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The Gender Gap Rules 2012 Election

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Don't be fooled that the gender gap -- the measurable difference in the way women and men vote for candidates and in the way they view political issues -- is disappearing. To the contrary, it is driving the 2012 election.

Nate Silver of the *New York Times*' [FiveThirtyEight](#) blog, after a thorough analysis of many presidential polls, concluded on October 21st : "Gender Gap Near Historic Highs." Silver's calculus revealed an 18 percent gender gap, with President Obama up among women by 9 percent and trailing among men by 9 percent. But women and men do not cancel each other out.

Women will be casting 10 million more votes than men in the 2012 election. Women both register and vote in higher percentages than men. In 2008, women cast 9.7 million more votes than men, according to the [Center for American Woman and Politics \(CAWP\)](#) . Overall, Gallup found that 53 percent of the vote was cast by women and 47 percent cast by men.

More important than national polls, Obama is leading in swing states precisely because of the gender gap. In Ohio, for example, a newly released (October 31) [Quinnipiac University/New York Times/CBS poll](#) of likely voters has Obama leading 50 percent to 45 percent with 56 percent of women for Obama and only 44 percent of men, creating a 12 percent gender gap. According to the same poll, in Florida and Virginia, Obama is leading by a slight margin and is boosted by a 10 percent gender gap.

I have been studying women's political behavior since the early 1970s and first identified the gender gap in 1980 with the help of legendary pollster Louis Harris. In those days, most analysts considered the gender gap unimportant because Ronald Reagan won the presidential election despite a gender gap in voting. Since I first identified it, the gender gap has only grown and no serious analyst or, for that matter, political professional can ignore it any longer.

The gender gap first appeared during the Equal Rights Amendment campaign in 1980. It persisted and has grown because of the increasingly different stances of the two major political parties and most of their candidates on women's rights. Issues ranging from equality in pay and employment, abortion and contraception, Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security have all fueled the gender gap.

In 2012, it is no wonder the gender gap is so pronounced. A blizzard of hostile legislation (over 1,000 bills) has been introduced in the past two years against women's reproductive rights in Congress and in many states controlled by Republican legislators and Governors. In the legislative War on Women, the Paycheck Fairness Act has been endlessly filibustered by Republicans in the Senate, the Reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act is being blocked by House Republicans and several hundred extreme anti-abortion and birth control measures have been passed in state legislatures and the US House.

In an obvious attempt to placate women, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney refuses to even say where he stands on the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act even though his party has led the fight against it in Congress. For the same reason, he is trying to muddle his hostile stance on *Roe v. Wade* to make it appear that abortion rights will not be threatened by a Romney presidency.

In an attempt to attract older women who are more dependent on Medicare than men, the Romney campaign is engaged in deception about President Obama's actions on Medicare. Despite repeated allegations from Romney and Vice Presidential nominee Paul Ryan that Obama is cutting \$716 billion from Medicare for Obamacare, it is actually the proposed Ryan budget that would cut \$716 billion in benefits and would end Medicare or privatize it for all people under 55 years of age. President Obama has not cut any benefits to the seniors on Medicare and, in fact, has increased Medicare benefits for seniors.

The gender gap is also making a pronounced impact on many key U.S. Senate races. For example, according to the October 31st Quinnipiac poll, in Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown (D) leads challenger Josh Mandel because of a 12 percent gender gap. In Connecticut, Chris Murphy (D) leads against Linda McMahon with a 10 point gender gap, despite the tens of millions of dollars McMahon is spending on her race. For a more comprehensive list of key US Senate races with gender gap data, see an [analysis of polls](#) by Jennifer Jackman, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Salem State University, MA.

Women's votes will make the difference in 2012. The fight for women's votes -- once gained -- will never be ignored again in American politics.

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