

**The Developmental Theory of the Gender Gap:  
Women and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective**

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## The Developmental Theory of the Gender Gap

During the postwar era the established orthodoxy in political science was that women in Western democracies proved more rightwing than men. Gender differences in party preferences were never as marked as the classic electoral cleavages of class, region and religion, for example there were no popular 'women's parties' as there were parties closely associated with labor unions, provincial regions or churches, but nevertheless 'women's conservatism' was commonly noted as a persistent and well-established phenomenon. During the 1980s the conventional wisdom came under increasing challenge. On the one hand, commentators in many countries outside the US detected a process of gender *dealignment*, finding minimal sex differences in voting choice and party preferences. On the other hand, in the United States a pattern of gender *realignment* became evident. The emergence of the modern gender gap in America is due to the way that women moved towards the Democrats since 1980 while men moved towards the Republicans on a stable, long-term and consistent basis, thereby reversing the pattern of voting and partisanship common in the 1950s.

The process of gender realignment in the United States raises the question whether similar developments are now evident elsewhere. There are two perspectives on this issue. If the gender gap in American politics is caused by common structural and/or cultural trends affecting modern societies, like increased female participation in the paid workforce, the break-up of traditional family units, or the transformation of sex roles, then we would expect to find similar gender gaps in other nations. Yet alternatively if caused by specific factors which are distinctive to American politics, such as the traditional lack of a strong class cleavage in the electorate, the centrist pattern of two party competition, or the salience of issues like abortion and affirmative action, then we would expect that the modern gender gap in the United States would prove to be *sui generis*, or at least highly contingent upon particular conditions found in particular countries, such as the predominant issue agenda, patterns of party competition, or cultural values. Exploring this issue is important both to compare, understand and map the pattern worldwide and also to provide further theoretical insights into the reasons for the emergence of the modern gender gap in the United States. Unfortunately the previous comparative literature has been unable to resolve this issue, with different studies producing somewhat contradictory and ambiguous findings.

To provide a fresh look at this issue we focus on comparing gender differences in the voting preferences of the electorate, the most common meaning of the term 'gender gap', in a wide range of countries. We recognize that the term 'gender gap' concerns a multidimensional political phenomenon that can refer to any political differences between women and men, such as in their voting behavior, partisanship, attitudes and opinions, or civic engagement, at mass or elite levels, but the concern of this paper is restricted to comparing voting choices. Our argument is based on a developmental theory of the gender gap which suggests that long-term structural and cultural trends, which have transformed women's lives, have gradually produced a realignment in women's politics in postindustrial societies. For data we draw on the World Values Surveys (WVS), carried out in three waves in the early 1980s, the early 1990s and the mid-1990s. In total these surveys allow us to compare gender politics in sixty societies around the globe, although not all countries were included in each wave. The WVS includes many different post-industrial, post-communist and developing societies. Gender differences in voting intentions are compared using a 10-point scale, derived from expert assessments of the position of parties across the left-right spectrum.

The analysis demonstrated that gender differences in voting behavior have been realigning in post-industrial societies. By the 1990s women voters in these nations proved significantly more leftwing than men, even after introducing a range of social controls. The modern gender gap is not confined only to the United States, as particularistic accounts suggest, but is also evident by the 1990s in some West European states. Nevertheless this pattern was not yet evident in post-communist societies or developing societies, where the traditional gender gap persists into the mid-1990s with women voters more rightwing than men. The main reason for the emergence of the modern gender gap in post-industrial societies, we argue, is that structural and cultural trends have transformed the values of the women, particularly among the younger generation. The conclusion summarizes the main findings and considers the implications for understanding women and men's power at the ballot box and the process of cultural change.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### The Orthodox Account of Female Conservatism

Research on gender differences in the electorate has been a recurrent theme in political science ever since the earliest systematic surveys of

voting behavior (Tingsten 1937:37-65). Many hoped, and others feared, that once women were enfranchised there would be a distinctive 'women's vote'. The early classics in the 1950s and 1960s established the orthodoxy in political science; gender differences in voting tended to be fairly modest but nevertheless women were found to be more apt than men to support center-right parties in Western Europe and in the United States, a pattern which we can term the '**traditional** gender gap' (Duverger 1955:65-6; Lipset 1960: 143; Dogan 1963:475-9; Pulzer 1967: 52; Butler and Stokes 1974:160; Berelson and Lazarsfeld 1945; Campbell et al. 1960:493). Inglehart (1977:229) confirmed that in the early 1970s women remained more likely to support Christian Democrat and Conservative parties in Western Europe, particularly in Italy and Germany (see Table 1), although a new pattern appeared to be emerging in the United States. Most explanations of the traditional gender gap emphasized structural sex differences in religiosity, longevity, and labor force participation, for example women in Italy and France were more likely to attend churches associated with Christian Democratic parties (Lipset 1960:260; Blondel 1970:55-56). By implication, in this era women were also commonly assumed to be more conservative in their political attitudes and values, producing an ideological gap underpinning their party preferences (for a critical summary of the literature, however, see Goot and Reid 1984). The conventional wisdom was summarized in *The Civic Culture*, first published in 1963:

*"Wherever the consequences of women's suffrage have been studied, it would appear that women differ from men in their political behavior only in being somewhat more frequently apathetic, parochial, [and] conservative...Our data, on the whole, confirm the findings reported in the literature."* (Almond and Verba 1989: 325).

Gender was not regarded as a primary electoral cleavage, equivalent to class, region, and religion, because women and men experienced many crosscutting cleavages, but nevertheless the classic account of European social cleavages by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) understood sex differences as one of the factors influencing the electoral base of party politics.

[Table 1 about here]

#### Theories of Gender Dealignment

This orthodoxy came under increasing challenge during the 1980s since scholars in many Western countries emphasized a pattern of gender dealignment in the electorate, or a weakening of women's traditional conservatism. This

pattern was noted in voting behavior in Britain (Baxter and Lansing 1983; Rose and McAllister 1986, 1990:51; Heath et al. 1985:23; Welch and Thomas 1988; Hayes and McAllister 1997; Hayes 1997) as well as in Germany (Rusciano 1992), the Netherlands (Mayer and Smith 1984), New Zealand (Vowles 1993) and Sweden (Wangnerud 1994). This literature suggested that the old thesis of female conservatism was apparently no longer evident, instead the situation in the 1980s seemed contingent upon political circumstances: in some established democracies women seemed to lean towards the right, in others to the left, particularly in Nordic societies (Listhaug et al. 1985; Jenssen and Bratterud 1997; Oskarson 1995), and in yet others no significant differences could be detected (Mayer and Smith 1985; Norris 1988; Oskarson 1995; Studlar et al. 1998). Studies of ideological self-placement, rather than voting choice, found that during the mid-1980s women in Western Europe tended to see themselves as slightly more rightwing than men, although this gap was reduced when controls were incorporated for labor force participation and religiosity (de Vaus and McAllister 1989). Nevertheless Jelen et al. (1994) found that European women tended to be more left leaning in their political attitudes and issue preferences.

An overall pattern of gender dealignment seemed to fit theories suggesting that the impact of traditional social-party linkages had weakened in many established democracies, notably in terms of class and religion (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Crewe and Denver 1985; Franklin et al. 1992; Evans and Norris 1999). This account stresses that voters have become more instrumental. Under these conditions no party could expect to enjoy a persistent and habitual advantage among women or men voters, instead contingent factors like government performance, party policies, and leadership images could be expected to come to the fore in voting decisions.

#### Theories of Gender Realignment

During the last decade, however, there has been much speculation, although little concrete evidence, that women were continuing to realign towards the left throughout advanced industrial societies, a situation which we will term the '*modern* gender gap', replicating the pattern evident since the early 1980s in the United States. The process of 'partisan realignment' is understood to produce an enduring and stable change in the mass coalitional basis of party politics (for a fuller discussion see Norris and Evans 1999). A classic example in the United States is the African-American realignment towards the Democrats in the 1950s and 1960s, while Southern

white conservatives shifted towards the GOP, leading to a major long-term shift in the basis of American party competition (Black and Black 1987). In the United States the process of gender realignment meant that although women leaned toward the Republican Party in the 1952, 1956 and 1960 presidential elections, during the 1960s and 1970s traditional gender differences in the electorate faded, and from the 1980s onwards the modern voting gap became apparent in successive Presidential, Gubernatorial, and state-level contests, as well as in Democratic party identification (Smeal 1984; Klein 1985; Mueller 1988; Bendyna and Lake 1994; Miller and Shanks 1996; Seltzer et al. 1997; CAWP 1998). The modern gender gap in American elections has rarely been substantial compared with differences based on race or religion, but nevertheless this has proved a consistent, stable and politically significant factor in many contests, representing a long-term shift in the mass basis of party politics (see Figure 1).

[Figure 1 about here]

#### The Developmental Theory of Gender Realignment

Why might we expect gender realignment? We argue that a developmental theory can be used to explain gender realignment, in which the transformation of sex roles in postindustrial societies has influenced the process of value change. As women's lifestyles and cultural attitudes have been altered by the process of societal modernization we expect this to have a major impact on their political preferences. The theory is based on three major premises that are open to empirical investigation, namely, we expect to find systematic differences in the gender gap:

- (i) *between societies based on their level of political and economic development;*
- (ii) *within societies based on generational cohorts; and,*
- (iii) *within societies based on structural and cultural factors.*

The developmental theory is based on the assumption that traditional societies are characterized by sharply differentiated gender roles that discourage women from jobs outside the home. Virtually all pre-industrial societies emphasised child-bearing and child-rearing as the central goal for women, and their most important function in life; careers in the paid workforce were predominately male. In postindustrial societies gender roles have increasingly converged due to a structural revolution in the paid labor force, in educational opportunities for women, and in the characteristics of

modern families. These major changes in sex roles can be expected to influence women's political behavior. Studies suggest that female participation in the paid labor force has had a significant impact on female voting behavior, for example in terms of political participation (Togebay 1994; Manza and Brooks 1998). Women's support for parties of the left may be encouraged by pervasive patterns of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation. Workingwomen are often over-represented in low-paid jobs and as public sector professionals and service providers in education, health care and welfare services. Women also experience continued pay disparities and lower socioeconomic status, with considerably higher levels of female poverty (United Nations 1995). The increased membership and activism of working women in trade unions can also be expected to move women leftwards politically while increased participation by professional women in higher education may have encouraged more liberal attitudes. Structural accounts have also commonly emphasised the process of secularization. Women have tended to be more religious in the past and this, particularly Catholicism, helped to explain greater female support for Christian Democrat parties in the postwar era (Lipset 1960). Trends in secularization may have gradually eroded church-party linkages over time (Inglehart 1981; Mayer and Smith 1985; de Vaus and McAllister 1989).

Structural factors can be regarded as interacting with, and causing, shifts in cultural attitudes and values that may subsequently exert an independent and direct effect upon voting choice. The most influential cultural theories concern gender differences in post-materialist values, the effects of feminist mobilization, and attitudes towards the role of government. Post-modernization theory suggests that in advanced industrial societies the growth of Post-materialist values among the younger generation has led to a gradual but steady decline in the class politics of economic and physical security, opening the way for greater priority being given to the values of freedom, self-expression and gender equality (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997; Abramson and Inglehart 1995). It is argued that this pervasive cultural shift has increased the salience of issues such as reproductive choice, sexual harassment in the workplace, and equal opportunities, although we can expect a time lag between the emergence of new issues on the political agenda and the party system's response. Value change has transformed gender roles in advanced industrial societies, including the norms concerning family structures, child-rearing and sexual mores (Inglehart 1990:177-211; 1997:267-292). If the modernization process has influenced the gender gap, we would

expect to find that support for post-materialist values would be closely associated with female support for parties of the left.

Alternatively, Pam Conover (1988) has argued that the electoral gap in America has been strongly influenced by mobilization by the women's movement around issues of gender equality. In this view it is not the general shift to post-materialist values *per se*, but rather the growth of feminist identity and consciousness that has been the catalyst producing the modern gender gap in party support (for a critical discussion, however, see Cook and Wilcox 1991). If so, we would expect to find the modern gender gap would be strongest among feminist women. This hypothesis can be tested by examining the size of the gender gap controlling for the effects of confidence in the women's movement and also attitudes towards abortion, understood as key indicators of sympathy for feminist ideals (see Appendix A for details of all the items used and their operationalization).

Lastly some suggest that the gender gap in America is due to greater support among women for a range of leftwing policy issues, rather than those that are explicitly gendered. Studies have focused on sex differences in public opinion towards issues such as government spending on the welfare state and public services, pro-environmental protection, and pacifism in the use of military force (Erie and Rein 1988; Klein 1985; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986; Gilens 1988; Rinehart 1992; Page and Shapiro 1992; Seltzer et al. 1997). We can examine this hypothesis by monitoring the gender gap after controlling for attitudes towards government, measured by examining a series of left-right attitude scales in the WVS towards the role of government in the economy and in the responsibilities of the state in the provision of social welfare.

Therefore to summarize, the developmental theory suggests that structural and cultural trends common to post-industrial societies have realigned women towards parties of the left. This can be tested by examining the size and direction of the gender gap given a series of hypotheses. First, at national-level we would expect to find the reversal of the gender gap according to the society's level of economic development. The transformation of sex roles in the paid labor force, education and the family had gone much further in modern than in traditional societies, as has the process of value change. If we compare gender differences in voting behavior worldwide we would therefore expect to find that the *traditional* gender gap would be most prevalent in developing nations, while the *modern* gender gap would have



advanced farthest in postindustrial societies.

Within postindustrial societies we would also predict that the gender gap would reverse by generational cohort, given the way that changes in lifestyles and cultural trends have transformed the lives of older and younger groups of women. Although we lack systematic comparative evidence in the World Values Survey from the era prior to the 1980s, we would expect to find long-term secular trends reflected in differences between the respective age cohorts, with the younger cohort of women most strongly influenced by the transformation of sex roles in advanced industrial societies. Previous studies in Britain have emphasized the curvilinear pattern of the gender gap by generation, with younger women leaning left while older women remain more rightwing than their male counterparts (Norris 1999). Consequently, we would hypothesize that the modern gender gap should be evident among the younger generation, while the traditional gap should remain relatively strong among the older cohorts. These generational effects would not be expected in post-communist or developing societies, since structural and cultural changes in these societies have taken very different pathways there. The forces of modernization have not yet transformed gender roles in most developing societies; and in the post-communist world, the historical changes of recent decades have been very different from those operating in advanced industrial societies.

Lastly, for reasons already discussed, we would also expect to find that within societies the gender gap at individual-level would vary systematically according to structural and cultural factors which have changes women and men's lives, namely women's participation in the paid labor force, socioeconomic status, education, and religiosity, as well as their attitudes towards post-materialism, the women's movement, and government.

#### **Trends in the Voting Gap**

Is there good evidence to support these propositions? We can start by comparing the gender gap in voting choice in eleven established democracies where we have information from the early 1980s to the early or mid 1990s. In the World Values Surveys respondents were asked: "*If there were a national election tomorrow, for which party on this list would you vote?*" Parties can be classified along the left-right spectrum using a variety of methods, such as content analysis of manifestoes. The most common approach is the one adopted here which relies upon systematic assessments of party positions by independent experts. We used Huber and Inglehart's (1995) scale based on

expert interpretation of the position of parties along a 10-point left-right scale in 42 countries, carried out in 1993. This scale allowed us to compare the mean left-right position of women and men voters within each country, calculating the voting gap as the difference between group means, checked for significance with ANOVA. In order to confirm the reliability of this measure it was correlated with another survey item asking people to place themselves on a ten-point left-right ideological scale. Overall where people placed themselves on the ideological scale was closely associated ( $r=.46$ ) with their position on the voting scale, increasing confidence in the consistency of this measure.

[Table 2 about here]

The evidence for trends since the early 1980s is available for the eleven established democracies included in the first wave of the World Values Survey. As shown in Table 2, if we compare the gender gap using the expert scale we find a mixed pattern in these societies in the early 1980s: in four countries (the Netherlands, the United States, Denmark and Italy) women leaned towards the left while in six countries they leaned rightwards. But the pattern of change over time is generally consistent: in countries where women were more conservative in 1981 this pattern weakens although does not disappear everywhere except for Spain. The modern gender gap, with women more leftwing than men, is evident in each wave in the U.S., consolidates over time in the Netherlands, and emerges by the 1990s in Canada and West Germany.

[Table 3 and Figure 2 about here]

We lack evidence in the World Values Survey for consistent trends over time in a wider range of societies but we can compare the size and direction of the voting gap in the 1990s in the 36 countries shown in Table 3 and Figure 2. What is striking is that in postindustrial societies in the 1990s the modern gender gap, with women significantly more leftwing than men, is evident in almost half the nations under comparison. Women are significantly more rightwing in only two (Finland and Spain) and in the remainder there is no significant gender difference. In contrast, in the eight developing societies women proved significantly more rightwing in four and more leftwing in only one (Argentina). Across all advanced industrialized democracies the gender gap in voting was  $+0.10$  (with women leaning left), whereas it was  $-0.08$  in post-communist societies, and  $-0.14$  in developing societies (with women leaning right). This provides important evidence providing initial confirmation of our first hypothesis, that the gender gap is consistently

associated at national-level with the process of economic and political modernization. The traditional 'rightwing' gap remains prevalent in developing societies but a pattern of convergence or gender realignment is evident in more developed societies. This lends support to the hypothesis that the shift towards the left among women is strongly influenced by the modernization process.

To test whether the pattern we have established is an artifact of the particular measure we used, or whether the patterns in voting are reflected more broadly in terms of the ideological position of women and men, we can compare nineteen nations where we have a consistent measure of left-right identity. In the World Values survey the ideological position of respondents is measured by where they choose to place themselves on a ten-point scale ranging from extreme left (1) to extreme right (10). The left-right ideological scale is particularly appropriate for cross national research since studies suggest that it has greater validity in multiparty contexts than the directional component of party identification (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Thomassen 1976; Holmberg 1994). This scale also allows consistent comparison within a country at different periods of time. This avoids the problems of reliably coding voting on a left-right scale for parties experiencing rapid political change, such as during the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. The 'ideological gap' is calculated as the difference in the mean self-placement of women and men on these scales; for example, if women place themselves at 5.5 and men at 6.8, the resultant ideological gap is estimated at +1.3. For consistency in the analysis a negative figure conventionally indicates that women are more rightwing than men within that country (the traditional gender gap), while a positive figure denotes that women are more leftwing than men (the modern gender gap). ANOVA tests the statistical significance of the differences in the group means within each country.

The analysis of gender differences in left-right ideology in the early 1980s, the early 1990s and the mid-1990s show an important development: the results in Table 4 confirm the conventional wisdom about women's greater conservatism in the past. In the early 1980s women did see themselves as slightly more rightwing than men in two-thirds of the countries where we have comparable data, and this pattern was particularly strong in Italy, Spain and France. By the early 1990s the evidence shows that women had moved center-left in about half the countries under comparison, with the modern gender gap becoming evident in the U.S., Norway and the Netherlands. By the last wave of

the survey in 1995-7 this pattern is even clearer as women were on balance more leftwing than men in all nations but Spain (where women have still become less conservative over time) and South Korea (which shows a mixed pattern over time and no significant difference in the mid-1990s).

[Table 4 about here]

Is this development evident in a wider range of societies? To explore this issue we also compared the ideological gap in 57 nations with data drawn from the most recent WVS surveys available in the early or mid 1990s. The results confirm that by the 1990s women were significantly more rightwing than men in only a few societies (six out of 57 nations). In most nations women proved largely similar to men, but they were significantly more leftwing in fourteen countries. If women were once consistently more conservative than men, as early studies suggest, this is now no longer the case. Most of the countries displaying the modern gender gap in ideology are postindustrial societies. Although this phenomenon has received most attention in America, it is striking that the size of the ideological gap in the U.S. is far from exceptional, since even larger gaps are evident in comparable democracies like Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark.

#### **Testing the Developmental Theory of Gender Realignment**

To examine the reasons for gender realignment we need to analyze the effects of the generational, structural and cultural factors discussed earlier. To do this we use ordinary least squared regression models with the 10-point left-right voting scale as the dependent variable. In all cases for consistency a negative coefficient indicates that women are more rightwing than men while a positive coefficient shows that they are more leftwing. In Model 1 we explore the impact of gender on the left-right voting scale without any controls. This indicates the direction and significance of the direct effect of gender on voting behaviour. Model 2 subsequently adds structural controls, including religiosity, labour force participation, education, age, and the respondent's socioeconomic status. Full details about the items and coding are provided in Appendix A. Model 3 adds controls for cultural factors, measured by support for post-material values, the women's movement and abortion, and attitudes towards government. The design aims to see whether gender remains a significant predictor of voting behavior after controlling for these factors. The results of the full models are given in detail in Tables 5-7 analyzing advanced industrial societies, post-communist and developing societies respectively. To explore variations within these

categories we then run the models for eighteen countries where we have the full dataset, only reporting the significance of gender on the vote, not the full range of control variables.

[Table 5 and Figure 3 about here]

Table 5 analyzed post-industrial societies. Model 1 confirms that gender was a significant predictor of voting choice in the 1990s, with women leaning left, confirming the existence of the modern gender gap. Model 2 shows that gender remains significant even after entering the structural controls. That is to say, the modern gender gap cannot be explained, as some previous research suggests (de Vaus and McAllister 1989) as simply the result of gender differences in religiosity, class, age or participation in the labor force. In established democracies the pattern of the gender gap by age group did prove to be an important indicator of generational change: among the youngest group women are far more leftwing than men (see Figure 3) whereas among the over 65s the gender gap reversed, with women more conservative. Given the process of generational turnover this promises to have profound consequences for the future of the gender cleavage, moving women further left. Lastly Model 3 also enters the attitudinal variables, which reduced the effect of gender although this still remained significant. Support for post-materialist values and for the women's movement were the most important effects although all these variables proved significant. What this suggests, as Studlar et al. (1998) noted in their comparison of the US, Australia and Britain, is that the modern gender gap is more strongly the product of attitudinal rather than structural variables. That is, women in advanced industrialized societies are shifting left because of a broad process of value change, particularly the shift towards more egalitarian attitudes associated with post-materialism and feminism.

[Table 6 about here]

Table 6 analyzed the results for post-communist societies. As expected we found a different pattern, with the traditional gender gap being prevalent in the 1990s. Women proved more rightwing than men even after controlling for differences in social structure and in political attitudes. Cultural factors proved particularly weak, perhaps indicating low levels of support for feminism in these nations, and the weak linkages between the organized women's movement and the new parties of the left. The pattern by age group was also far more polarized than in established democracies (see Figure 2), since the women who leaned further to the left than men were found between

both the youngest and oldest cohorts. The pattern of secular generational trends in these nations is therefore more complex than we can predict in developed societies. When we compared the same models in developing societies, the results confirmed the persistence of the traditional gender gap, even after controlling for structural and cultural factors, as shown in Table 7.

[Table 7 about here]

As observed earlier, however, there are important variations within these broad categories of societies, and in table 8 we break down the results further to compare patterns for the eighteen nations where we have the complete set of control variables. The results in Model 1 confirm that by the 1990s among advanced industrialized societies women proved significantly more leftwing than men in six out of ten nations, there was no significant difference in three countries, and in one (Finland) women were more rightwing. The modern gender gap was maintained in the US, France and Germany after introducing structural controls, but it became insignificant in every country except the US once we controlled for cultural attitudes. This reinforces the earlier conclusions that structural and cultural factors play a role in the development of the modern gender gap, but of these it is value change, which seems the most direct influence. Moreover in Post-communist societies the only significant gender gap at the national level was found in East Germany, which closely reflects the West German tendency for women to lean to the left. Lastly in the four developing nations analyzed here, the traditional gender gap proved strong and significant, even after introducing controls, in two (Chile and Mexico). This again reinforces the finding that any global analysis of the gender gap needs to take account of the type of society, as well as individual-level factors. The process of modernization has had profound effects on men and women's lives, and the modern gender gap is strongly linked to the process of economic and political development.

### **Conclusions and Discussion**

When women were first enfranchised it was anticipated by many contemporary observers that they would vote as a bloc, thereby transforming party politics. In the event, this did not happen. Nevertheless, even modest gender differences in the electorate have often proved significant, and sometimes decisive, for the political outcome. The modern gender gap is now an established feature of the American political landscape although, despite the extensive body of research on the topic, the precise reasons for this

phenomenon continue to remain a puzzle. Much of the previous literature has attempted to explain the American gender gap by particular factors specific to US politics, such as party polarization over issues like ERA, or the heightened salience and highly polarized politics of abortion or welfare reform (Costain and Berggren 1998; Mueller 1988). Yet if due to more general structural and cultural trends common to post-industrial societies, as we suggest, we would expect to find similar patterns of gender realignment emerging elsewhere. Commenting on the comparative evidence in the early 1970s, Inglehart argued that gender realignment in advanced industrialized societies might occur in future:

*"We might conclude that sex differences in politics tend to diminish as a society reaches an advanced industrial phase. Or, going beyond our data, one could interpret the cross-national pattern as reflecting a continuous shift to the Left on the part of women: in the past they were more conservative than men: in Post-Industrial society, they may be more likely to vote for the Left. The relative conservatism of women is probably disappearing."* (Inglehart 1977:229).

Norris's research based on the 1983 Eurobarometer expressed cautious views about the existing pattern of gender differences in Europe at the time but also speculated that the conditions might prove ripe for change:

*"We can conclude that there was no voting gap in European countries in recent years; overall women and men were very similar in their electoral choices and ideological positions. There is a potential gender gap, however, as women and men disagree significantly on a range of issues. These policy differences have not yet translated into voting differences, but they could, given certain circumstances."* (Norris 1988)

By the 1990s these predictions appear to be confirmed. The developmental theory emphasizes that common developments transforming the lifestyles and values of women and men in postindustrial societies have produced changes in party preferences. To support this theory, this study established three main patterns. First, we found that in established democracies as recently as the early 1980s, women tended to be more conservative than men, in their ideology and voting behaviour, as earlier studies suggested. The *traditional* gender gap continued to be evident in many postindustrial societies as late as the 1980s. Moreover this pattern persists today in many developing societies where women continue to prove slightly more rightwing than men, even after including a range of social

controls.

Yet, most importantly, we also found that in many postindustrial societies by the 1990s women have shifted leftwards, producing a *modern* gender gap similar to that which currently exists in the United States. It should be stressed that the process is far from uniform, probably reflecting particular circumstances within each country, such as the pattern of party competition, the predominant issue agenda, and the strength of the organized women's movement. Nevertheless by the mid-1990s we established that women are now no longer more conservative than men, and are often more left leaning, in many established democracies. In postindustrial societies the modern gender gap persists even after introducing a range of social controls but the size of the gap diminishes once we take into account cultural factors. This suggests that the modern gender gap is more strongly the product of cultural differences between women and men in their value orientations, especially attitudes towards post-materialism and the women's movement, rather than differences in their lifestyles.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly for future developments, we demonstrated that in postindustrial societies the *modern* gender gap was strongest among the younger age groups while the *traditional* gender gap was evident among the elderly. If a generational rather than a life-cycle effect, as seems most likely, this suggests that the process of generational turnover will probably continue to move women leftwards. In the long-term, as younger voters gradually replace older generations, through secular turnover, the modern gender gap should therefore strengthen and consolidate in established democracies.

The results also carry important implications for understanding the emergence of the modern gender gap in the United States. The pattern indicates that the realignment in the U.S. is not *sui generis*, but represents a new gender cleavage becoming increasingly evident in other postindustrial societies, such as in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden, due to long-term secular changes in women and men's value orientations. As women are now increasingly engaged in public life, turning out at the ballot box in equal or greater numbers than men in many democracies, this promises to have significant consequences for patterns of party competition and for the future power of women at the ballot box. The gender gap in the United States has served to expand media attention and public debate about gendered issues, to heighten party competition in the attempt to gain 'the women's vote', and to



increase the attractions of nominating women for public office. Whether these consequences become apparent in future in other political systems remains to be seen.

## Tables

**Table 1**

**The Gender Gap in the Early 1970s**

<b>Society</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Gap</b>
Italy	44	30	-14
Germany	60	47	-13
Britain	50	41	- 9
Belgium	40	36	- 6
France	54	49	- 5
Netherlands	47	45	- 2
USA	32	37	+ 5

**Note:** Percentage supporting parties of the left

**Source:** Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution*, 1977: 228.

**Table 2**  
**Trends in the Voting Gap in the 1980s and 1990s**

	1981 Gap	1990 Gap	1995 Gap	Chg
Netherlands	.08	.51 **		.43
Belgium	-.39 **	-.08		.31
France	-.39 *	-.09		.30
Canada	.01	.23		.22
Britain	-.25	-.03		.22
W.Germany	-.06 *	.16 *	.05	.22
Ireland	-.28	-.20		.08
USA	.14	.15 **	.35 **	.01
Spain	-.08	-.21 *	-.28 **	-.13
Denmark	.84 **	.69 **		-.15
Italy	.39 **	.05		-.34

**Note:** The difference between the mean position of women and men on the 10-point voting scale. A negative figure represents women more rightwing than men. A positive figure represents women more leftwing than men. Sig. \*\* p.01 \* p.05

**Source:** World Values Surveys

**Table 3**  
**The Size and Direction of the Gender Gap in Voting, 1990s**

	Advanced Industrialized Societies	Post-Communist Societies	Developing Societies
Japan	.81**		
Ireland	.80**		
Denmark	.69**		
Austria	.54**		
Netherlands	.51**		
E.Germany		.36**	
USA	.35**		
Norway	.30**		
Sweden	.26**		
Switzerland	.24**		
Canada	.23**		
Argentina			.19**
Ukraine		.09	
W.Germany	.05		
Italy	.05		
Lithuania		.03	
N.Ireland	.01		
S.Africa			.01
Portugal	.01		
Iceland	.00		
Brazil			-.01
Romania		-.02	
Britain	-.03		
Australia	-.03		
France	-.03		
Taiwan			-.04
Hungary	-.06		
Belgium	-.08		
Poland		-.10	
Estonia		-.10	
India			-.11
Mexico			-.12
Finland	-.24**		
Spain	-.28**		
Chile			-.32**
Turkey			-.35**

**Note:** The voting gap is measured as the difference between the mean position of women and men on the 10-point voting scale. A negative figure represents women more rightwing than men. A positive figure represents women more leftwing than men. \*\* p. Sig .01

**Source:** World Values Surveys

**Table 4**  
**Trends in the Ideology Gap**

	1981	1990	1995
Denmark	.43	.20	
Iceland	.27	.35	
Canada	.23	-.06	
Australia	.21		.07
South Korea	.15	-.13	-.02
Japan	.06	.00	.17
USA	-.03	.22	.14
Norway	-.03	.11	.13
Netherlands	-.03	.43	
West Germany	-.06	.06	.26
Britain	-.06	.19	
Sweden	-.10	-.01	.06
Argentina	-.11	-.03	.05
N.Ireland	-.13	.40	
Ireland	-.18	-.13	
Belgium	-.20	-.22	
Italy	-.41	-.19	
Spain	-.62	-.39	-.18
France	-.64	-.15	

**Note:** The ideology gap is measured as the difference between the mean position of women and men on the 10-point left-right ideology scale. A negative figure represents women more rightwing than men. A positive figure represents women more leftwing than men.

**Source:** World Values Surveys

**Table 5**  
**The Effects of Gender on Leftwing Voting Scale, 1990s**  
**Advanced Industrialized Societies**

	Model 1 Gender Only	Model 2 Gender + Social Structure	Model 3 Gender + Social Structure + Cultural Attitudes
<b>Female</b>	<b>.04 **</b>	<b>.05 **</b>	<b>.02 *</b>
SOCIAL STRUCTURE			
Religiosity		-.17 **	-.14 **
SES		-.15 **	-.16 **
Age		-.03 *	-.01
Education		.04 **	-.01
Paid Employment		.02	.02
ATTITUDES			
Post-Materialism			.16 **
Support for Women's Movement			.14 **
Support for Abortion			.06 **
Left-Right Attitude Scale			.08 **
R2.	.01	.06	.13

Note: Sig. \*.05 \*\*.01. The models are based on OLS regression analysis. The figures are standardized Beta coefficients representing the impact of the independent variables on the left-right 10-point voting scale.

See Appendix A for details.

**Source:** World Values Surveys

**Table 6**  
**The Effects of Gender on Leftwing Voting Scale, 1990s**  
**Post-Communist Societies**

	Model 1 Gender Only	Model 2 Gender + Social Structure	Model 3 Gender + Social Structure + Cultural Attitudes
<b>Female</b>	<b>-.07 **</b>	<b>-.08 **</b>	<b>-.08 **</b>
<b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE</b>			
Religiosity		.08 **	.08 **
SES		-.06	-.04
Education		.16 **	.13 **
Age		-.05	-.04
Paid Employment		.05	.05
<b>ATTITUDES</b>			
Post-Materialism			.01
Support for Women's Movement			.02
Support for Abortion			.05
Left-Right Attitude Scale			.22 **
R2.	.01	.05	.10

Note: Sig. \*.05 \*\*.01. The models are based on OLS regression analysis. The figures are standardized Beta coefficients representing the impact of the independent variables on the left-right 10-point voting scale.

See Appendix A for details.  
Source: World Values Surveys

**Table 7**  
**The Effects of Gender on Leftwing Voting Scale, 1990s**  
**Developing Societies**

	Model 1 Gender Only	Model 2 Gender + Social Structure	Model 3 Gender + Social Structure + Cultural Attitudes
<b>Female</b>	<b>-.02</b>	<b>-.05 **</b>	<b>-.06 **</b>
<b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE</b>			
Religiosity		.01 *	.01
SES		-.05 *	-.04 **
Age		.11 **	.10 **
Education		.01	.01
Paid Employment		.11 **	.11 **
<b>ATTITUDES</b>			
Post-Materialism			.16 **
Support for Women's Movement			.06 *
Support for Abortion			.05 *
Left-Right Attitude Scale			.03
R2.	.01	.02	.05

Note: Sig. \*.05 \*\*.01. The models are based on OLS regression analysis. The figures are standardized Beta coefficients representing the impact of the independent variables on the left-right 10-point voting scale. See Appendix A for details.

**Source:** World Values Surveys



**Table 8**  
**The Effects of Gender on Left Voting Scale, 1990s**  
**By Nation**

	Model 1 Gender Only	Model 2 Gender + Social Structure	Model 3 Gender + Social Structure + Culture
<b>Advanced Industrialized Societies</b>			
USA	.13 **	.15 **	.13 **
France	.12 *	.13 **	.06
W.Germany	.12 *	.13 **	.06
Sweden	.10 *	.06	.05
Switzerland	.10 *	.05	.01
Norway	.06	.02	-.01
Australia	-.01	-.01	-.04
Spain	-.03	-.04	-.04
Finland	-.09 *	.01	.03
<b>Post Communist Societies</b>			
E.Germany	.11 **	.09 *	.08 *
Estonia	.02	.01	.01
Ukraine	.02	.08	.09
Lithuania	-.04	.01	.01
Poland	-.05	-.03	-.03
<b>Developing Societies</b>			
Argentina	.18	.15	.14
Brazil	-.02	.01	.01
Chile	-.11 *	-.09 *	-.10 *
Mexico	-.13 *	-.14 **	-.14 *

Note: Sig. \*\*.05 \*\*.01. The models are based on OLS regression analysis. The figures are standardized Beta coefficients representing the impact of gender on the left-right 10-point voting scale.

Model 1 includes only gender without any controls.

Model 2 adds controls for religiosity, labour force participation, education, age and the respondent's socioeconomic status.

Model 3 adds controls for support for post-materialist values, support for the women's movement, for abortion and for left-right attitudes toward the role of government in the economy.

See Appendix A and Table 8 for details.

Source: World Values Surveys

**Appendix A: Items and Coding of Variables**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Coding</b>
Left-Right Voting Scale	V210. <i>If there were a national election tomorrow, for which party on this list would you vote?</i>	10-point scale based on the Inglehart-Hubert (1995) expert party location scale
Left-Right Ideology Scale	V123. <i>In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?</i>	10 point scale where 1 = Most Left, 10 = Most Right
Political Discussion Scale	V37. <i>When you get together with friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently (3), occasionally (2), or never (1)?</i>	3-point scale
SES	V221. <i>In which profession/occupation do you, or did you, work?</i>	9-point scale from Employer/manager with 10+ employees (1) to Unskilled Manual Worker (9).
Labour Force Participation	V220. <i>Are you employed now or not?</i>	Fulltime, part-time or self-employed (1), other (0).
Education	V217. <i>What is the highest educational level that you have attained?</i>	9-point scale from no formal education (1) to university level with degree (9).
Religiosity	V181. <i>Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services these days?</i>	7 -point scale from More than once a week (1) to Practically never, never (7)
Age		Continuous Years
Left-Right Attitudes Scale	<p>Now I'd like you to tell me your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? 1 means you agree completely with the statement on the left: 10 means you agree completely with the statement on the right; and if your views fall somewhere in between, you can choose a number in between.</p> <p>V126. <i>Private ownership of business and industry should be increased (1) or Government ownership of business and industry should be increased (10).</i></p> <p>V127. <i>The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for (1) or People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves (10).</i></p> <p>V128. <i>Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas (1) or Competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people (10)</i></p>	30-point scale summed from V126+v127+v128.

Support for Women's Movement	<i>I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence (4), quite a lot of confidence (3), not very much confidence (2) or none at all(1)?</i> ...V148 The Women's Movement	4-point scale
Abortion Scale	Please tell me for each of the following statements whether you think it can always be justified, never justified, or somewhere in-between, using this card.. V199 Abortion	10-point scale from Never justified (1) to Always justified (10).
Post-Materialism Scale	V1010 12 item Materialism/ Postmaterialism index	

Source: World Values Study 1995-6 Codebook

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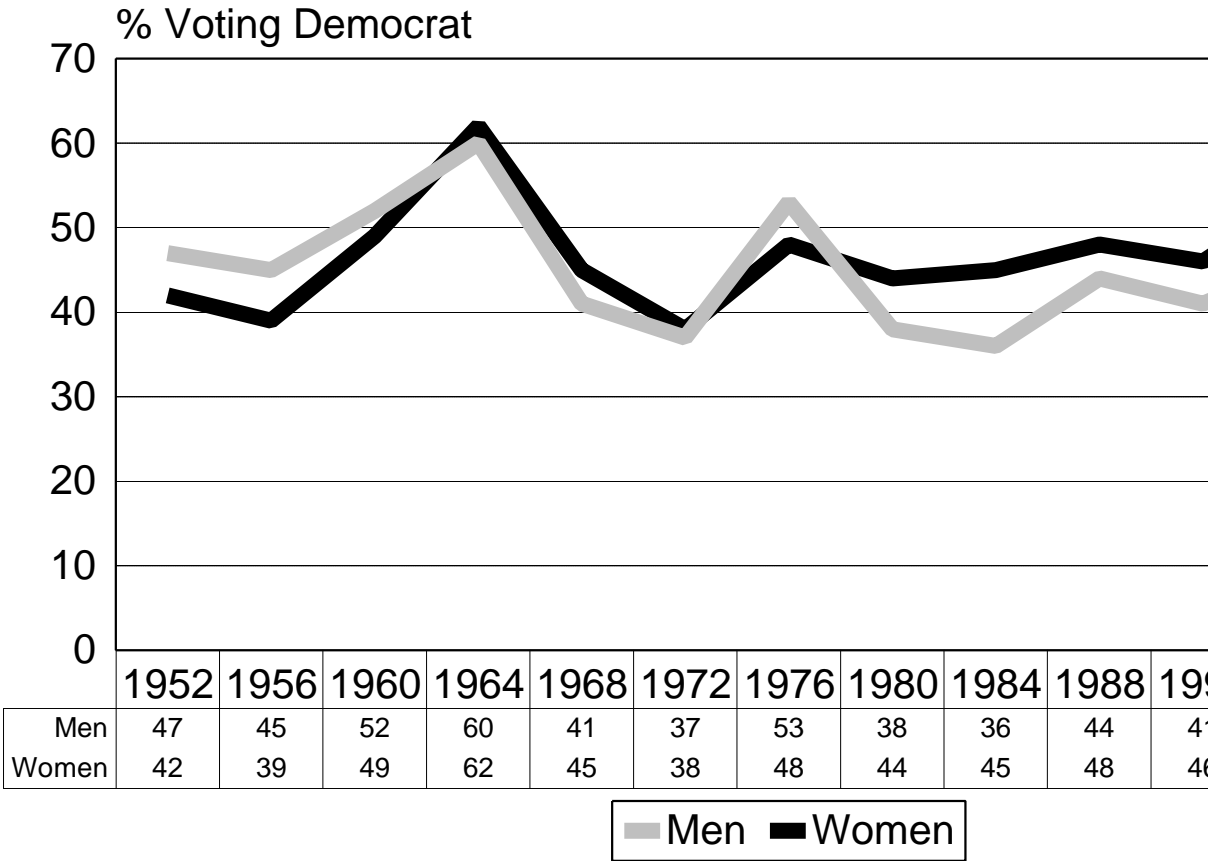
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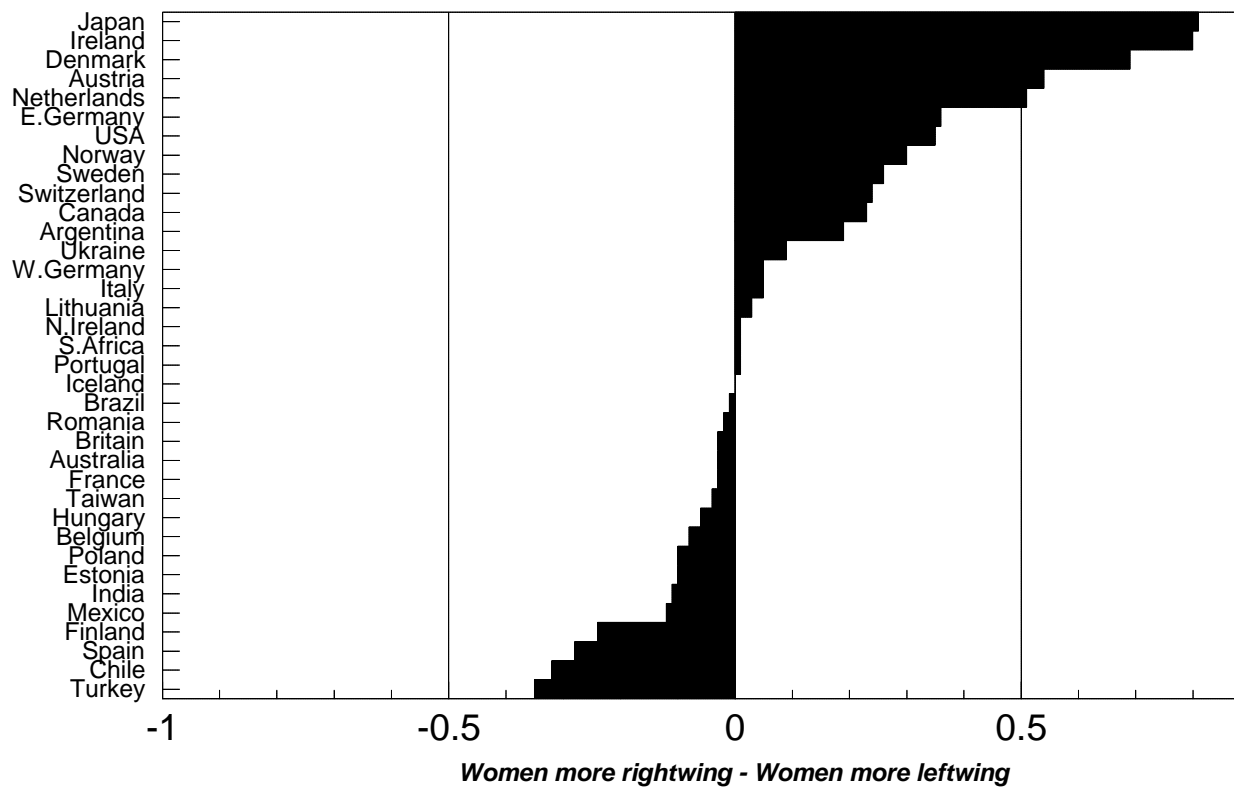
# Gender Gap in Voting

U.S. 1952-96



Source: Gallup Polls

# The Gender Gap in Voting, 1990s



Note: The difference between women and men on the 10-point voting scale.  
Source: World Values Surveys.

Figure 2: The Gender Gap by Age Group, 1990s

