The Gender Gap and Beyond

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Outline

Gender-Related Aspects of Electoral Survey Design

Pitfalls to Avoid in Studying Gender Gaps

Combining Surveys with Other Methods
Gender-Related Aspects of Electoral Survey Design

Sex-of-Interviewer Effects

Opinion Expression and Don’t Knows

Gender Biases in Measuring Political Knowledge
Sex-of-Interviewer Effects

Respondents tend to give more feminist responses on gender-related items when they are interviewed by a woman.

Sex-of interviewer effects are typically not huge but they’re not inconsequential.

It’s not clear whether women or men are more susceptible.
Why Do Sex-of-Interviewer Effects Appear?

Impression Management: respondents want to create a positive impression

Zaller & Feldman’s competing considerations model: interviewer’s sex may elicit different considerations on gender-related topics

Social distance theory: same-sex interactions facilitate communication and thus lead to more open answers
What Can We Do About Sex-of-Interviewer Effects?

Randomly assign male and female interviewers to male and female respondents

Include a sex-of-interviewer variable so that researchers can estimate possible bias

Consider using some form of self-administered questionnaire if gender-related attitudes are central to the study
Opinion Expression and Don’t Knows

Sex is one of the most consistent predictors of opinion expression: women are significantly more likely than men to respond ‘don’t know’

The gender gap in opinion expression is typically attributed to women’s ‘socialized reticence about politics’

Based on the finding that the relationship between political knowledge and opinion expression is stronger for women than for men

i.e. Women require a higher level of objective political competence to achieve comparable levels of opinion expression
Alternative Interpretations

What if the relationship between political knowledge and opinion expression had been stronger for men than for women?

Perhaps men are readier to express preferences that have only a flimsy basis in political knowledge.

The literature on non-attitudes has found that men are more likely than women to offer opinions on nonexistent issues.

Don’t knows may be masking “informed indecision”
Take-Home Point

We need to recognize the possible symmetry of gendered socialization.

Gender isn’t something that just affects women.

If gender role socialization and cultural norms influence women’s political behaviour, it’s surely plausible that they influence men’s, too.
Measuring Political Knowledge

Study after study has shown that women typically know less about politics than men do.

Mondak & Anderson: surveys encourage men to ‘shout out the answers’ while inviting women to ‘sit in the back and keep quiet’

i.e. Gender gaps in political knowledge may be an artefact of gender differences in the propensity to guess.

Jury is still out on how much of the knowledge gap is attributable to gender differences in willingness—as opposed to ability—to answer
Socialized Reticence or Stereotype Threat?

McClone et al.:

• Stereotype threat
• Diagnosticity

Implications:

• Record sex-of-interviewer
• Pay attention to question order
The Feminist Critique

The conventional measures have a built-in gender bias

But we should not discount the importance of political knowledge as conventionally mentioned

Broadening our conception and measures of political knowledge

Knowledge of government services and programs—and why it matters
What We Know About Gender Gaps in Vote Choice

Women tend to be less individualistic than men, more resistant to the use of force, and more tolerant of new lifestyles.

The gender gaps in vote choice can’t be explained simply by looking at differences in social background or political attitudes.

Even when women and men have similar opinions, they may politicize them to differing degrees.
Pitfalls in Focusing on Gender Gaps

The risk of categorical thinking

The risk of reinforcing gender stereotypes

The risk of normative comparisons

Adopting a female-centered perspective
The Evolution of the Gender Gap in NDP Vote Choice, 1965-2008

Note: The gender gap is calculated by subtracting the male vote share from the female vote share. A negative (positive) value indicates that women were less (more) likely to vote NDP than men.
Gender and the Evolution of the NDP Vote, 1965-2008

The graph illustrates the change in the percentage of NDP votes received by women and men from 1965 to 2008. The data shows fluctuations over the years, with notable peaks and troughs, indicating shifts in voter preferences.
Gender and Vote Choice outside Quebec in the 2008 Election

- Liberal
- Conservative
- NDP
- Green

Vote Choice by Gender:

- **Women**
- **Men**
Take-Home Points

When gender gaps reverse, don’t assume that it’s due to women’s changing behaviour

We need to develop theories about men’s changing political behaviour, too

Don’t just focus on gender gaps; look at the overall vote distributions

Gender is not synonymous with female; gender is part of the identity of women and men alike
Combining Surveys with Other Methods

1. Embedding experiments

   Burden: party identification--feeling versus thinking

   Streb et al.: using the list experiment to assess social desirability biases

2. Merging rolling cross-section data with media content

   Gender identity and the acceptance of media messages
Campbell-Manning Spread by Sex

(5-day moving average)

Source: 1993 Canadian Election Study
Thank you