

## Chapter 8

### A Gender-Generation Gap?

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The conceptual framework in this book classifies maintaining elections as those where patterns of party support display considerable continuity over time. Deviating elections are indicated by trendless fluctuations, or a temporary surge and decline, in long-term alignments. In contrast *critical* elections are characterised by more enduring realignments in the electoral basis of party support, with major voting blocs creaking, cracking and reconsolidating like ice floes in the Antarctic. This classification raises important theoretical questions about how far parties can produce realignments by their own efforts, --for example by targeting new groups of voters, strategically shifting ideological positions along the left-right spectrum, or selecting new leaders -- or how far they remain prisoners of social and political forces outside their control (see, for example, the discussion in Kitschelt 1994). If parties make strategic appeals, do voters respond?

To examine this issue we can focus on the politics of the gender gap in Britain. From the mid-1980s onwards, facing a shrinking working-class constituency, Labour has actively recognized the need to expand its electoral base. As part of this process Labour has attempted to attract more female support and thereby to reverse the traditional gender gap in British voting behaviour (Hewitt and Mattinson 1987; Perrigo 1996; Lovenduski 1997; Eagle and Lovenduski 1998)<sup>1</sup>. Clare Short (1996) has described this as "a quiet revolution" in the Labour party. The most dramatic component of this strategy has included picking far more female candidates for winnable seats, a policy which helped triple the number of Labour women MPs, from 37 in 1992 to 102 in 1997. The party leadership changed with women now one quarter of Labour parliamentary back-benchers and one fifth of the Cabinet, some with high-profile non-traditional posts, like Mo Mowlam. Women have also made inroads at all levels of the party organization<sup>2</sup>. To a lesser extent Labour has also attempted to rebrand their party image via campaign communications and packaging, and modestly to revise their policy platform, in the pursuit of women's votes. The central question we address is whether Labour's strategy succeeded in producing a critical realignment of gender politics in the 1997 election.

The first section of this chapter lays out the theoretical framework and then seeks to establish baseline trends by describing the long-term pattern in the *size* and *direction* of the gender gap in British elections from 1945 to 1997. The next section goes on to differences in the role of structural factors, party images, economic evaluations, and issue positions in explaining women and men's party support in 1997. The third section then focuses on age-related divisions among women, termed the 'gender-generation' gap, and considers alternative explanations including the role of cohort and period effects. The conclusion considers the implications for understanding the process of gender realignment, and more generally for theories of critical elections.

### **Theories of Gender Realignment**

In seeking evidence for the pattern of the gender gap we need briefly to consider the theoretical conditions believed to produce these phenomena (for a fuller discussion see Norris 1997:118-147). The classic structural theories of elections developed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) suggested that class, region and religion became the bedrock cleavages of European party politics since these were the long-standing social and economic divisions within the continent when parties were mobilizing voters just before and after the expansion of the franchise. These social cleavages were the product of complex historical forces associated with deep divisions, between landowners and industrialists, workers and employers, Church and State. In the orthodox view these alignments subsequently froze for decades as parties organised and mobilized to maintain their coalition base of support.

Based on these structural theories gender cleavages in the electorate can be expected to prove electorally salient and to become aligned with parties on a long-term and stable basis if, and only if, they meet certain minimal conditions. First, *women and men need to hold divergent attitudes and values towards major political issues of the day*. When only this condition is met the situation can be termed a latent gender gap. If women and men have gradually come to share similar political attitudes and values on salient issues, as Rose and McAllister (1990:51) suggest, due to growing similarities in lifestyles, then would expect a process of dealignment as women and men are no longer anchored to particular parties representing their interests. On the other hand if the different experiences of women and men in the workforce, state and family produce distinct value priorities and political perspectives on a range of issues, if women speak 'in a different voice', then this would provide the potential conditions and catalyst for

mobilization. Restructuring theories suggest that older social identities of occupational class based on economic inequalities has been replaced over time by more complex social and political cleavages, including more fluid and constructed multiple social identities based on gender, region and ethnicity.

The second necessary condition for realignment, making latent divisions manifest, is *if parties and organizations mobilise these groups politically*. Parties need to compete strategically by offering alternative platforms on these issues, or at least being perceived to do so in terms of party images and campaign appeals. Depending upon this process, certain political cleavages are mobilized into the electorate while others are mobilized out. Classic exemplars include the role of religion which once provided the principle division in British party politics, with heated battles over issues such as disestablishment, Home Rule and education, but which faded with the ascendancy of class cleavages in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Butler and Stokes 1974: 172-192). In the United States, party polarization over issues such as welfare, reproductive rights and affirmative action may have helped trigger the gender gap in the electorate. We therefore need to explore differences in voting choice, but also whether there is a gender gap in political attitudes and values which could potentially allow parties to mobilise a gender realignment. In this sense, both 'bottom up' and 'top down' conditions are required, in a complex interaction, for an effective and lasting realignment.

Before we can consider whether the pattern in the 1997 election broke with the past we need to establish a suitable baseline for historical comparison. The previous literature provides three plausible hypotheses about the expected direction and size of the British gender gap in the last half century, and these can be termed the traditional, convergence, and revisionist perspectives.

### **The Traditional Perspective**

When women were enfranchised after the Great War many contemporary observers expected that they would act as a decisive 'swing vote', producing a radical change in party fortunes. In the inter-war years women did not vote as a single bloc or homogeneous group, as some feared, but evidence suggests that the Conservatives were slightly more successful in mobilising women (Tingsten 1937:42-45; Durant 1949; Ross 1955), as were the Republicans in the United States (Andersen 1996:65). Women's tendency to lean towards the center-right was confirmed in Duverger's seminal comparison of voting behaviour in Britain, France, Italy and Germany (Duverger 1955). It was subsequently replicated in voting studies during the 1960s in other Western

democracies, including the United States (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960:493) and Britain (Durant 1969; Butler and Stokes 1974:160). As a result the literature during these decades conventionally focussed on explaining why women voters were more conservative than men due to their religiosity or class background (see, for example Blondel 1970:55-56; Rose 1974; Pulzer 1967:522; Lipset 1960:260). Women were often also assumed to be more rightwing in their ideological beliefs and partisan identification, although few examined this proposition systematically.

### **The Convergence Thesis**

Yet the convergence thesis suggests that the traditional pattern of women's greater conservatism, evident in the 1950s, may have faded over time. Growing similarities in the lifestyles and social backgrounds of women and men may have led to increased gender dealignment in their politics. This argument is developed in several studies (Rose and McAllister 1986, 1990:51; Heath, Jowell, and Curtice 1985:23; Hayes and McAllister 1997; Hayes 1997; Studlar, McAllister and Hayes 1998). This literature suggests that when social structural and situational factors are taken into account, like patterns of female participation in the paid workforce and in trade unions, then gender fails to emerge as a significant predictor of voter choice. In Rose and McAllister's words (1990:51): *"Notwithstanding traditionalist theories of women favouring the Conservatives and feminist theories indicating that women ought to vote Labour, gender has no influence upon voting in Britain today. The reason is straightforward: on matters that are salient to voting men and women tend to share similar political values."* Nevertheless, like older studies which 'controlled' for religiosity, as Goot and Reid argued (1984), we can question theoretical models which assume the primacy of employment status, occupational class, or education over gender.

### **The Revisionist Perspective**

The more recent literature suggests that the traditional pattern may have reversed, rather than converged, with women becoming more leftwing than men. By the 1990s more female than male voters, particularly in the younger generation, have been found to lean towards the left in the United States (Seltzer, Newman, and Leighton 1997), Scandinavia (Oskarson 1995:79), as well as in Germany, Portugal and Spain (Norris 1996a). Some countries, although not all, have experienced a significant realignment of gender politics in recent decades (Norris 1988, 1996a; de Vaus and McAllister 1989; Jelen et al. 1994; Inglehart 1997b; Studlar et al. 1998; Inglehart and Norris 1998). We

are only starting to understand the dynamics of this process on a comparative basis.

This pattern has received most extensive attention in the United States where support for the classic Democratic coalition established in the New Deal has steadily eroded among many core constituencies including vast swathes of southern conservatives, blue-collar workers and Italian-American and Irish-American voters. In contrast, during the last two decades the Democrats have made substantial, long-term and consistent inroads among women, generating a large literature seeking to explain this pattern (see, for example, Mueller 1988; Conover 1994; Cook and Wilcox 1991; Seltzer et al. 1997). During the 1950s more American women than men supported the Republicans in their voting choice and party identification. During the 1960s and 1970s these gender differences faded to become insignificant. The 1980 election proved critical. Since then the modern gender gap, with women leaning towards the Democrats while men lean towards the GOP, has been evident in successive Presidential, Gubernatorial and state-level contests (CAWP). In the early 1980s this pattern was attributed to the appeal of particular candidates (like President Reagan), or issues (like greater Democratic support for reproductive rights and the ERA), but it has subsequently become consolidated as a long-term realignment in the voting patterns and party loyalties of women and men. In the early 1980s the gender gap in Presidential elections fluctuated in the region of 6-9 points. In 1996 the gender gap proved the largest (11 percentage points) in any American presidential election (CAWP). According to the VNS exit poll, women split 54:38 for Clinton, while men split 44:43 for Dole: an all-male franchise could have produced President Dole.

Moreover, in accordance with realignment theory, this phenomenon has also had significant consequences beyond the electorate. The gender gap encouraged the Democratic Party to select more women for office, symbolized by the 1992 'Year of the Woman'. Realignments have also been evident in the programmatic basis of American party competition. The 1990s have seen more heated conflict and increased political polarization over issues such as sexual harassment, reproductive rights, and affirmative action, all dominating the headlines. Gender has moved from margin to mainstream becoming one of the primary cleavages in American politics. The first issue is therefore to establish whether women in Britain remain more rightwing than men, whether gender differences have converged over time, or whether women have now moved to the left, as in the United States.

## Trends in the Size and Direction of the Gender-Gap 1945-1997

The term 'gender gap' is a catch-all phrase which can be used to refer to a wide variety of political differences between women and men, whether in terms of voting choice, partisan identification, ideological values, or levels of political participation. For consistency in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, the gender gap is defined and measured in terms of the *two-party vote lead*. This is calculated as the difference between the percentage Conservative-Labour lead among women minus the percentage Conservative-Labour lead among men. In 1945, for example, according to Gallup polls (see Table 8.1) women split their vote almost evenly: 43 percent Conservative to 45 percent Labour, producing a slim (2 point) Labour lead. In contrast, men divided 51 percent Labour to 35 percent Conservative, resulting in a large (16 point) Labour lead. This produced a substantial gender gap of -14 points. For consistency, a negative gap is used throughout to indicate that women are more Conservative than men, while a positive gap denotes that women are more Labour. Gender differences can also be found in support for the minor parties but this chapter focuses primarily on the two-party vote lead, since this is most critical to the outcome for government.

To start to explore the alternative interpretations of trends we can use data available from 1945 to 1964 in Gallup election polls and from 1964 to 1997 in the series of British Election Studies. Inevitably relying upon two data sources produces problems of strict comparability over time. Nevertheless since the items of voting intentions are relatively standard the advantages of using both series outweighs the disadvantages. The results in Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1 show considerable fluctuations in the size of the gender gap over fifteen general elections, rather than a steady linear trend. Nevertheless the long-term pattern confirms the first theme which emerges from this analysis: a general tendency towards *gradual convergence between the sexes*. During the post-war decade women leant strongly towards the Conservatives while men gave greater support to Labour: the size of the gender gap averaged around 14 percent, peaking in 1951 and 1955. From 1959 to October 1974 this gap tended to shrink to around 8 percentage points. The Conservatives continued to count upon female support to provide a decisive edge in close contests; we can estimate that if Britain had continued with an all-male franchise, all other things being equal, there would have been an unbroken period of Labour government from 1945 to 1979. Yet since 1979 the overall gender gap has been only 3 percent on average, becoming statistically insignificant in several elections, indicating *dealignment* in the strength of

the association between gender and vote choice. The 1997 election proved consistent with this pattern: although women remained slightly more Conservative than men, the size of the overall gender gap was only 4 percentage points and was statistically insignificant. Labour's efforts proved insufficient to produce a critical realignment in their favour among women voters. The convergence over time has neutralized the traditional Conservative advantage but this cannot have been due to Labour's recent attempts to modernize its strategic appeal and move towards the center-ground since the convergence occurred before the mid-1980s. This evidence leads us to reject both the traditional and the revisionist hypotheses. The 1997 election can be characterised most accurately as one which maintained the pattern of dealignment with weakened links between gender and party support which has been evident in Britain since 1979, not a critical realignment displaying a sharp break with the past.

(Table 8.1 and Figure 8.1 about here)

While this represents the simple summary of trends, certain qualifications need to be added. The percentage size of the postwar gender gap has often proved relatively modest compared with other social cleavages in the British electorate, such as those by class (see Chapter 5) or by race (see Chapter 6). Nevertheless political differences between women and men have often proved electorally important, at least until 1979, for several reasons. First, there is a *demographic gap*. Due to patterns of greater longevity women are the majority of the electorate. As they get older women increasingly outnumber men until, for those aged 85 and over, there are three women to every man (*Social Trends* 1997:29). In the 1997 election women represented 51.7 percent of the electorate. While parties may feel that there are few major benefits, and some distinct electoral risks, associated with explicitly targeting groups such as ethnic minorities, or gay and lesbian voters, no party can afford to discount women as one of the largest groups of potential supporters.

Moreover, women's slight edge in the electorate has been magnified by the *turnout gap*. During the post-war decade females were slightly less likely to participate at the ballot box, a pattern found in many Western democracies (Christie 1987). Since the 1979 general election, however, women have voted at similar, or even slightly higher, rates than men (see Table 8.2). In the last election 80.1 percent of women reported voting compared with 76.9 percent of men, a turnout gap of 3.2 percent (see Chapter 9). The net result

of these differentials is that an estimated 17.7 million women voted in 1997, compared with around 15.8 million men.

*(Table 8.2 about here)*

Lastly, the spatial distribution of party support is also important. The votes of many demographic groups most favourable towards Labour are often concentrated in particular areas, such as ethnic minorities in inner-city London, the North-West and the Midlands or the poorer working class clustered in Glasgow, Newcastle and Manchester. In contrast, women and men are dispersed fairly evenly across different types of constituencies, with the exception of certain southern retirement communities where women predominate. As a result even a modest gender gap translates into millions of votes distributed evenly in marginal seats across the country. In recognition of these factors, all parties have actively sought to capture 'the women's vote', although this has often proved elusive (Lovenduski and Norris 1993, 1996).

#### **Explanations of Gender Dealignment**

Why has there been dealignment over time in the traditional links between Conservatism and women? The older literature has traditionally given priority to structural factors although differences in the appeal of party images, evaluations of economic performance, or issue preferences may also prove important. Given the importance of class in British politics, the most obvious structural developments relate to the position of women and men in paid work. Women were often believed to be more Conservative because of their predominance in lower-middle class occupations - as secretaries, clerks, nurses, teachers, receptionists, and shop-assistants - given well-established patterns of vertical and horizontal occupational segregation. Men might be expected to prove more sympathetic to Labour since they dominate the traditional heavy industries, and represent two-thirds of all manual workers (Price and Bain 1988). This explanation was advanced by Blondel (1970) although Denver (1994:39) found the gender gap persisted during the sixties even after controlling for social class. The influence of social class might be expected to operate differently for women outside the paid labour-force. Rose and McAllister suggest that married women at home may be less strongly influenced by their prior occupational class, or their spouse's class, since they are not exposed to the reinforcing influence of colleagues in the workplace, and they may experience more crosscutting cleavages (Rose and McAllister 1990:50-51).



Although class is the preeminent structural explanation in Britain, it is not the only one. Duverger (1955) argued that the gender gap was based on older women's greater *religiosity*, particularly in France, Italy and Germany where there were strong links between the Catholic church and Christian Democrat parties. Religion could have influenced the gender gap in the post-war period, given the commonly asserted association between the Church of England and the Conservative party. In the United States other demographic factors have been found to influence the gender gap, notably marital status (Plissner 1983), labour force-participation, and educational status (Mueller 1988). Moreover, Studlar et al. (1988) found that differential patterns of *trade union membership* were important, probably due to the links between the Labour party and organised labour. Once the study controlled for differences between women and men in union membership and socioeconomic status, Studlar et al. found that the gender gap became insignificant.

If these factors are influential, it follows that structural changes in lifestyles may help explain the convergence of the gender gap over time. During the last half century British society has been gradually transformed by long-term shifts in gender roles within the family and labour force. This includes increased participation by women in the paid work, (particularly among married women), growing educational opportunities, mobilization of women in trade unions, the breakdown of the traditional family, and a renegotiation of domestic roles and responsibilities.

In addition to structural factors we also need to consider whether party and leadership images have a differential impact on women and men's party support, along with evaluations of the past and future economy, and ideological differences on major issues, including women's rights. We have demonstrated that women and men are voting along similar lines in recent elections but this does not necessarily mean that they are doing so for the same reasons. To examine the influence of these factors on voting choice in the 1997 election we can use OLS regression analysis models, where the Conservative-Labour vote is turned into a dummy variable. The models in Table 8.3 were run first for men and women separately, then jointly.

[Table 8.3 about here]

The results confirm that the influence of gender on voting choice was extremely weak in this election (only approaching significance at the .10 level without any controls). Nevertheless the pattern also reveals some interesting contrasts between women and men which may make us reconsider some of the conventional wisdom about voting behaviour in Britain.

As noted earlier (Norris 1993, 1996b), **age** proved to be strongly related to women's Conservative or Labour support, indeed to be the most significant structural factor predicting their vote. The results in the regression model were further confirmed on more detailed examination. In 1997 the majority of younger women (55 percent) supported Labour compared with 44 percent of younger men. In contrast among the older generation, 39 percent of women voted Conservative compared with 31 percent of older men (see Figure 8.2). The gender gap among the young was therefore 14.2 points, with women more leftwing, while among the older generation it was -13.4 points, with women more rightwing. As the figures in Table 8.4 show, the pattern in 1997 is consistent with previous elections. From 1964 to 1997 the traditional gender gap was usually reversed by age: in the youngest group women have consistently proved more Labour-leaning than men, while at the same time in the older group women have nearly always been more Conservative than men. We shall come back to this in the last section to consider whether this represents a life-cycle, period or cohort effect.

*[Figure 8.2 and Table 8.4 about here]*

As Table 8.3 also shows, the influence of social **class**, (defined in the model by the respondent's manual or non-manual occupation), household **housing tenure** and the respondent's current **union membership** all proved far stronger for men than for women (where none proved significant as a predictor of voting choice)<sup>3</sup>. In contrast, **education** proved a far better indicator of women's voting behaviour than men's. Closer examination of the class-gender divisions are shown in Table 8.5, using the five-fold Goldthorpe-Heath classification of the respondent's occupation. The results show that in the salariat women were slightly more leftwing than men, perhaps because women are more likely to be found in the public sector professions, although in other class categories they were more Conservative. The analysis also demonstrates the reasons why this factor is a poor predictor of women's voting choice since the association between class and party tends to be slightly flatter and less polarised than men's. This evidence suggests that the class-dominant model in British electoral politics, based on economic inequalities in society, may need revision when it comes to explaining women's voting behaviour.

*[Table 8.5 about here]*

Turning to other variables in Table 8.3, the results show fewer differences between women and men in terms of the positive attractions of party and leadership image, where the party image scale proved by far the most important predictor in the equation<sup>4</sup>. On economic evaluations, women seemed to give slightly more weight to these factors than men, particularly their evaluations of the future performance of the British economy, and to judgements about how well their own household economy has prospered under the last year of Conservative management.

The model incorporated five issue scales measuring some of the major dimensions of party competition, including Europe, privatization v. nationalization, jobs versus prices, and taxes versus spending. In order to examine the role of feminist values the 1998 BES included one item which directly taps support for women's rights, including their role in the workplace and home, on a 10-point scale<sup>5</sup>. If we analyze the response to this item shown in Figure 8.3 the pattern shows that this issue is one which polarizes women: among people in their twenties and thirties women are far more egalitarian than men, but in the retired generation women are more traditional than men<sup>6</sup>. Yet when this item is included in the overall model of voting choice in Table 8.3 it fails to prove significant for women or men. This suggests that feminist values do divide younger and older women, but these are not closely associated with support for the major parties. When asked to place the parties on this same scale, Labour were seen as the most egalitarian (with a mean score of 2.52) compared with the Liberal Democrats (3.22) and the Conservatives (4.52). Nevertheless the parties were perceived as being less differentiated on this issue than on others like the priority which should be given to taxes versus spending, or to jobs versus prices (see Chapter X). Lastly on the other issue scales, there were again some minor differences, as the issue of jobs versus prices was more salient for men while in contrast Europe and taxation versus government spending proved slightly more important to women. Nevertheless the gender gap on economic evaluations and on issues was generally weaker than the structural contrasts discussed earlier. Overall the models explained a high degree of variance in voting choice for the major parties (the  $R^2$  was .52 for men and .61 for women).

#### **Explaining the Gender-Generation Gap**

The convergence trends which we have noted at aggregate level can emerge either because all women and all men increasingly share similar party preferences, political attitudes and values, as Rose and McAllister (1990) suggest, or because different age-groups of women are diverging. Studies of

previous elections have noted the development of what has been termed a 'gender-generation gap', where younger and older groups of women increasingly differ (Norris 1993, 1996a). As shown earlier, this situation continued in 1997, with younger women voters far more pro-Labour than younger men. In the United States similar patterns were evident in the 1992 Presidential and the 1990-1994 Congressional elections, where the gender gap is concentrated heavily among younger voters (Seltzer et al. 1997).

The age-related gender gap may be attributed to cohort, period, or life-cycle effects, each of which has different implications for the process of realignment. The term '*cohort*' refers to groups categorized by the year of birth. Cohorts can be regarded as '*generations*' when they cohere around certain defining historical events, such as the inter-war depression years, the affluent postwar boom, or the Thatcherite eighties. Cohort replacement theories assume that attitudes are formed by the socialisation process in early youth, so that people are affected by the particular historical era in which they were growing up. During later adulthood attitudes are thought to freeze into fairly stable patterns. As new cohorts gradually enter the electorate, and older ones exit, demographic turnover can be expected to produce a glacial shift in the overall balance of society's attitudes and values (Mason and Fienberg 1985). In this sense, society changes even although none of its individual members do. These theories underpin Inglehart's account of post-material and post-modernization value change (Inglehart 1977, 1990, 1997a), Miller and Shank's (1996) analysis of generational replacement in the American electorate, and Putnam's (1995a, 1995b, 1996) description of the erosion of 'the civic generation' in American society. Cohort accounts imply powerful tides which ripple and surge through society, carrying politics in its wake.

In terms of the gender-generation gap, the impact of the second-wave women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s may have influenced the cohort who grew up in the wake of the social revolution caused by feminism. Studies based on the British Social Attitude survey have documented changes in attitudes towards sex-roles in the family and paid work-force since the early 1980s (see Kiernan 1992; Heath and McMahon 1992; Thomson 1995). In America substantial generational differences have often been found in terms of traditional values and attitudes towards gender equality, sex roles in the workforce and family, and support for issues such as childcare, reproductive rights and equal opportunities (Page and Shapiro 1992:302-305). Moreover these changing attitudes may be closely linked to the gender-generation gap. Pamela Conover (1994) has argued that women differ in their political values

depending upon the degree to which they identify as the women's movement. Feminist consciousness is thought to act as a catalyst for value change, driving the politics of the gender gap. The younger generation of women, who have been most exposed to the influence of the women's movement, could therefore be expected to prove most liberal/leftwing in their partisan leanings.

Alternatively fluctuations in the overall size and direction of the gender gap could be attributed to *period effects* which concern changes that pass through all generations in society for a limited number of years, like a rat in a python. The EMU crisis in September 1995, for example, may be expected to have caused a dip in government competence ratings among young and old alike. This logic suggests that if Labour's strategic campaign to win women's votes paid dividends in the 1997 election we might expect to find stronger period-specific shifts towards Labour among women than men.

Lastly, the gender-generation gap may also be due to *life-cycle* effects which influence individuals as they get older. There is some evidence that the young become progressively more conservative as they age, at least in terms of party identification (Heath and Park 1997). This pattern may reflect experiences in the workplace, family and community as people enter middle-age, perhaps taking on commitments like mortgages and childcare.

Although conceptually distinct, cohort, period and life-cycle effects can be expected to operate simultaneously. With repeated cross-sectional data there is usually considerable difficulty in disentangling the different components of change on an empirical basis. This produces the identification problem: once we know which period (survey year) and which birth cohort someone is in, we also know what age they must be. We cannot therefore enter survey year, birth cohort and age into the same model (Alwin and Scott 1996; Heath and Martin 1996). Nevertheless even if everyone gets slightly more Conservative as they age, there seem few theoretical grounds to believe that life-cycles should effect the electoral behaviour of women and men differently. Given the classic problems of identification associated with these factors we will not test for life-cycle effects in this chapter.

To examine cohort and period effects we need to move from cross-sectional data to analysing cohort differences over time. Accordingly the combined BES dataset 1964-92<sup>7</sup> was divided into seven groups based on the decade of birth and the proportion of women voting Conservative was compared in the elections at roughly ten year intervals (1964, 1974, 1983 and 1992). The results in Figure 8.4 show that the younger cohort born in 1947-1956 proved the least Conservative throughout this period. This is also the group

who experienced their formative years during the second-wave women's movement of the 1970s and the changing social revolution associated with issues of gender equality. In contrast the group who proved most Conservative were the oldest cohort, who came to political consciousness just after the female franchise was granted and during the years of Conservative predominance discussed in the introduction. As in the United States, therefore, the modern gender-generation gap may well be related to early experiences of feminist mobilization and consciousness. There were some period effects evident: when Conservatives support increased from 1974-1983 women shifted in their direction. Nevertheless the striking pattern is that all cohorts moved more or less in tandem, with a few exceptions, indicating the overall stability of generational political differences.

### **Conclusions and Discussion:**

Ever since women were enfranchised the Conservative party has attempted to mobilize female support, incorporating women as the backbone of the grassroots organization (Lovenduski et al.1994), and maintaining a slight edge among women voters during the 1950s and 1960s. As discussed earlier, Labour has recently intensified its efforts to make the party more women-friendly. During the last decade the Labour party has tried to expand its constituency by appealing strategically to women, most notably by selecting far more women parliamentary candidates, as well as by crafting its programmatic appeal and marketing strategy. Since 1987, Labour has slightly strengthened its policy commitments on issues such as more generous provision of nursery places, revised sex equality legislation, and the introduction of a minimum wage, although these promises can hardly be regarded as adopting a radical feminist agenda. The changes in women's parliamentary representation which occurred in 1997 seem likely to have most lasting consequences. Labour has now abandoned the use of compulsory all-women shortlists but the incumbency status of many younger women MPs in safe seats means that the last election produced a dramatic stepped shift in women's representation, or a punctuated equilibrium model at elite-level, which is unlikely to be sharply reversed (for a discussion see Eagle and Lovenduski 1998).

The issue this chapter has addressed has been whether Labour succeeded in its attempt to broaden its electoral base among women voters in 1997, and whether there is any evidence for a critical realignment in gender politics in Britain. The *traditional* view, common in the 1950s and 1960s, suggests women are usually slightly more conservative than men. The *revisionist*

perspective, generated largely by the emergence of a new gender gap in the United States and Western Europe, suggests that women in the 1990s have realigned towards parties of the left, especially among the younger generation. The evidence in this analysis suggests that the 1997 election was very similar to the pattern of the gender gap in the series of elections since 1979. This supports the *convergence* thesis suggesting that in the last decade gender has faded as a significant electoral cleavage in British politics. Despite the transformation of Labour's parliamentary face, from 1992 to 1997 the pro-Labour vote swing was of a similar magnitude for both women and men.

Nevertheless the analysis of voting choice found that although women and men were voting in similar ways, this did not mean that the influences upon them were necessarily the same. We established that many of the classic socioeconomic indicators which have commonly formed the basis of structural accounts of voting behaviour in Britain - -including class, housing tenure and union membership - operate differently for women. In other regards there were more modest differences in terms of the role of economic evaluations, issue preferences, and party images.

Lastly the analysis shows that the gender-cohort differences noted earlier have been consistent over the last three decades. The generation of women who spent their formative years during the height of the second-wave women's movement are least Conservative in their voting choice. Understood as a cohort rather than life-cycle effect, this implies that generational turnover can be expected to gradually produce a long-term realignment in gender politics, as older voters progressively die out and younger voters eventually take their place. As our study of the 1992 election concluded:

"The implications of this analysis are that in the short-term it is probably extremely difficult for the Labour party to mobilise more female support in the next campaign. The party may give greater emphasis to issues such as strengthening the legislation on equal pay, creating a Ministry for Women, and improving the visibility of women within its ranks. Such measures seem likely to prove popular among Labour women activists. But there is little evidence that these sorts of proposals will change the well-established patterns of voting behaviour...

In the longer term, however, the implications ... may prove more positive for Labour. As the older generation of Conservative women is gradually replaced by population change we can expect the proportion of women

voting Conservative to slowly decrease. Given the gradual shrinkage of the old working class base... the growth of new support among women may be vital to the future of the Labour party. This change is unlikely to produce a sudden change in party fortunes, but in the long-term this seems likely to have significant consequences."(Norris 1993)

The results of the 1997 election confirm these predictions. It did not prove, as some hoped and others feared, a critical election in terms of gender realignment. But this does not mean that the conditions may not be right in future.



Tables

Table 8.1:Vote by Gender 1945-1997

	Cons.		Labour		Liberal		Gender
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Gap
1945	35	43	51	45	11	12	-14
1950	41	45	46	43	13	12	-7
1951	46	54	51	42	3	4	-17
1955	47	55	51	42	2	3	-17
1959	45	51	48	43	7	6	-11
1964	40	43	47	47	12	10	-4
1966	36	41	54	51	9	8	-8
1970	43	48	48	42	7	8	-11
1974	37	39	42	40	18	21	-3
1974	35	37	45	40	16	20	-8
1979	45	49	38	38	15	13	-3
1983	46	45	30	28	23	26	-2
1987	44	44	31	31	24	23	-1
1992	46	48	37	34	17	18	-6
<b>1997</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>1992-97</b>	-16	-17	16	17	1	1	

Note: The gender gap is calculated as the difference in the Con-Lab lead for women and men.

Source: Gallup Polls 1945-59; BES 1964-97.

Table 8.2

**Reported Turnout by Gender, 1964-97**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Turnout Gap</b>
<b>1964</b>	90.9	86.6	<b>-4.3</b>
<b>1966</b>	84.3	82.6	<b>-1.7</b>
<b>1970</b>	81.0	81.0	<b>0.0</b>
<b>1974 (F)</b>	88.8	86.9	<b>-1.9</b>
<b>1974 (O)</b>	85.2	84.8	<b>-0.4</b>
<b>1979</b>	84.4	85.2	<b>0.8</b>
<b>1983</b>	82.5	84.1	<b>1.6</b>
<b>1987</b>	85.5	86.7	<b>1.2</b>
<b>1992</b>	86.4	87.5	<b>1.1</b>
<b>1997</b>	76.9	80.1	<b>3.2</b>

Note: The turnout gap is calculated as the difference in the *reported* turnout for women and men.

Source: BES 1964-97.

**Table 8.3: Model of the Components of Con-Lab Vote Choice by Gender**

	Men		Women		All		Coding
	Beta	Sig.	Beta	SIG	Beta	Sig.	
<b>SOCIAL BACKBROUND</b>							
Gender					-.02		RSEX Women (0) Men (1)
Age	.08	**	.14	**	.11	**	RAGE (Years)
Class	.15	**	.03		.06	**	RSEG recoded into Non-Manua
Education	.03		.11	**	.05	*	HEDQUAL Highest Educational Scaled from Degree (7) to N
Housing Tenure	.09	**	.01		.06	*	TENURE2 recoded into Owner
Union Member	-.08	*	-.04		-.06	*	UNIONS2 recoded into Trade (1), Not (0).
Marital Status	.02		.03		.02		MSTATUS recoded into marrie
Religiosity	.01		.03		.02		Religiosity on a 4-point sc
<b>PARTY/LEADERSHIP IMAGE</b>							
Major as PM	.10	**	.15	**	.14	**	Q274 How good a job as PM?
Conservative Party Image	.41	**	.44	**	.42	**	Party Image scale construct Conclass+Conxtrme+Constrgv+
<b>ECONOMIC EVALUATIONS</b>							
Retrospective sociotropic	-.07	*	-.10	**	-.06	*	Five point scales..lot bett GECPOST Economic situation i
Prospective sociotropic	.06	*	.15	**	.13	**	monthds GECXPC Economic situation i
Retrospective egotropic	-.08	**	-.13	**	-.10	**	GHINPST Economic situation
Prospective egotropic	.07	*	.04		.06	*	months GHINXPC Economic situation
<b>ISSUE SCALES</b>							
Women's Rights	.04		.04				All issues scaled 1=11 Q.433
Jobs v. Prices	.10	*	.04		.08	**	Q.341
Taxation v. spending	.05		.09	**	.09	**	Q.359
Nationalization scale	.03		-.04		.02		Q.377
EU Scale	.06	*	.12	**	.09	**	Q.413
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.52</b>		<b>.61</b>		<b>.58</b>		

Note: OLS Regression analysis models with the vote coded Conservative (1)

Labour (0) as the dependent variable. \*\*=p>.01 \*=p>.05

Source: British Election Study 1997 Cross-Section (Release 3) N. 3615

Weighted by Wtfactor.

Table 8.4

**Gender Gap by Age Group, 1964-1997**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Under 25</b>	<b>Aged 25-44</b>	<b>Aged 45-65</b>	<b>Aged 65+</b>
<b>1964</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>1966</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>-8</b>	<b>-5</b>
<b>1970</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-7</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-30</b>
<b>1974</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-10</b>
<b>1974</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-10</b>	<b>-2</b>
<b>1979</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>-1</b>	<b>-11</b>
<b>1983</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>-2</b>	<b>-4</b>
<b>1987</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1992</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-5</b>	<b>-19</b>
<b>1997</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>-13</b>

Note: The gender gap in the two-party vote lead is calculated as the percentage Con-Lab lead among women minus the percentage Con-Lab lead among men for each age group. A negative gap indicates that women are more Conservative than men.

Source: BES 1964-97

Table 8.5:

**Gender Gap by Class, 1997**

Row %	Cons.		Labour		LibDem		Gender Gap
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Salariat	40	35	39	42	21	23	7
Routine NM	23	34	57	48	20	18	-20
Petty Bourgeoisie	43	49	42	25	15	25	-23
Foremen & Supervisors	18	23	66	52	16	25	-19
Working Class	15	20	69	66	16	13	-8

Col %	Cons.		Labour		Liberal	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Salariat	51	34	27	24	43	36
Routine NM	5	39	7	34	7	34
Petty Bourgeoisie	19	7	10	2	10	6
Foremen & Supervisors	6	3	12	4	9	5
Working Class	18	17	43	34	30	18
All	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Note: Source: British Election Study 1997 Cross-Section N.1313  
Weighted by wtfactor.

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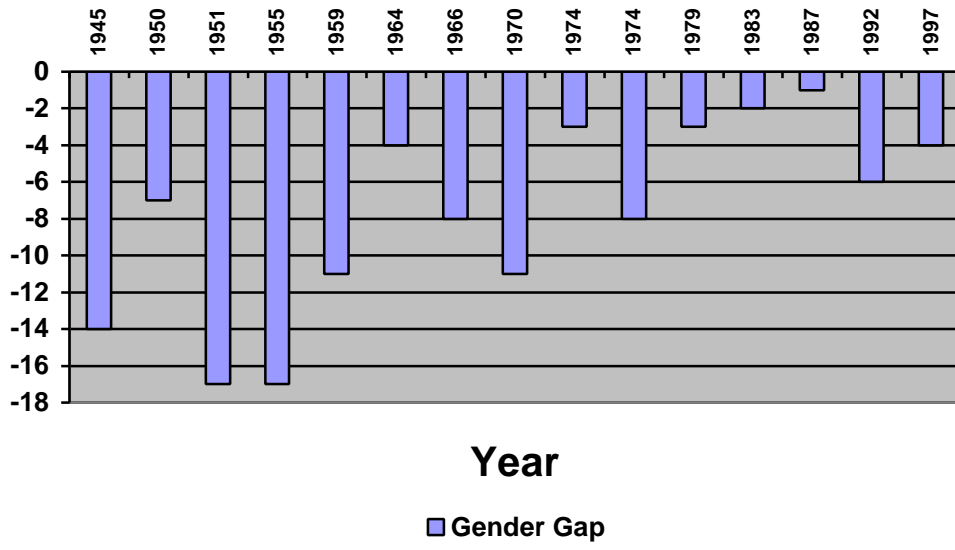
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[8000 words+4 figures]



# Gender Gap 1945-1997



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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Greg Cook "Whither the Gender Gap?" *Polling and Electoral Bulletin* 18, 10 October 1996 (The Labour Party, unpublished paper).

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted, however, that Labour seems to have failed to change the gender gap in party membership. An analysis of party members in 1997, by Whiteley and Seyd, found that the women were 40 percent of 'old' Labour members and 37 percent of 'New' Labour members (who joined after 1994). See Whiteley and Seyd 1998.

<sup>3</sup> When tested employment status was also unrelated to the gender gap in voting choice. There was no significant differences between women and men in full time work and women home-workers. The only major difference concerned the retired, where women proved more Conservative than men, but since this is primarily related to age rather than work-status this was excluded from the regression model. The percentage vote by work-status and gender is as follows:

1997	Conservative		Labour		Liberal Democrat	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
FT Work	30	31	51	50	19	19
PR Work	21	28	44	53	35	19
Retired	34	38	51	44	15	18
Homeworker		32		53		15

<sup>4</sup> The party image scale was constructed from the following four items. These were tested by factor analysis and were found to fall into one dimension. The 4 point summary scale proved highly reliable (Cronbach's Alpha .67).

On the whole, would you describe the Conservative Party nowadays as..

☒☒...good for one class (0)

☒☒Or good for all classes? (1)

☒☒Capable of being a strong government (1)

☒☒Or, not capable of not being a strong government? (0)

---

☒☒ Extreme (0)

☒☒ Or, moderate? (1)

☒☒ ...stands up for Britain abroad (1)

☒☒ or, does not stand up for Britain abroad? (0)

<sup>5</sup> Q424 "Recently there has been discussion about women's rights. Some people feel that women should have an equal role with men in running business, industry and government. These people would put themselves in Box A. Other people feel that a woman's place is in the home. These people would put themselves in Box K. And other people would put themselves in-between, along here. In the first row of boxes, please tick whichever box comes closest to your own views about this issue."

<sup>6</sup> Similar patterns were also found on the European Union scale and on the privatization v. nationalisation scale, where younger women proved most left-wing of any gender cohort, although this pattern did not hold on the other scales.

<sup>7</sup> Note: This model will be replicated and updated once we have the combined 1964-1997 dataset.

A Gender-Generation Gap? Recommend Documents. GaP. Apr 15, 1991 - With the aim of developing a systematic theory to relate superlattice versus type-II character) are presented for the superlattices studied. A particular GAP in mind. Explaining the Gender-Generation Gap The convergence trends which we have noted at aggregate level can emerge either because all women and all men increasingly share similar party preferences, political attitudes and values, as Rose and McAllister (1990) suggest, or because different age-groups of women are diverging. Studies of previous elections have noted the development of what has been termed a 'gender-generation gap', where younger and older groups of women increasingly differ (Norris 1993, 1996a). The gender pay gap is the gap between what men and women are paid. Most commonly, it refers to the median annual pay of all women who work full time and year-round, compared to the pay of a similar cohort of men. Other estimates of the gender pay gap are based on weekly or hourly earnings, or are specific to a particular group of women. Note: The U.S. Census Bureau adjusted its methodology for this year (2018 data) changing the reported pay gap. This doesn't reflect a real difference: There is no statistical change from 2017. No matter how you analyze it, the gender pay gap is real, persistent A generation gap or generational gap is a difference of opinions between one generation and another regarding beliefs, politics, or values. In today's usage, generation gap often refers to a perceived gap between younger people and their parents or grandparents. Early sociologists such as Karl Mannheim noted differences across generations in how the youth transits into adulthood. and studied the ways in which generations separate themselves from one another, in the home and in social situations and