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## How Women Vote: Exploring the Relationship Gender and Party Affiliation

### **Key Words:**

gender, Democrats, Republicans, party identification, gender gap

### **Description:**

The overwhelming majority of women identify with the Democratic party and vote for Democrats. There are a few exceptions to this generalization, which shows that gender is only a single factor in determining political identification, thus allowing the Republican party to still hold a significant portion of the female electorate.

### **Key Points:**

- The Democratic party has long been seen as the main champion for Women's rights issues in the United States. However, during certain periods of history, it was actually the Republican party that worked to increase the participation of women in politics (within existing legal and power structures).
- Women seem to be more effected by other forms of political affiliation more so than gender. Married, and historically more financially stable, women tend to skew more conservative than unmarried women.
- The majority of women holding elected office in the United States do so as Democrats. Furthermore, it is easier for women to be elected in more liberal districts, no matter their party.

- If voters use qualitative analysis of candidates to make voting decisions, it would make sense that there would be more women running as Democrats because of the larger population of women who are registered Democrats. At the risk of using circular logic, the same could be said about why there are more women as Democrats, than there are women as registered Republicans

**Brief:**

Ever since women were granted the right to vote with the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment, their place in American the electorate has been solidified by high levels of voter turnout. Women consistently turnout to vote in much larger droves than men do. The gap between female and male electoral turnout first began in the 1980s when women first started voting in similar proportions to men.<sup>1</sup> This is due to many different factors including: more women stay at home to parent than men meaning a higher amount of free time, women make up a larger portion of the population than men because they have longer life expectancies, and women, inhabiting a world where masculinity is the hegemon, may have a greater sense of responsibility when it comes to voting.

This increased turnout means that both Democrats and republicans are constantly vying for the support of the female vote. Contrary to popular knowledge, it was actually Republicans who first began reaching out to women in order for them to get involved with the political process.<sup>1</sup> The reason Republicans were more successful in getting women involved in the political process is because before 1980, the Republican party was the main surrogate for representing Women's rights, it wasn't until the 1980s when the Democrats actually caught up to—and eventually surpassed—Republicans in promoting women's rights.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Freeman, J. (2000). *A room at a time: How women entered party politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Although Democrats have generally taken the helm when it comes to female inclusion in decision making, there still remains a loyal coalition of women who still vote Republican. The main cause for this is the fact that often times race and marital status are still key factors when a voter makes a decision. Married women tend to vote more conservatively than single women, this is due to the fact that historically the Republican party has been the party that most often focuses on 'family values', and being married presupposed that an individual would have a family and would be that much more concerned with those issues.<sup>2</sup>

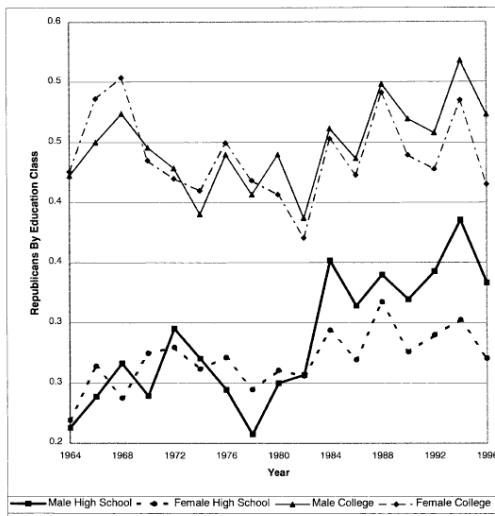


FIGURE III  
Reagan Democrats and Soccer Moms

Notes. This figure graphs by education the proportion of male and female respondents who are Republicans. We use information on 18–64 year old respondents from the National Election Studies surveys. Male College is the proportion of men with at least some college education who are Republican, Female College is the proportion of women with at least some college education who are Republican, Male High School is the proportion of men with no college education who are Republican, Female High School is the proportion of women with no college education who are Republican. A respondent is a Republican if his/her own stated party identification is Strong-, Weak-, or Independent-leaning Republican. Appendix 1 provides a full description of the National Election Studies sample.

Image

Source:

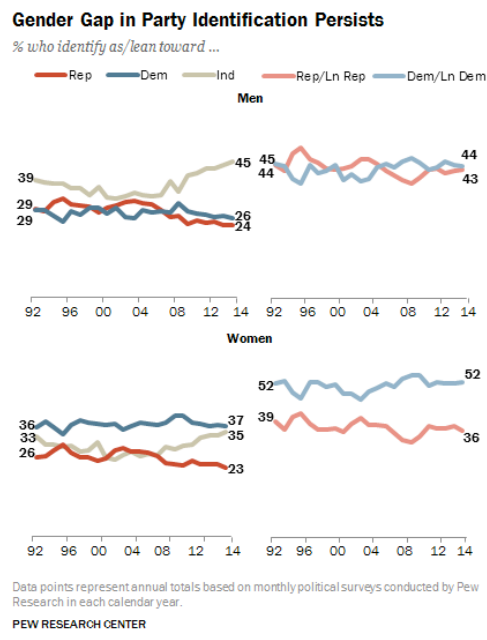
that family values became a prominent feature of Republican political campaigns [Whitehead 1993]).

**Children.** An important consequence of nonmarriage is the increasing prevalence of families in which children live with only

<sup>2</sup> Edlund, L. (n.d.). *Why Have Women Become Left-Wing? The Political Gender Gap and the Decline in Marriage*. The Quarterly Journal of Economics.

Furthermore, there has been an increase in the number of single-parent households or households in which women are the main bread winners. These households turn ingrained gender roles and make it so that women are not only focused on health care and education but the economy as well.<sup>3</sup> This shift in issues that women care about forces political parties to either change their tone or risk losing the female vote. The Republican party has done a particularly bad job at trying to appeal to women economically and that it tends to come off as “harsh, off-putting, and mean spirited.”<sup>3</sup>

While the Republican party has had issues appealing to women voters, the Democratic party is often seen as the main champion for women’s issues and, therefore, enjoys the majority of the female vote. Democrats enjoy a higher party identification among women voters than Republicans, about 52%



of registered women voters identify with the Democratic party, whereas only about 36% identify with the Republican party.<sup>4</sup>

Image Source: <http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/07/party-identification-trends-1992-2014/#gender>

<sup>3</sup> Rubin, J. (n.d.). The GOP’s problem with women voters. Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2013/05/29/the-gops-problem-with-women-voters/>

<sup>4</sup> Party Identification Trends, 1992-2014. (2015). Retrieved April 12, 2016, from <http://www.people-press.org/2015/04/07/party-identification-trends-1992-2014/#gender>

The disparity between party identification between the two parties can best be ascribed to the policies that each party pursues. The Democratic party tends to be very liberal when it comes to women's issues including reproductive rights in which they give the freedom to choose. Likewise, there persists the notion that Democrats, specifically Democratic women, will be more likely to support the reproductive rights of women. Whereas Republicans, and Republican women, would not necessarily play into the suppression of reproductive rights but may lean more heavily on other conservative issues.<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that the majority of women in congress and state legislatures tend to be Democrats which is reflective on the gender gap in party preference with women favoring Democrats far more than men.

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<sup>5</sup> Sanbonmatsu, K., & Dolan, K. (2008). Do Gender Stereotypes Transcend Party? *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(3), 485-494. doi:10.1177/1065912908322416

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## Relevant Websites

National Organization for Women: <http://now.org/>

Democratic Party: <http://www.democrats.org/>

Republican Party: <https://gop.com/>

Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewresearch.org/>