

THE 2012 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION GENDER GAP

By

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Abstract

The gender gap in presidential elections has been an important part of American politics for the past decades. This phenomenon in politics refers to the differences of men and women in party identification and voting behavior. This paper explains the origins of the gender gap dating back to the 1980s. It explains the patterns and analyzes the most significant issues in each presidential election. Finally, it analyzes the gender gap in the 2012 presidential election. It focuses on the issues that had the biggest difference and it explains why some issues are more susceptible to having a greater gender gap.

Introduction: Gender Gap Effect on the 2012 Presidential Election

The phrase “War on Women” is an expression that has been used in American politics to describe certain policies that restrict women’s rights. Some of these women’s rights include, but are not limited to topics, such as: abortion, birth control, violence, workplace discrimination and so on. Although some may argue that the notion of the “War on Women” does not exist, others believe that the “rhetoric” is a desperate attempt to gain female voters. The concept of the “War on Women” dates back to over forty years ago, when the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Roe v. Wade*. Now, forty years later, some politicians want to push through laws that ban most abortions and shut down women health centers, while others defend women’s right to choose others use these arguments to attempt to gain the women’s vote, according to John Sides and Lynn Vavreck, there is no link between gender attitudes and women’s rights. Men and women do not have differing attitudes on topics such as abortion and birth control; in fact there is no evident gender gap.

The gender gap refers to the difference in attitudes and behavior of men and women. It is the gap between the genders, not within a gender. Although, the gender gap exists in all aspects of life, it is irrefutable that such gender differences have played a tremendous role in recent political behavior and to an extent play a role in contemporary political controversies. In politics, the gender gap refers to the differences of men and women in party identification and voting behavior. The contemporary gender gap emerged in 1964, with the election of Lyndon B. Johnson, and since then has grown incrementally, as men than women, moved into the

Republican Party (Kaufman 2006). Yet, the gender gap in voting for presidential candidates has been apparent in every election since 1980; with a greater proportion of women than men preferring the Democrat candidate in each election (CAWP 2012). Even when men and women favor the same candidate, the percent of men supporting the candidate may be different than the percent of women doing so. The difference between these two percentages is the gender gap. The result of the 2012 presidential election was no exception, with women favoring Barack Obama by 10 percentage points more than men did (CAWP 2012). Nevertheless, such results are based on several factors that contribute to the political gap between men and women such as economic circumstances, group consciousness, and policy views, to name a few. By examining the political behavior of men and women in the 2012 presidential election we will be able to see the effects that the gender gap had on the outcome of the election. However, before analyzing and examining the 2012 presidential election we will take a closer look at the role of the gender gap in previous elections and what the major trends are leading up to today. In other words, what social, political, and ideological issues influence men and women's voting behavior and as a result may affect the political engagement of each. The main purpose of this thesis is to view gender differences in the voting behavior of men and women in presidential elections leading up to the most recent 2012 presidential election.

Chapter One: Gender Gap Trends in Previous Elections Since 1980

The contemporary gender gap emerged in 1964, with the election of Lyndon B. Johnson, and since then has grown incrementally (Kaufman 2006). With this election,

men became increasingly more conservative and more Republican, while women were more to remain in the Democratic camp (Norrander 1999). Thus, the gender division in recent presidential elections is not unusual. It follows a voting pattern that developed over the 50 years. The gender gap in voting for presidential candidates became more consistent and significant since 1980, with a greater proportion of women than men preferring the Democratic candidate in each election (CAWP 2012). When women's votes and men's votes are similar there is no gender gap. However, when their votes diverge there is an emerging gender gap (Manza 1998). There has been a gender gap between 4 and 11 percentage points in every presidential election since 1980 (CAWP 2014). Though, there has been similar patterns, the gender gap varies from election to election.

Men and women are important political actors with recognizable political differences. They have disparate attitudes on a variety of issues. Since the 1980s the differences between men and women have been persistent in regards to vote choice, party identification, and presidential performance ratings (Dittmar 2014). These differences have an important impact on political significance. Ultimately they can help determine political agendas and election outcomes (Box-Steffensmeier 1997). By understanding and analyzing the over time change in the gender gap, we can understand the gender gap in a more general view. The variations in gender differences over time can reveals trend that continuously occur up until the most recent elections.

1980 Presidential Elections

In the three presidential elections that occurred in the 1980s (1980, 1984, 1988) there was an average of 7 percentage points difference in gender voting results. In the 1980 presidential election, between Ronald Reagan (R) and Jimmy Carter (D) there was a gender gap of 8 percentage points, 46 percent of women voted for Reagan, while 54 percent of men voted for Reagan, (Dittmar 2014). Women were not only less supportive of Ronald Reagan, but it is during this time that they were also less likely to consider themselves Republican (Shapiro 1986). Women actually preferred candidate Jimmy Carter, thus it is during this election that gender has a significant association with a specific candidate.

During the 1980 election, Republican candidate Ronald Reagan focused his campaign on his opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, support for traditional family values, as well as an aggressive policy of military containment of Soviet-style communism (Manza 1998). These themes, many of which have become the commonly known stereotype of the Republican Party, are presumed to be one of the important factors that contributed to the alienation of a large number of women voters who have not moved into to the Republican fold as men have done. The aftermath of the 1980 presidential election essentially led to party polarization due to extent of gender related issues, which in turn created the partisan gender gap (Gillon 2014). Many believed that due to Reagan's strong opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment women would not be as likely to vote for Reagan. However, that was not the case according to Barbara Norrande. The women's issues targeted in the Equal Rights Amendment did not explain the gender gap, both genders had the same

position on these issues (Norrander 1999). Many scholars believe that the emergence of the gap during this time, in particular, was due to the change of women's policy preferences as they became more and more financially and psychologically independent from men. According to Kaufmann, the partisan gender gap was caused by the increased salience of social welfare inclinations in determining the different partisan identifications (Kaufmann 1999).

1984 and 1988 Presidential Election

By the 1984 presidential election, the gender gap gradually decreased 2 percentage points and incumbent Ronald Reagan was reelected. During this election 56 percent of women voted for Reagan, while 62 percent of men voted for Reagan (Dittmar 2014). In the 1984 presidential election the majority of women voted in favor of the Republican candidate. The Democratic Party was under the impression that by nominating the first woman as a major-party vice presidential candidate that they could win the women's vote. This was not the case. Public opinion polls demonstrated many women favored Reagan because they were focused on economic interests. By knowing this, the Reagan campaign began to target working women, whether single or married. Reagan's campaign strategy was competent enough, thus resulting in his re-election with a majority of not only the male vote but also the female vote. Moving forward, gender differences continued to hold steady. In the 1988 presidential elections there was a 7 percentage point difference, 57 percent of men voting for George H.W. Bush and 50 percent of women voting for George H.W. Bush (Dittmar 2014). Through the 1980s, men were characterized as having more

conservative policy views than women. It was this decade that set in motion the emergence of the gender gap. Also by the 1980s gender differences in voting participation disappeared as women were equally as likely to vote as men.

1992 and 1996 Presidential Election

Transitioning into the 1990s the gender gap continued to shape the voting behavior in presidential elections. During the 1990s several issues combined to help explain the gender gap, issues such as the economy, social programs, and ideology (Chaney, Alvarez, and Nagler 1996). In the presidential election of 1992, there was a gender gap of 4 percentage points. Democrat Bill Clinton received 45 percent of the female vote and 41 percent of the male vote (Dittmar 2014). As in previous elections, women favored the Democratic candidate. These results were due to the differences on issues between men and women. The major differences were based on distinctive issue preferences rather than politicization issues. Four years later, presidential campaigns began to pay more attention to women voters in hopes of winning the female vote. In 1996, both parties wanted to appeal to female voters, thus demonstrating that gender would be of prime importance during this election. The results of the 1996 presidential elections had the highest gender gap difference since 1980. There was an 11 percentage point difference with 54 percent of women and 43 percent of men voting for Democrat Bill Clinton. Both men and women again had differentiating priorities on the main issues impacting this election. Among the leading issues were the economy and jobs. Nevertheless, men were more concerned

with the budget deficit and taxes; while women were more concerned for Medicare, Social Security and education (Frankovic 1996).

2000 Presidential Election

To no surprise, following the same pattern as the 1996 presidential election, the presidential elections of 2000 contained a similar outcome. During this election there was a gender gap of 10 percentage points. The winner, George W. Bush, received 43 percent of the female vote, while 53 percent of men voted for George W. Bush (Dittmar 2014). Quite similar to previous elections female voters favored Democrat Gore in all demographic categories. The gender gap during this election had an imperative role for both the Democratic and Republican candidate as more women (52 percent) were registered to vote than men (50 percent) (Voter News Services 2001). Evidently the candidates of both parties were attempting to captivate the support of women voters. George W. Bush did so by exemplifying a compassionate conservatism side. George W. Bush's campaign created a seemingly compassionate view, due to the notion that the women voters are more concerned with compassionate issues such as education, health care, and poverty, to name a few (Kaufman 1999).

2004 Presidential Election

In the 2004 presidential elections, there was a small decrease in the gender gap. President George W. Bush (R) received 48 percent of the women's vote and 55 percent of the vote from men resulting in a gender gap of 7 percentage points (Dittmar 2014). The 2004 presidential elections was consistent with results of

previous elections. However, it was smaller than the 10-point gap of the 2000 presidential elections. This time around President Bush was able to increase his support among women vote to 48 percent (CAWP 2004). The gender gap was not concentrated in one subgroup; rather it was present in each demographic category. In every subgroup such as race, age, education, etc. women were less likely to vote for George W. Bush than men (CAWP 2004). During this presidential election it was estimated that eight million more women than men would vote. Although George W. Bush won the 2004 presidential election, Democratic candidate, John Kerry, had a better support from women at 51 percent (CAWP 2012). While Kerry did manage to obtain the majority of the women's vote he fell short compared to the percent of women's votes that Al Gore received in the 2000 presidential election. According to Lois Duke Whitaker, Bush was able to increase his percentage of the women's vote by having the vote of "security moms." After the terrorist's attacks on September 11, 2001, women, as well as men, became more focused on issues of national security. The vote of "security moms" played an imperative role during this election, and it is one of the reasons why Bush was able to defeat Kerry (Whitaker 2008).

2008 Presidential Election

Once again in the 2008 presidential election the gender gap was comparable to those of the last two decades. In the 2008 presidential election the winning Democratic candidate Barack Obama had a 7 points difference between the female

and male vote (CAWP 2012). However, President Obama won narrowly among men. Obama received 49 percent of the male vote, while the opposing candidate John McCain (R) received 48 percent, only a one-point difference. Although Obama won the majority of women's vote, he had fewer votes from white women than McCain. Yet Obama obtained a tremendous majority of the unmarried women's vote. The gender gap during this election was quite evident. Nevertheless, several factors also can affect the results such as race, marital status and age.

Chapter Two: What Major Issues Distinguish the Male and Female Vote?

As previously demonstrated, the gender gap in all presidential elections since 1980 have been similar. Gender is a considerable factor in presidential elections and even more so in competitive races. Evidently it is easy to identify the gender gap in every presidential election by simply taking the difference in the percentage of votes from men and women. However identifying and explaining the causes of these differences is complex and difficult. Since 1980, women are more likely than men to identify themselves as Democrats and vote for the Democratic presidential candidate. However, why is it that women relate more to the Democratic Party? According to Susan E. Howell and Christine L. Day, "...the source of the gender gap on one issue may not be the same as the source of the gender gap on another issue...the gender gap can be produced by compositional effects or by conditional effects" (Howell, Day 2000 p. 859). Compositional effects refer to women being more liberal than men due to certain characteristics that pertain more to them. For example, because women are poorer than men, women may be more likely to support Democratic candidates.

However, when the importance of an issue varies across the two sexes a conditional effect occurs (Howell, Day 2000). In this case, women may stress social welfare issues more strongly than men when choosing which candidate to support. According to Robert Y. Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan, the emergent differences in each gender can be explained by the way women have been socialized as caretakers and nurturers (Harpreet and Mahajan 1986). This could also explain why women may place more emphasis on social welfare positions. There are several explanations for male and female differences, but not a single explanation has been accepted. For example, one explanation is based on inherent value differences and biological differences between men and women (Howell, Day 2000). Socioeconomic variables also play a role in the cause of gender differences such as income, education, and occupation (Howell, Day 2000). Another explanation for the gender gap has been attributed to the rise of feminism. Over the years feminist consciousness has increased causing women to be more liberal and men more conservative (Howell, Day 2000). The causes and explanations for the gender gap in presidential elections are complex, yet they intertwine to help establish a more concrete explanation as to the causes of the gender gap.

Social Welfare and Military Issues

Throughout the past few decades several ongoing issues have fueled the gender gap in presidential elections. Men and women tend to have different priorities on certain political issues. Such differences on political issues may lead to a variation in the size of the gender gap. The gender gap has been noticeable in issues related to

human services and the role of government in different programs. Some examples of these compassion issues are health insurance, social security, public school, child care, and the homeless to name a few (Howell, Day 2000). Now, what exactly are the reasons for the distinctive stance on these issues for men and women?

Men and women have experienced different patterns of socialization that contribute to shaping their core values and behavior (Manza 1998). According to Manza, psychological research demonstrates that childhood socialization plays an important role in establishing certain behaviors. The differences in gender roles for boys and girls establish lifelong morals imposed during childhood. Women also experience motherhood, which connects them to their roles as mothers and essentially leads them to develop different moral and political priorities in comparison to men. The experience of motherhood also tends to make women more compassionate than men (Manza 1998). Ultimately, this heightened compassion may lead women to support government spending on social welfare programs as opposed to men who are not as supportive. It is for this reason that women tend to relate more to the Democratic Party, since it has stood for a greater governmental role in social welfare programs (Manza 1998). On the other hand, the Republican Party has been viewed as being more likely to use military force in its pursuit of geopolitical aims (Manza 1998). Since women are more likely to be nurturing they are less likely to favor the Republican Party.

As previously mentioned, women tend to favor policies that protect traditional values and family (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). Women as opposed to men are more

compassionate on issues such as income redistribution or other policies that help the poor. According to Robert Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan, “the average gender difference for these policies is just over three percent” (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986 p. 51). It is also assumed that women’s greater preference for government services is due to their reliance on the state. In other words, women are more likely than men to need the services provided by the government, and they are also more likely to rely on the public sector for employment (Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau and Nevitte 2001). As stated by Shapiro and Mahajan, “...women were more supportive of a guaranteed annual income, wage-price controls, equalizing wealth, guaranteeing jobs, government-provided health care, student loans, and rationing to deal with scarce goods” (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986 p. 51). Women’s support for social welfare services dates back to the Reagan Administration in which women became increasingly at odds with the Reagan Republicans and their “anti-statist” views (Kaufman and Petrocik 1999). Men on the other hand were prone to pocketbook voting, rather than women who cared for the economic well-being of society (Kaufman and Petrocik 1999). Overall, according to Susan E. Howell and Christine L. Day, “...women are more concerned with ensuring equality of opportunity and other equity issues, which predictably inclines them toward more liberal views on political issues” (Howell and Day 2000 p. 871).

Gender differences in political attitudes are also based on the socioeconomic status of each. Men, generally speaking, tend to earn more than women and are less likely to live in poverty. The fact that women earn less than men makes them more

likely to rely on the government's welfare services. According to Howell and Day (2000), women who tend to be more autonomous from men have the most different views. Women who have a higher educational and occupational status have the most different voting behavior compared to men.

Voting and party differences between men and women are based on attitude and political differences. Besides the differentiating gender views on social welfare programs another issue that reveals a significant gender gap is in military force. Women in general are less supportive of defense spending and the use of military force for any purpose. There are several issues linked to governmental use of force such as solving international disputes, defense spending and use of nuclear weapons. For example, in 2004 there was a gender gap due to the question of security during the Iraq War (Kaufman 2006). The salience of military concerns in the country has a greater effect on the gender gap as opposed to domestic concerns such as social welfare (Kaufman 2006).

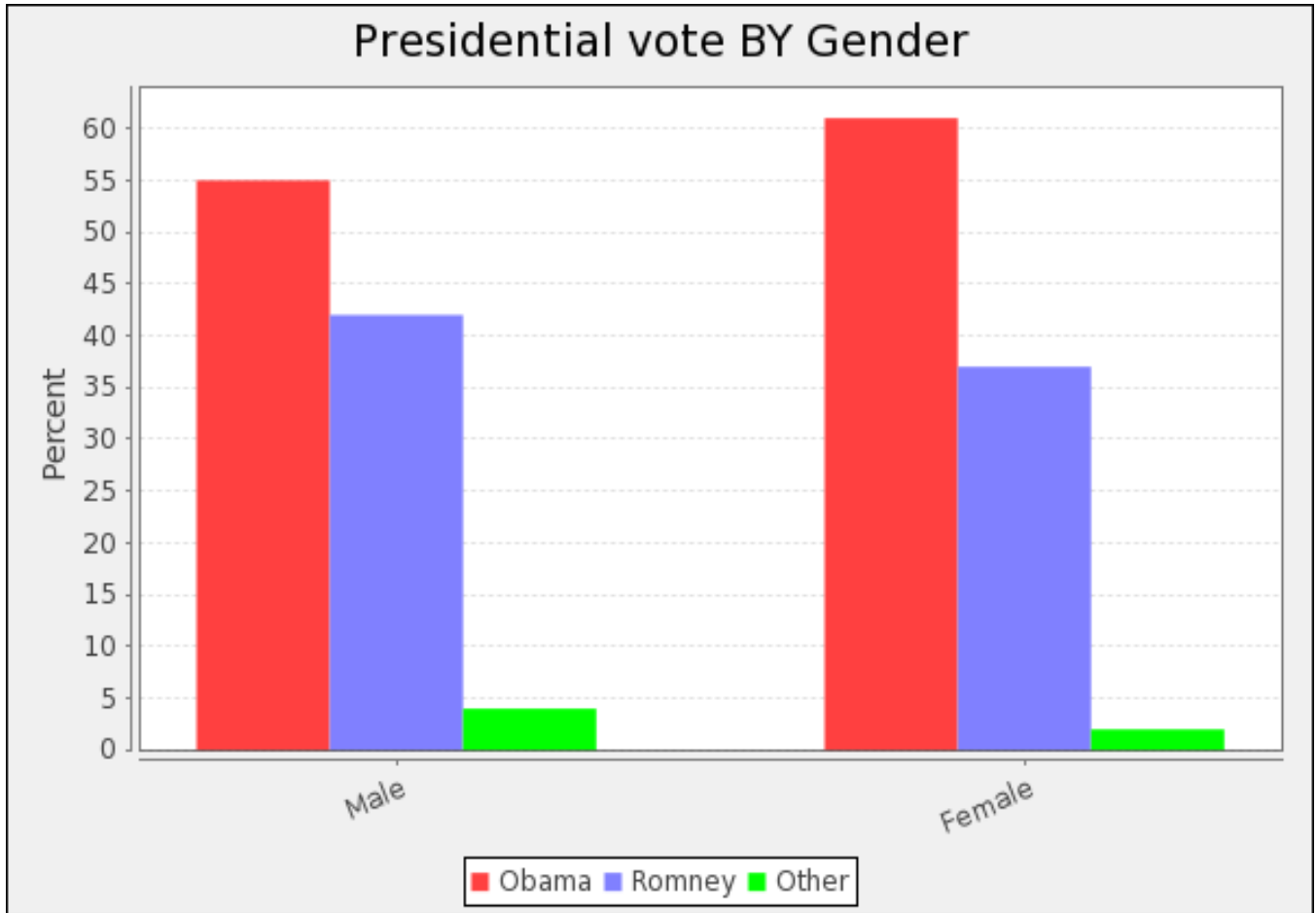
Another explanation for the gender gap, as stated by Howell and Day (2000), is feminism. During the 1980s, feminist consciousness began to increase and essentially establishing a gap as women became more liberal and men more conservative. This new trend in political party support stem from more polarized views on certain cultural and social issues. Nonetheless, feminism is not a clear explanation of political differences, because according to Howell and Day there is no causal connection between the two. However, although there is no causal direction, feminism can be used as an independent variable along with other issues (Howell and Day 2000).

Chapter Three: Gender Gap Outcome in the 2012 Presidential Elections

The gender gap has been apparent in several elections since 1980. It has been apparent in the way in which women and men view and react to contemporary issues. Throughout the previous presidential elections several gender gaps have been observed that compare the main differences between men's and women's voting behavior. Polls demonstrate that compared with men, women tend to be more inclined to favor a more activist government, more supportive of social services, more supportive of restrictions on firearms, and more supportive of same-sex marriage (CAWP 2012). All these factors contribute to gender differences in presidential elections.

The gender gap is a significant factor in presidential elections, and the preferences of men and women were once again noted in the 2012 election. I will now analyze survey data from 2012 elections. I will use the SETUPS analysis package to analyze the American National Election Studies Survey (ANES) from 2012. I will begin with measuring the size of gender gap in the presidential vote. I will then turn to the gender gap on issues. It is these issues that may be shaping preferences for the presidential vote, a topic I will turn to in chapter 4. As shown in Figure 1, the 2012 presidential election resulted in a 10-point percentage gap. This election's gender gap results were larger than any year except for the elections of 1996 with a gender gap of 11 percentage points. The winning candidate, Barack Obama, received 55 percent of the women's vote and 45 percent of men's vote (CAWP 2012). Figure 1, illustrates how men and women vote for both candidates.

Figure 1:



Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on 2012 ANES data

But what exactly were the main reasons for the gender gap during this election? When comparing Obama's and Romney's 2012 political positioning there is a drastic difference in the major political issues that trigger the gender gap. Some of the most controversial issues have been gay marriage, health care, gun control, and military intervention. Nonetheless, presidential elections now are highly partisan and the differences of men and women can be further explained by viewing party

identification. The impact of several of these issues plays a role in the agenda setting for each presidential candidate. It is therefore pertinent to know the political differences that may exist in a given group, in this case, the differences between both genders.

The 2012 presidential candidates were confronted with controversial issues that needed urgent attention. Some of the main issues discussed during this election were tax cuts and federal spending, defense spending, healthcare, and moral value issues such as gay rights. Based on the position of the presidential candidate on certain issues, voters decide whether they are in favor or against the candidate. Hence it is imperative to know what each candidate wants. When comparing Barack Obama's and Mitt Romney's platforms, it is easier to see the major differences among the two candidates. In terms of positions on the economy, Barack Obama wanted to repeal President George W. Bush's tax cuts for households earning more than \$250,000 and to lower taxes on manufacturing industry. He wanted stimulus spending and tax cuts to grow the economy and to cut spending and raise taxes on wealthy in order to reduce deficit. Contrary to Barack Obama, Mitt Romney wanted to make Bush's tax cuts permanent. He wanted to lower corporate tax rate across the board to 25 percent and cut taxes and regulations to encourage business. When it came to healthcare Barack Obama signed the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which calls for patient protections such as allowing coverage for pre-existing conditions, not letting insurers cancel policies when patients get sick, and requiring individuals to buy health insurance or pay a fine. Mitt Romney supported similar legislation when

he was governor of Massachusetts, but he believes that it is not appropriate for the federal government to impose such programs. Thus Romney wanted to repeal the Affordable Care Act. On the other hand, he proposed encouraging individuals to purchase their own health insurance rather than through their employers. Military intervention is another controversial issue. Barack Obama opposed wars and intervention. Mitt Romney believed that the president has the right to do what he believes makes the country safer. Finally when it came to gay rights, Barack Obama supports same-sex marriage and pushed Congress to repeal *Don't Ask Don't Tell*, which would allow gays to serve openly in the military. However, Mitt Romney opposes same-sex marriage and supports *Don't Ask Don't Tell*.

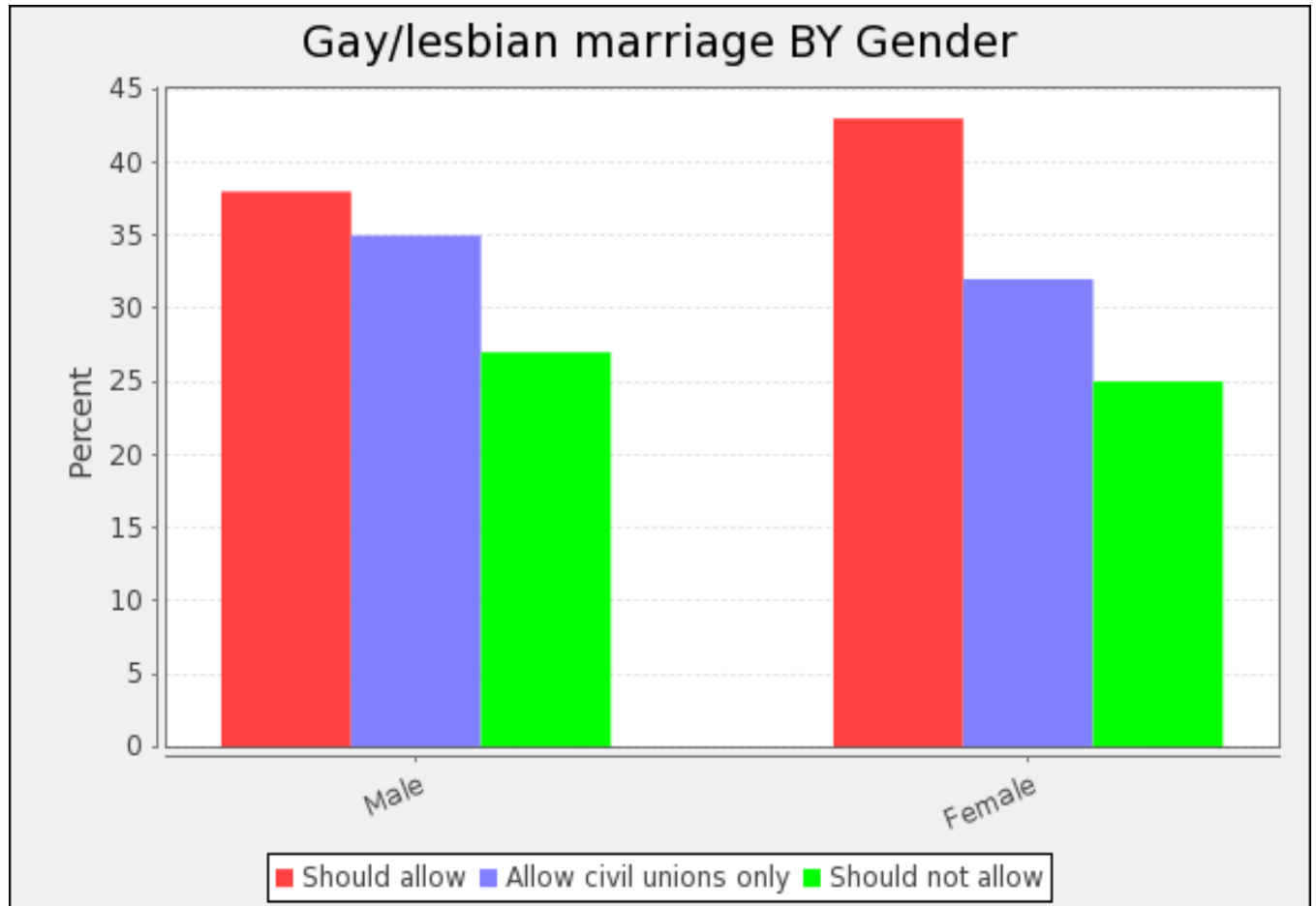
Gay Rights

Social issues tend to be some of the most controversial topics in society. A social issue is an undesirable condition that people believe needs to be corrected. The 2012 presidential election was encompassed by several contemporary social problems. Perhaps one of the most controversial social issues was gay rights. Gay marriage has been one of the top social issues for over a decade and has continued to be a salient issue. According to William N. Eskridge Jr. (1993), the same-sex marriage debate has been an ongoing twenty-year debate. While some argue that same-sex couples are not different than opposite-sex couples and should have the same legal treatment; others believe that by definition marriage requires a man and a woman, which makes it unconstitutional for same-sex couples to marry. There have been three main arguments in support of same-sex marriage. The first states that refusal to

allow same-sex marriage violates the due process clause of the U.S. Constitution. Additionally, others argue that by refusing to allow same-sex marriage, states are engaging in sex discrimination and violating the equal protection clause. Finally, another arguments states that classifying individuals due to their sexual orientation is unjust scrutiny, and no compelling state interest justifies treating others differently due to their sexual orientation (Eskridge 1993). Nevertheless, just as there are several arguments in favor of same-sex marriage, there are also several against same-sex marriage. Opponents of same-sex marriage argue that marriage is between opposite-sex couples and cannot include same-sex couples. Another argument against same-sex marriage is due to morals, and that only opposite-sex marriage is justified morally (Eskridge 1993).

As previously mentioned gay rights, more specifically same-sex marriage, was a controversial issue during the 2012 presidential elections. Barack Obama was a strong supporter of race, gender and sexual orientation equality. In his platform he also included open support of gay rights and marriage equality. Barack Obama also repealed the *Don't ask, don't tell* policy in order to allow openly gay soldiers to serve openly in the military. On the other hand, Romney cites the First and Ninth Amendments against same-sex marriage, and is in favor of the Defense of Marriage Act. Gender differences do not always tend to follow a predictable patter, but in terms of social issues such as gay marriage there is a slight divide. Figure 2, illustrates the results of the voting behavior of men and women during the 2012 presidential election in regards to gay marriage.

Figure 2:



Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on 2012 ANES data

Figure 2, demonstrates that women are more likely to favor same-sex marriage, in comparison to men. Although, the difference is not large it is still noticeable: 38 percent of men support gay marriage versus 43 percent of women. There was a gender gap of 5-percentage points difference in support of gay marriage. This observation supports the idea that men are more attracted to the Republican Party while women are more attracted to the Democratic Party (Norrander 1999).

Healthcare

Healthcare is another controversial issue in politics that no one can seem to agree on. This is a divisive issue that clearly splits Democrats and Republicans, especially when discussing cost and methods of access. During the 2012 presidential election the Obama Administration campaigned for an affordable and accessible healthcare plan for all Americans. His 2008 campaign also centered around health care, essentially leading to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010, requiring all Americans to have health insurance by 2014 or pay a penalty. Romney was not in favor of Obama's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 and wanted to dismantle the law. According to Gallup, four in five Americans took into consideration each candidate's views on healthcare reform when voting for a candidate. Although, women tend to favor government spending on social services in comparison to men, there is not much variation between the sexes in terms of healthcare. Figure 3 illustrates the 2012 gender results regarding government spending on healthcare. We can see that the percentages of each are almost identical meaning, there is no difference in opinion. Figure 4 illustrates the results of how each sex feels about the health insurance plan and again we can see that there is little difference in opinion.

Figure 3:

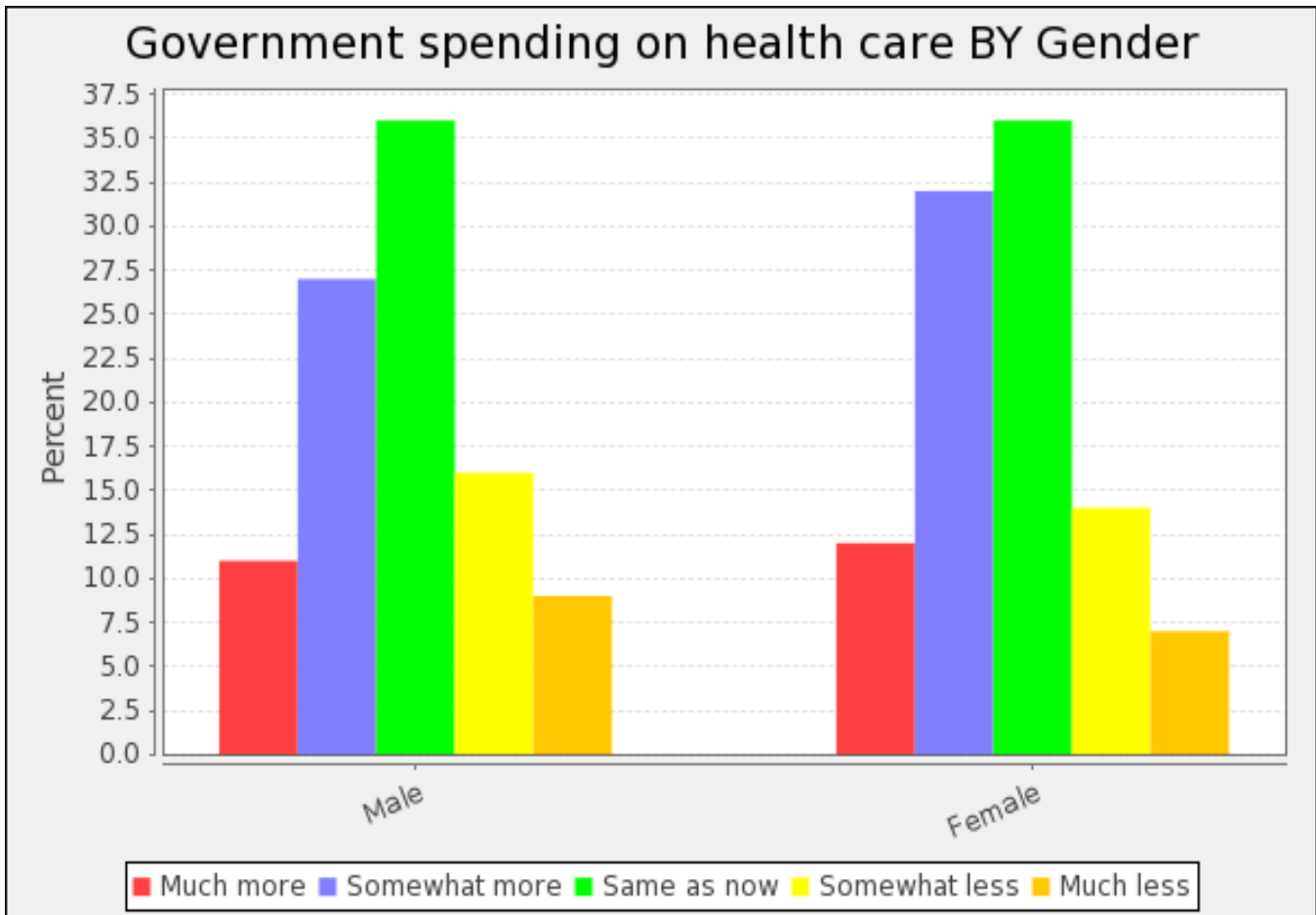


Figure 3 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on 2012 ANES data

Figure 4:

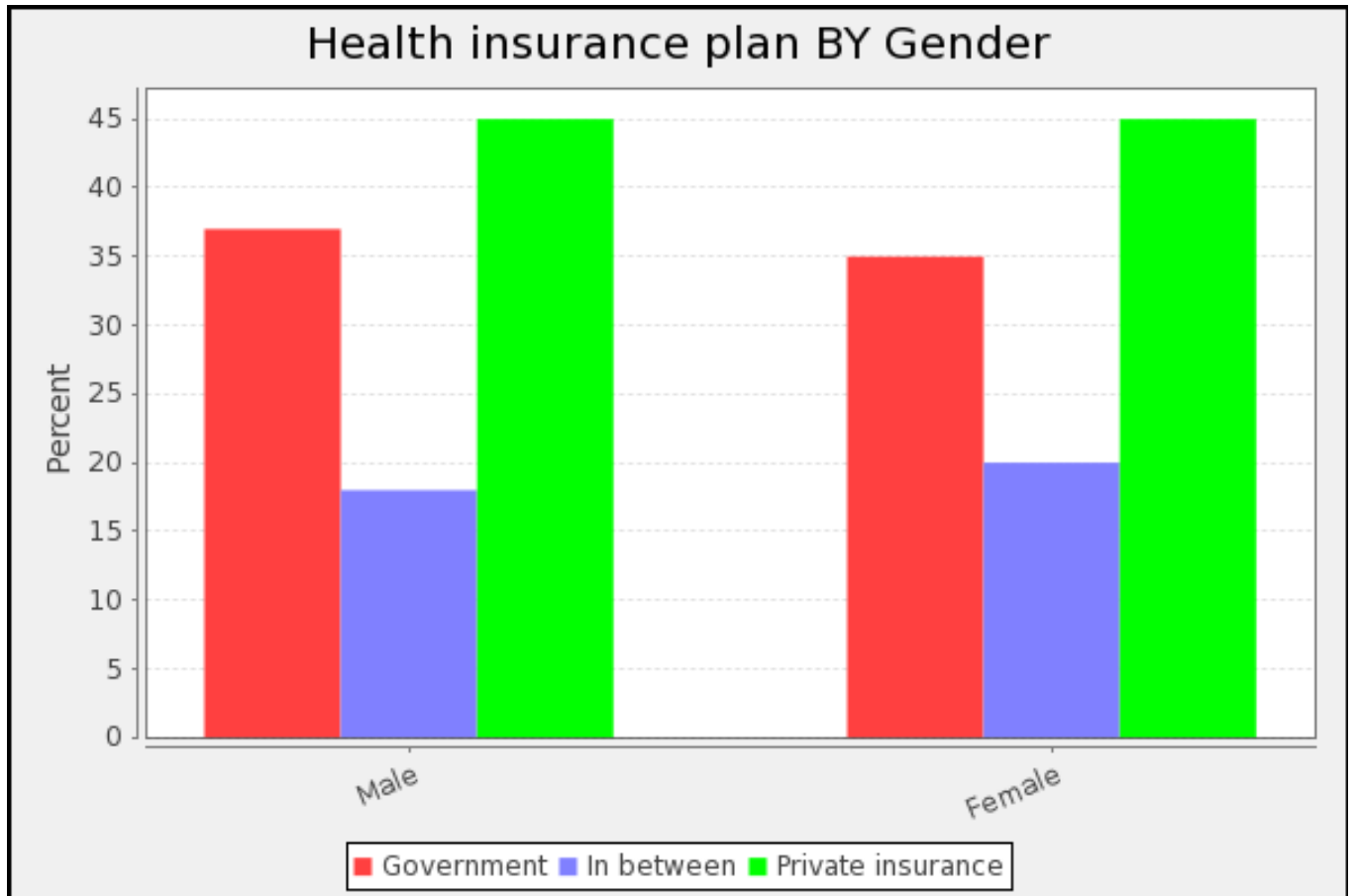


Figure 4 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on 2012 ANES data

Government Military Spending

The use of military force and defense spending are ongoing issues that divide the general public's opinion. The gender gap in regards to military force and spending through time has changed slightly. According to Richard C. Eichenberg (2000), women for the most part tend to be less supportive of defense spending and military force. This issue was imperative during the 2012 presidential elections. As previously mentioned Barack Obama opposes wars and military intervention, but Mitt Romney believes that the president has the right to do what is essential for the safety of the country. These two are completely different opinions because you have one candidate in favor of wars and one against. When we look at Figure 5, we can see that in terms of support for defense spending during 2012 both men and women believe that it should be greatly decreased. Thirty-three percent of men believe that defense spending should greatly decrease while 28 percent of women believe it should also greatly decrease. That is a gender gap of 5 percentage points. The results are opposite of standard gender gap expectation. However, this arises because women are slightly more likely to opt for the middle category.

Figure 6 illustrates the results of each gender regarding whether the government should reduce the deficit by cutting military spending. Thirty-nine percent of men favor that reducing the deficit by cutting military spending compared to 31 percent of women. There is a gender gap of 8 percentage points regarding cutting military spending to reduce the deficit but thus is an unexpected direction—men are more likely to favor cutting military spending.

Figure 5:

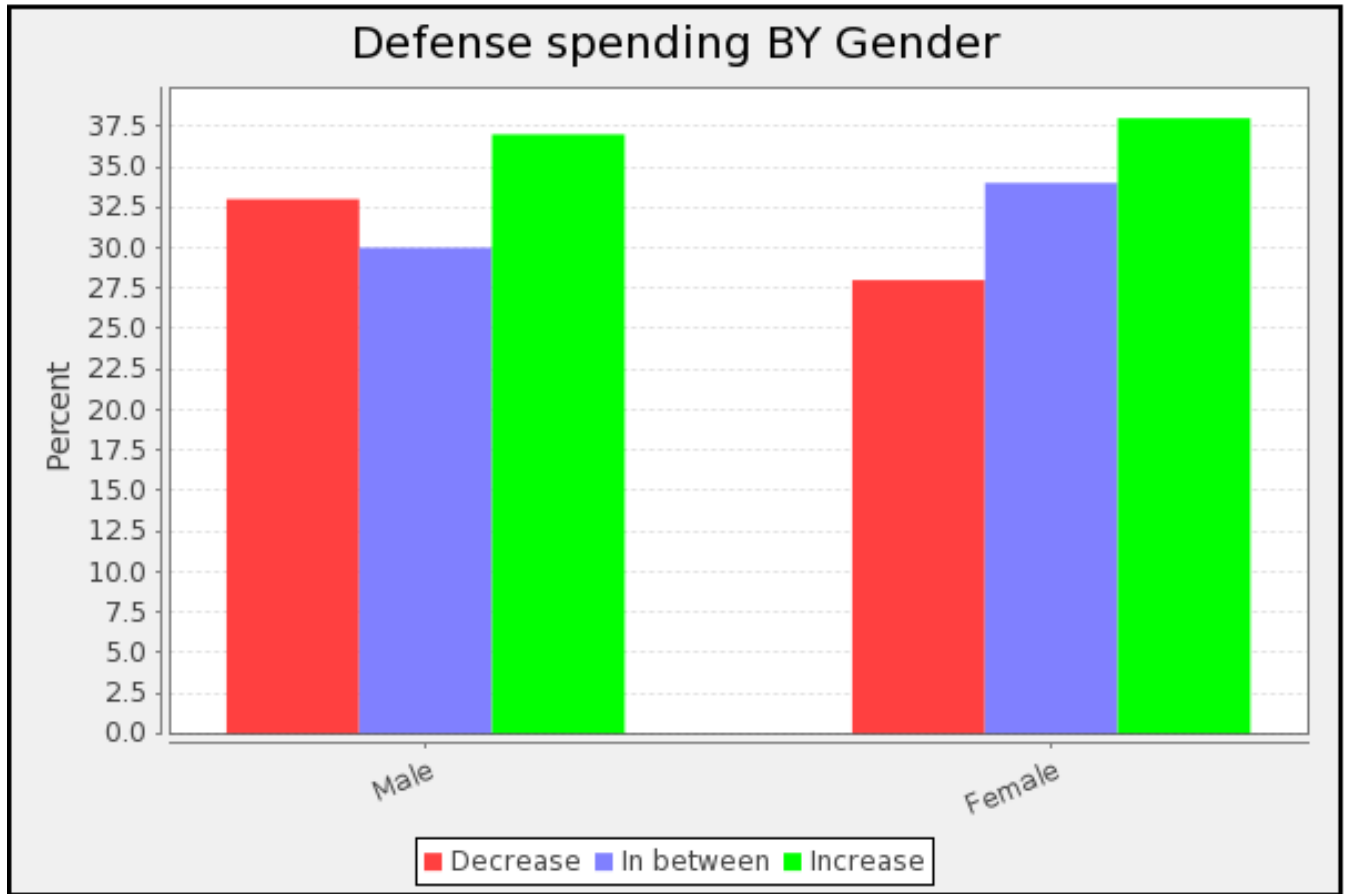


Figure 5 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on 2012 ANES data

Figure 6:

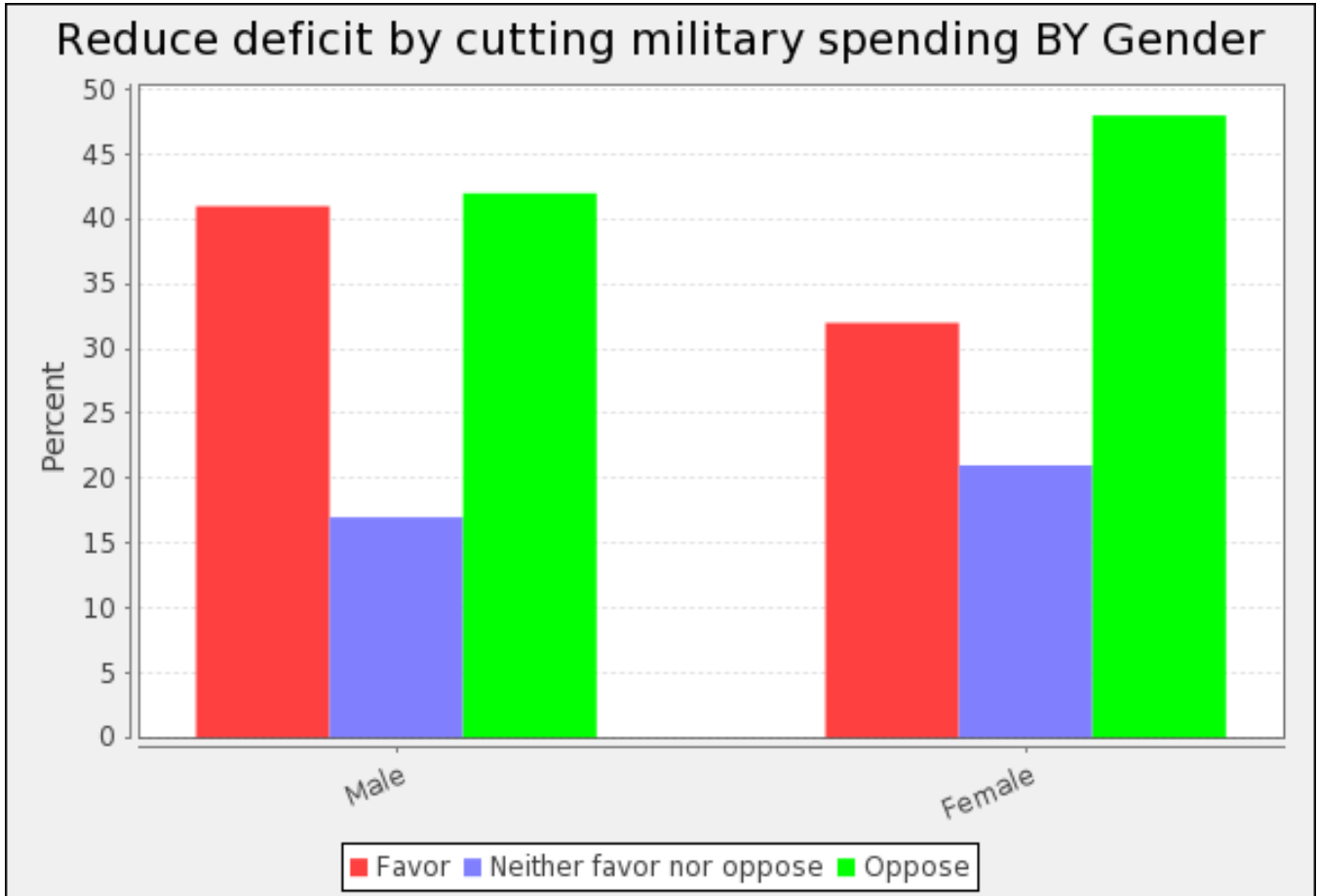


Figure 6 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on ANES data

Economy

Due to the slow U.S. economic recovery and high unemployment rate, the economy was one of the central issues during the 2012 presidential elections. Job creation was a top priority for voters, resulting in competing policy proposals by President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney on how to stimulate the economy and boost hiring. President Obama's approach to improving the economy was through government spending and targeted tax cuts, while Romney proposes several tax-cutting proposals. President Obama's plan centered on targeted tax breaks that would provide relief to the middle class and small companies. He also wanted federal dollars to help local communities in order to hire more firefighters, cops and teachers. On the other hand, Mitt Romney's main focus was to increase job growth, but by loosening regulations and lowering business taxes. Figure 7 illustrates the 2012 presidential election gender results towards the economy. A total of 89 percent of men believe that the economy is doing better and 88 percent of women also agree. The gender gap is less than one percent towards this issue. This evidently demonstrates that there is no gender gap in terms of the U.S. economy.

According to Robert Shapiro and Harpreet Mahajan, gender differences tend to be more prominent in issues known as compassion issues. As previously mentioned, compassion issues are largely related to jobs, income redistribution and other economic policies that mainly target the poor (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). Although there is no major gender gap, the slight gap of over 3 percentage points is due to

women supporting and being more compassionate towards the poor and targeted groups. Despite previous research findings, during the 2012 presidential election there was no major gender gap towards government spending policies. Figure 8 illustrates the gender gap that exists in government services and spending. A total of 47 percent of men believe that the government should provide fewer services and a total of 38 percent of women agree. This is a 9-percentage point gap.

Figure 7:

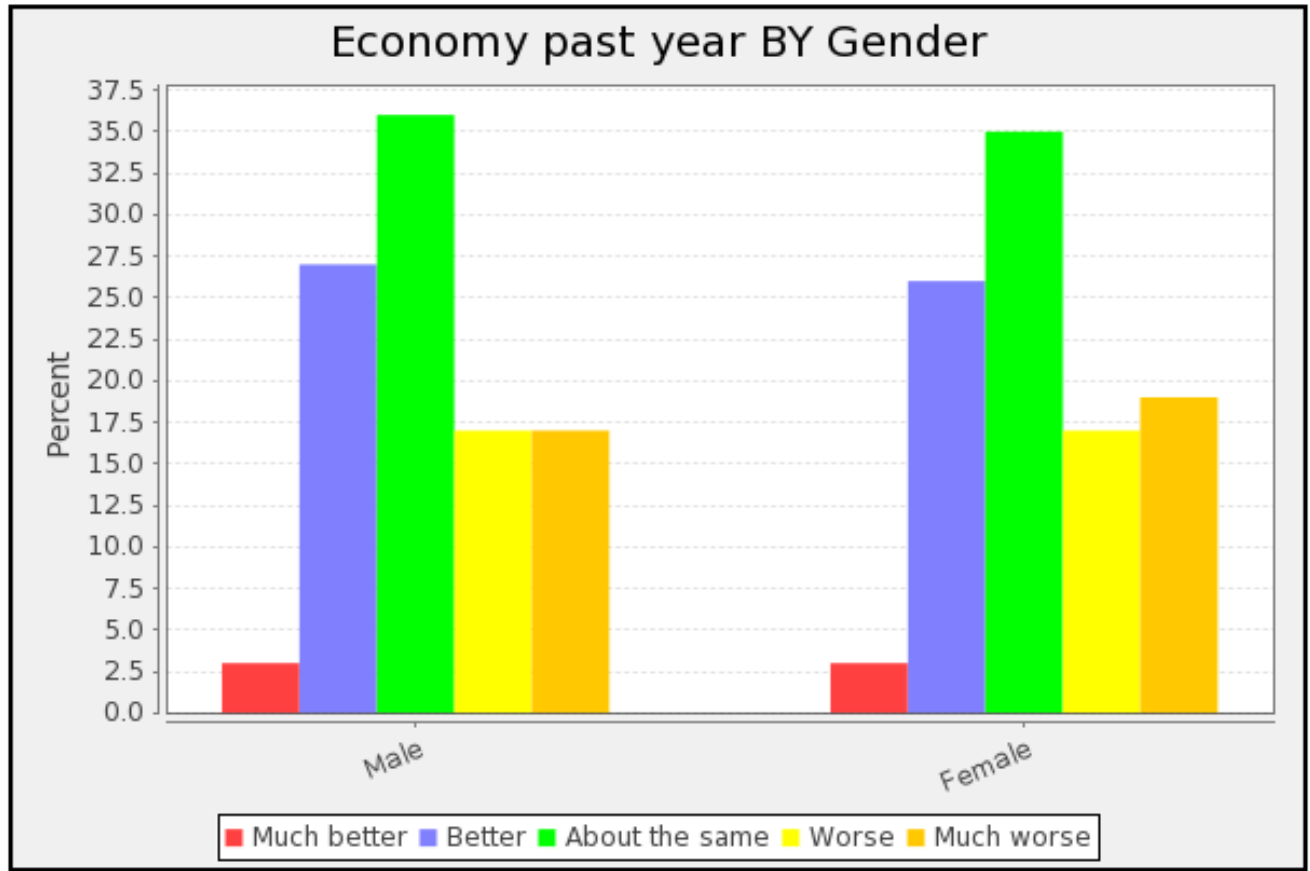


Figure 7 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on ANES data

Figure 8:

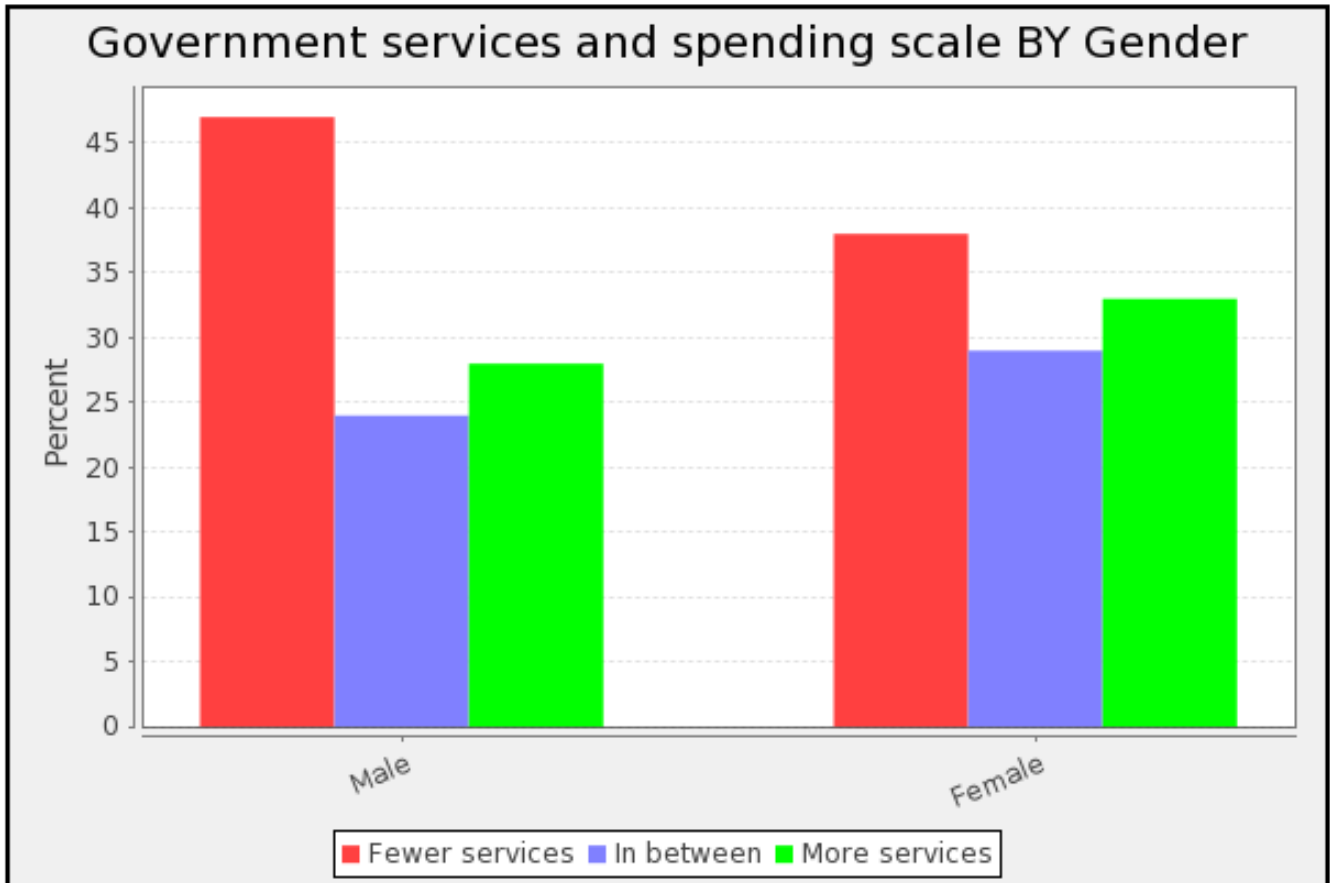


Figure 8 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on ANES data

Party Identification

The existence of a fundamental gender gap in political party identification is evident. Studies show that larger proportions of women than men are Democrats. According to Margaret C. Trevor, “the increasing disparity is often attributed to many of the widely recognized major factors that contribute to voting: differences in patterns of issue support, degree of issue voting, and even differences in socioeconomic status between the two groups” (Trevor 1999 p. 62). Men have continuously moved into the GOP fold, while women maintained a Democratic preference (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). The results of the 2012 presidential elections were consistent with this research. Figure 9 illustrates the party identification distribution between men and women. There are six different categories ranging from strong Democrat to strong Republican. The results demonstrate that 29 percent of women consider themselves a strong Democrat, while only 21 percent of men consider themselves a strong Democrat resulting in a gender gap of 8 percentage points. However, the remainder of the party categories were evenly distributed with no significant differences.

According to Karen M. Kaufmann and John R. Petrocik, since 1988 women have followed the same Democratic trend and continue to do so today. This trend is due to the assumption that men and women have different attitudes and essentially converts such differences into a gender gap in partisanship (Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). According to Gallup, in the 2012 presidential elections Obama beat Romney, taking 56 percent of the women vote, resulting in a 12-point difference. Subsequently, Romney beat Obama among men, taking 54 percent of the men vote, resulting in an 8-point difference (Gallup 2012). There are several possible reasons for the outcome of the 2012 presidential election. For example, Obama was more appealing to women due to his continuous stress on social safety, while Romney was more appealing to men due to his business background.

Figure 9:

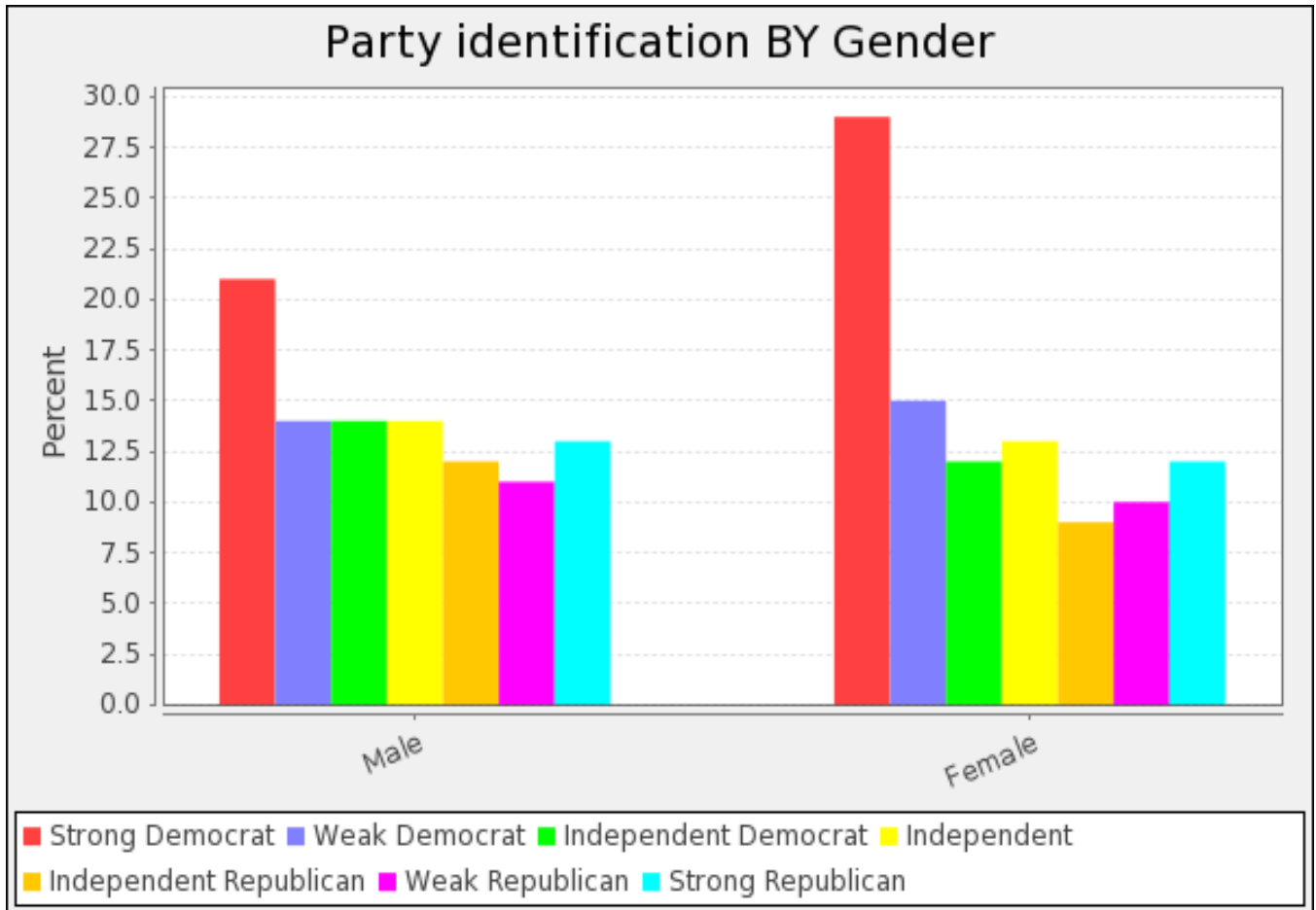


Figure 9 Source: Chart created through SETUPS based on ANES data

Chapter 4: What do the results mean?

As previously mentioned, the gender gap in presidential elections is due to the differences between the reported vote of men and women for the Republican candidate and Democratic candidates. We have been able to analyze the gender gap since 1980 up to the 2012 presidential elections, and we can conclude that the gender gap is alive in American politics. In some elections, the gender gap has proven to be the defining characteristic of the results. For example, in the 1996 presidential election, the women's vote helped Bill Clinton win the presidency. It is true that women are more likely to be poor and more likely to be single parents, meaning that they are more likely to be recipients of government aid. With this inference, one would assume that women's issues such as abortion rights or the Equal Rights Amendment would be the major driver of the gender gap. This notion dates back to the 1980 presidential election, in which women were less likely than men to favor Ronald Reagan. Yet, later research demonstrated that men and women had the same attitudes toward issues such as abortion and the ERA and that it was not the reason why women were less likely to favor Ronald Reagan (Norrander, 2008). According to political scientists Karen Kaufman, women's issues do not always have a noticeable gender gap. In terms of attitudes, "...men are uniformly more conservative than women. They are more conservative than women on issues related to homosexuality; but roughly equivalent to women in their views about prayer in school, abortion, and the desirability of women working" (Kaufman and Petrocik 1999 p. 875). The way in which men and women politicize their attitudes on certain issues is completely different. According to Kaufman, men focus their opinions and concerns to the social welfare state, while women are more focused in cultural issues (Kaufman 2002).

After analyzing the 2012 presidential voting results, it is evident that gender attitudes have been consistent for decades. The 2012 presidential elections were consistent with the patterns of previous elections. This presidential election had a gender gap of 10 percentage points. After analyzing the results of gender attitudes on issues such as gay rights, healthcare, military spending and the economy we can

suggest that the issues that are more likely to shape the preferences for the presidential vote are gay rights and military spending. Every other issue mentioned did not have a significant gender gap to even be considered.

Gay rights, most importantly gay marriage, have been a continuous controversial political issue for several years. During the 2012 presidential elections the controversial issue of gay marriage posed a gender gap of 5 percentage points, in comparison to other issues, this issue did have a notable difference. The topic of gay rights is considered to be a cultural issue, according to Kaufman, as these types of issues are motivated by differing moral beliefs (Kaufman, 2002). Political attitudes demonstrate that women do tend to be more liberal than men, which is one of the reasons why the gender gap has grown more disparate over the past elections. The importance of cultural policies in terms of political significance continue to grow for women, while men do not have evidence of growing concerns (Kaufman 2002). However, just as women continue to become more liberal, men are also becoming more Republican, and this could be linked to their higher opposition to gay rights when compared to women. During the 2012 presidential campaigns, as already mentioned, Barack Obama was a strong supporter of race, gender and sexual orientation equality while Mitt Romney was not. Due to the clear distinction of each candidate's opinions on gay rights, voters can have a better sense of what candidate they favor. Not surprisingly, Obama did receive the majority of the women vote. In a presidential election with a gender gap of 10 percentage points, issues such as gay marriage can be a decisive factor. Women were more likely to vote for President Obama rather than Mitt Romney because Obama supported gay rights in comparison to Mitt Romney. The gender differences toward this issue are due to the disparate moral beliefs of each gender.

Prior research has found that gender differences have been consistent in issues related to military force. In the past, men have always been more likely than women to increase military spending. Since 1980, there has been an average gender gap of 8 percentage points in terms of increasing military spending (Norrander

2008). According to Barbara Norrander, “women continue to show less support than men on use-of-force issues, whether in the domestic or international arena,” (Norrander 2008 p. 20). Women overall, are less probable to be in favor of any type of violent action including security policies (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). The results of the 2012 presidential elections reveal that 33 percent of men believe defense spending should decrease while 28 percent of women believe the same. This results in a gender gap of 5 percentage points. The 2012 military spending results is consistent with the average gender gap of previous elections. Both, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney campaigned on saving money and rebuilding the economy, yet they also wanted to make sure that the United States has the finest military in the world. However, Mitt Romney planned on reversing President Obama’s massive defense cuts. Despite the 5 percentage point gender gap, we can suggest that men favored Romney due to his intent to increase military spending and women voted for President Obama because although his goal was to have the finest military; he did not plan on spending as much as Romney.

The 2012 presidential results on military spending could have plausibly been due to the current economy and prioritization of issues. Despite the noticeable military spending gender gaps of previous years, the main concern during 2012 was rebuilding the economy. Both men and women, in a majority level, wanted to see a greater decrease of military spending. This is also true in reducing the deficit by cutting military spending. In regards to this issue 39 percent of men and 31 percent of women wanted to reduce the deficit by cutting military spending. These results correlate with figure 7 and 8 (related to the economy). The issue of the economy had no significant gender gap it was almost identical. By comparing the gender voting results of military spending to the economy, we can conclude that military spending, five percentage point gap, correlated with the 9 point difference in reducing government services.

Conclusion

As we can see, there has been a gender gap in voting behavior since the 1980s and even earlier. The gender gap on political issues is a complex paradox with no concrete explanation. According to Susan E. Howell and Christine L. Day, "...it is produced by a variety of social, economic, and psychological factors...the source of the gender gap differs from issue to issue," (Howell and Day 2000 p. 870). Women have proven to be more concerned with issues dealing with equality, thus inclining them towards the liberal spectrum. On the other hand, men have proven to lean more to the conservative fold (Howell and Day 2000). Early explanations of the gender gap found that the gender gap was created on issues such as abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, but in reality women's issues do not explain the gender gap. The attitudes of men and women on women's issues tend to be the same (Norrande, 1999).

After analyzing the gender gap evolution since the 1980s, with a main focus on the 2012 presidential election, I can conclude that the gender gap in general did not have a drastic difference in several issues. I focused on four main issues gay rights, health care, military spending and the economy. These four issues were the most controversial issues during the 2012 presidential campaigns. Each of these issues had typical results. For example, the gender gap in gay marriage was 5 points, government services had 9 points and party identification had 8 points. There was also a gender gap on military issues but in an unexpected direction. Men more than women want to reduce this spending. However, healthcare and evaluations of the economy had no gap.

The 2012 presidential election results are partially consistent with previous elections. There is no precise explanation of why American politics shows this phenomenon, but there are several explanations that can explain such differences. Although not one single explanation exists, there are four main explanations that provide a better understanding of the complexities of the gender gap. According to Susan E. Howell and Christine L. Day (2000), one of the explanations is based on the

inherent value differences between genders. A second explanation is centered in socioeconomic status, meaning that their liberalism inclinations can be due to self-interests. The third explanation is related to women autonomy and those with higher status occupations were most different to men in their voting behavior. Finally the fourth explanation suggests that feminism may contribute to the gender gap. Based on the 2012 presidential voting results, each of the four explanations can contribute to the reasoning behind the 10-percentage point gender gap. Although, the gender gap is not large, ranging from 5-10 percent each election, it is enough to make a difference in election results.

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