gap holding (Norman Transcript, 1982).

The principal explanations advanced to explain the gender voting gap centers on the idea that women believe Ronald Reagan is likely to get the U.S. involved in war. As many as 46% of females surveyed feared Reagan's actions could lead to war, whereas only 37% of males think so (Gallup, 1981). Past research (Fulenwider, 1980) shows that women worry more about the possibility of war than do men. This is important because those who worry about the possibility of war are more likely to perceive differences between political parties in terms of which would be most likely to engage in military conflict. When asked which political party would most likely keep the U.S. out of war, both males and females favored the Democratic Party (by a margin of 13 percentage points over the Republican Party) (Gallup, 1981).

In addition to fears of war involvement, females are less supportive than males of Reagan's defense policies, the Administration's handling of relations with the U.S.S.R., and Reagan's support of production of the neutron bomb (Gallup, 1981). Only 49% of females surveyed support Reagan on defense policies, whereas 65% of males do. Likewise, only 42% of females support Reagan's policies regarding U.S./U.S.S.R. relations, while 55% of all men support such policies. Fewer women yet, 39%, approve Reagan's decision to produce the neutron bomb, yet a majority (54%) of men approve of this decision (Gallup, 1981). Analyzing another issue related to defense, peacetime conscription, one finds males and females

again very much apart. Males favor such conscription (53% for — 42% against), whereas females do not (43% for — 49% against). Similarly, females favor gun control. Reagan does not support gun control, a sentiment shared by a majority of all men polled (62% against — 34% for) (Gallup, 1981). Women are also less likely than men to support the development of nuclear power plants, something Reagan does, once again, support.

Dissatisfaction with President Reagan among women has spread to include Republican women in general. In the August 5, 1982 Harris Survey, 54% of women polled said they intend to vote Democratic in November, while only 38% favored Republicans (Norman Transcript, 1982). Women hold a voting majority in the U.S. today, and, as a group, they exhibit an increasing tendency to vote. In close elections, a change in one vote in every precinct could change the outcome of an election. Thus, given that women outnumber men in the population and that, by 1980, they were voting at almost the same rate as men, the fact that an absolute majority of women lean toward the Democratic Party could spell disaster for Republicans in future elections.

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

By Walter G. Thompson

The policy of "affirmative action," aimed at advancing the educational, economic and ultimately social status of minority racial and ethnic groups, and also of females, has played a central role in the engineering of social change in the United States during the past twenty years. Last defined in 1979 as "those actions appropriate to overcome the effects of past or present practises, policies or other barriers to equal opportunity,"⁽¹⁾ affirmative action has recently attracted increasing criticism in that it openly seeks the advancement of less competent or qualified members of the identified "minority" groups against the interests of more competent or qualified individuals belonging to the category of "White males." Since the program remains in force in all educational, commercial and industrial organizations which are recipients of government funds or government contracts (in excess of \$50,000 per annum), the history of what has been described as an "anti-quality policy" is well worth examination.

The concept of affirmative action first appeared in Executive Order 10925, issued by President Kennedy in 1961, for the furtherance of "non-discrimination" in employment of Negroes, Spanish-speakers, Orientals, Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts. Implementation by federal commissions in compliance with President Johnson's Executive Order 11246, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, soon evolved to the point where heavy litigation and court ordered penalties and back payments of wages, allegedly due to those who were supposed to have been discriminated against, led to the establishment of ethnic quotas by many major corporations and educational institutions. Any history of affirmative action in the U.S. must take into account:

- (1) the legislative, executive, and judicial basis for affirmative action, and
- (2) the history of federal policy in respect to "equal" employment and higher education.

Legislative Action

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

The Civil Rights Act is commonly regarded as the broad