MY STRATEGY BRINGS ALL THE BOYS TO THE YARD:
An Analysis of the Gender Gap and its Impact on the Swing Vote in United States Presidential Elections

Thesis by
Abigail Bartels

Advised by
Josh Kaplan
Introduction

In American presidential elections, statistics show that women vote differently than men. For nearly thirty years, a higher percentage of women have voted for the Democratic candidate than have voted for the Republican candidate. In addition, a higher percentage of women than of men have voted for the Democratic candidate in every presidential election since groups started collecting reliable election polling data in the 1950s. This empirical observation has led to a common understanding called the gender gap, the concept that men and women vote differently.

In this paper, I will address the widespread misunderstanding of this concept. I will begin with the empirical observation that a gender gap exists. The general public tends to interpret the gender gap to mean that the Republican Party has a problem attracting women voters. Many then conclude that there are actions the party can and should take in order to attract women, treating women as if they are swing voters. News articles and memos indicate that media and party strategists share this understanding of women as swing voters and as crucial votes to capture in order to win an election. I argue that, while a gender gap does exist, it is a mistake to treat women as if they are swing voters because it does not properly account for the composition of the swing vote.

---

1 I am aware of the many valid arguments against a gender binary. However, because these categories of “man” and “woman” serve as historical and expected descriptors of voting data, the binary gives us as political scientists analytical power. These categories, fictional though they may be, are useful fiction in that they provide a way to classify a mass of data. They are not meant to reflect any particular individual’s performance of gender. Many fields can capture gender fluidity in their research; voting data, especially from past centuries, cannot. Whether a gender binary is a correct understanding of humanity or not, it is what I must use.


3 Ibid.

4 I will provide examples of this later in this article. For additional examples, please see (listed in the works cited) Seelye’s piece in the *New York Times* on October 24, 2012 and Rosin’s piece in *Slate* on March 13, 2012.
The statistical gender gap (as distinct from the concept of the gender gap) is the absolute value of the percentage-point difference between men and women voting in a defined way on a given candidate, ballot, or election.\textsuperscript{5} For example, if 50% of women who voted in the presidential race and 60% of men who voted in the presidential race voted for Candidate A, one would say that Candidate A won the presidential race with a 10-point gender gap in favor of men during that election. These measures will allow me to see the variation between how men and women vote. A higher gender-gap value for an election or a party will indicate a further distance between the men’s and women’s voting blocs, thus indicating a stronger or more obvious example of the concept of the gender gap. The opposite is also true.

The statistical gender gap provides evidence that women tend to vote more loyally than men and more in line with the Democratic Party than men do, both of which line up with the common understanding of the gender gap. However, media and academia have overlooked the result of this phenomenon. A basic understanding of the existence of the gender gap is that women tend to vote differently than men and more loyally than men. The gender gap then creates a puzzle regarding the swing vote. If the genders vote differently, whose votes are more likely to switch between parties? Along the same lines, whose votes should parties strategically pursue? If it is true that women and men tend to vote differently and that women tend to be more loyal voters than men, men must be more fickle voters than women. Men are the swing voters, and if parties want to pursue the swing vote, they should pursue men.

\textsuperscript{5} This definition is similar to that of the Center for American Women and Politics, “The Gender Gap.”
A swing voter is an individual who votes and who is not a core, regular voter for a particular party but rather is persuadable to multiple parties, candidates, or ideas. Following William Mayer’s definition, then, swing voters are fickle voters. That works to their benefit. Parties see swing voters as attainable and valuable, which means party strategy often aims to reach out to swing voters as a bloc. Party strategy is the set of decisions in a given election cycle that a party makes in order to further its agenda. This term especially regards party appeal to or rejection of certain voter demographics. Parties often make deliberate attempts to respond to the concerns of swing voters in an attempt to win them over. These attempts may include bringing public awareness to certain issues or choosing a candidate with a particular interest or track record on an issue. If the attempts are successful, the party gains votes and the swing voters are more likely to have their concerns addressed. Everyone benefits except loyal core voters, whose concerns are more or less ignored.

There has been much discussion about the benefits of this strategy. While some elections rely heavily on turnout from core voters, many elections are decided by swing voters. Because of this, the parties try to appeal to the issues that concern the swing voters, often ignoring the issues that concern the core voters, since the core voters have been “captured” for that particular party.

One step in carrying out this strategy is dividing the voting population into groups. Parties and journalists often divide the population by demographics rather than ideology. For example, race is one of the most popular lenses through which to view voter demographics. As Black and Black say, race has historically played more of a role

---

than any other factor in political divisions in the key electoral area of the South.7 Racial
voting blocs are often discussed in terms of core and swing voting blocs. For example,
the Democrat Party has won the votes of African Americans for so long that the black
voting bloc is usually categorized as a core Democrat voting bloc.8 At the same time,
Obama “swayed” Latinos to vote for him, indicating that the Latino voting bloc is a
swing voting bloc.9 In fact, the common story after the 2012 election was that the
Hispanic vote won (or at least was quite instrumental in winning) Obama the presidency,
though black voters turned out to vote for him at an impressive rate.10 The swing voters
are the blocs more covered by the press and usually considered the more crucial during
elections. Because these voting blocs have become so heavily associated with race, the
result is that issues that concern Latino voters may be more heavily covered during an
election than issues that matter to black voters.

There are other divides that the media and political scientists use to divide groups
by demographic lines as well. Some of these divides include religion,11 marriage,12 and
income.13 These demographics sometimes have significant correlations with how people
vote, such as with race, and sometimes have very modest correlations with how people

---
7 Earl Black and Merle Black, The Rise of Southern Republicans (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002). Black and Black identify four key divisions by which they separate voters into core Republican, core Democrat, and swing voter: the first is race, the second is religion, and the final two are gender and income. Black and Black also claim elsewhere in their book that the South defined the two-party political system the United States experiences today (page 2). Their implicit argument is, if race affects the South, race affects the nation.
8 For example, see Paul Frymer, Uneasy Alliances: Race and Party Competition in America, 2010.
vote, such as with marriage. Yet these divides are the context through which we examine the crucial election principle of which voters a party should woo.

Why is our culture, specifically our media and our two major political parties, so infatuated with the gender gap? The topic of the gender gap serves as a starting point for our understanding of the broader topic of women in politics. Women in leadership roles and women in power, especially as commander in chief of a military, present a challenge to the more patriarchal aspects of American society. Political parties are embroiled in this upheaval, as it has created a key debate in recent years for the two political parties, and each side has pointed to the other as the actual perpetrators of the “War on Women.”

My project will provide insight into how the Republican and Democratic Parties strategize, and whether this strategy will be effective in garnering votes from either the women’s voting bloc or the swing voters. This project will also bridge a gap between literature on the gender gap and literature on swing voters. Some authors allude to the connection between the two but have never actually written about it. By looking at an old problem, the swing vote, in a new way, through the lens of the gender gap, I will put these two phenomena in conversation with each other and address assumptions that undermine the value of our accounts of both.

Additionally, my project will discuss implications of a male swing vote, including the potential for expanding the political power of women. When women are trying to decide which party to vote for, they might think about that decision conventionally or they may want to think in terms of bloc power. The term bloc power means the influence that a particular group of voters, often determined by demographics, has over party strategy. Bloc power is a measure of either how much political sway a demographic

---

already has or how badly the party wants to attract that voter demographic. I will argue that women could increase their bloc power by, paradoxically, voting less cohesively, thus making themselves more of a swing voter bloc and less of a captured bloc.

To correctly understand the conversation regarding the swing vote, we must begin with the proper understanding of the gender gap, which is currently not upheld by either major party or any major media source and is barely touched by academia. In order to fill the gap in the existing literature on the subject, I will first address the statistical manifestation of the gender gap and the common resulting theoretical misconceptions surrounding the swing vote. I will present an alternative understanding of gender and voting dynamics. That understanding is an account of the swing vote as male. Second, I will examine how party strategy has approached women and men differently and argue for how parties might better approach each gender. Finally, I will assess the implications of a male swing vote—in particular, how women could increase their bloc if they voted less cohesively than they currently do and historically have. Overall, my aim is to correct the misconceptions prevalent in society regarding voting and the gender gap.
Chapter 1: The Gender Gap

Let us begin our new account of women as a voting bloc with the concept of the gender gap. We have established what the gender gap is; now we turn to how we know the gender gap exists, what caused the gender gap, and what the implications of the gender gap are.

The gender gap stems mainly from two observable phenomena: first, that women tend to vote more for the Democratic Party than men do, and second, that women tend to vote more loyally than men do. The numbers that support the existence of the gender gap and imply these two conclusions come from three main sources. Some studies, including those done by the Center for American Women and Politics, detail statistics for the electoral results of American presidential races in a recent given time period and break down those results by gender.\(^\text{15}\) Other authors use statistics from as many as sixty years ago but emphasize one or two elections as case studies.\(^\text{16}\) Others, especially media outlets, focus solely on single elections, providing state-specific exit-poll data.\(^\text{17}\) Still other studies measure the difference between the female and male voter turnout rates throughout a given time period.\(^\text{18}\)

Some authors focus their energy on what caused the gender gap. There are five main theories that have resulted.

---

15 See for instance Center for American Women and Politics, “The Gender Gap.”


Theory 1: Ronald Reagan.

Ronald Reagan is sometimes cited as the individual who caused the gender gap. This may be because the term “gender gap” was first used to describe Reagan’s seeming lack of appeal with women voters in a short article published in *Newsweek* on October 4, 1982. Just two weeks later, *TIME* magazine referred to the gender gap as the “most fashionable topic among pollsters today.” The author credited Reagan’s resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment and to abortion, issues associated primarily with women, with the divergence between male and female support for him.

However, of all the credible explanations of what caused the gender gap, Ronald Reagan is not one of them. First, the Gallup polling data indicates that a voting behavior gap between the genders existed before Reagan (see Figure 1). That being said, the gender gap did increase five points between Reagan’s first election and his second. This leads us to the second refutation of the notion that Ronald Reagan caused the gender gap. The gender gap actually decreased a point from the previous election during Reagan’s first election and only increased for his second election. Reagan’s stances on the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion while governor of California would have been relevant to voters (and perhaps, due to the shorter time period separating his term as governor from the first election, even more salient) during his first election rather than the second. For these two reasons, the claim that Reagan is a basic cause of the gender gap is not supported by the data.

---

Who would benefit from the propagation of this claim that Reagan was the cause of the Republican Party’s “problem with women”? Perhaps an easier question to answer is who would be hurt by this claim. Reagan is often held as the standard-bearer of conservative Republicans today. The conservative movement, both within and outside of the Republican Party, would be harmed by this assumption. Therefore, perpetuating the claim would benefit those who oppose the conservative movement; specifically, this claim benefits the Democratic Party.

Theory 2: Messaging.

The second explanation of the existence of the gender gap is that the Republican Party has a messaging problem with women voters. White male Republicans especially

---

20 Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, “Ronald Reagan: Life in Brief.”

21 In her book, Kathy Bonk argues that feminist activists created the idea that women voted for the Democratic Party more than men did in order to promote the Equal Rights Amendment. More specifically, then, perpetuating this claim would benefit feminist activists in favor of the ERA.
have committed their fair share of gaffes regarding women.\textsuperscript{22} For example, during the 2012 presidential election cycle alone, Republican Senate Candidate Richard Mourdock of Indiana drew criticism for comments that implied that God intends rape to occur.\textsuperscript{23} Republican Senate Candidate Todd Akin of Missouri infuriated many by saying that women’s bodies prevent pregnancy during legitimate rapes.\textsuperscript{24} Republican Assembly Candidate Roger Rivard of Wisconsin drew national criticism during his state legislature race due to his statement that “some girls rape easy.”\textsuperscript{25} It is presumably unnecessary to explain how this type of messaging could upset women or otherwise encourage them not to vote for the Republican Party.

The assertion that these Republican male gaffes is the main factor causing the gender gap is made primarily by the media, and I have found no evidence of anyone in the academic community who ascribes to this explanation. This may be due to academia’s lack of ability to test this hypothesis going back to the 1950s or before, or more likely to the fact that both Democrat and Republican men have made inflammatory statements about women even recently.\textsuperscript{26} However, the implications of the media holding this belief are notable, given that the media plays an important role in how the public views political leaders. Who benefits from the perpetuation of this argument? Because

\textsuperscript{23} Krieg and Good, “Mourdock Rape Comment Puts GOP on Defense,” par 1.
\textsuperscript{24} Eligon and Schwitz, “Senate Candidate Provokes Ire With ‘Legitimate Rape’ Comment,” par 1.
\textsuperscript{25} Terkel, “Roger Rivard Loses Reelection To Wisconsin Assembly After Saying ‘Some Girls Rape Easy,’” par 1.
\textsuperscript{26} See for example GOP, \textit{Democrats Degrade Women}, youtube video (October 31, 2014); Tom McCarthy, "Albright: 'special place in hell' for women who don't support Clinton," \textit{The Guardian} (February 6, 2016); Rich Schapiro, “Gloria Steinem, feminist icon, says young women support Bernie Sanders to meet 'boys' — then apologizes,” \textit{NY Daily News} (February 8, 2016); \textit{TIME}, "How the Cookie Crumbles," April 20, 1992: 14.
the claim besmirches the Republican Party by playing into a story about the Republican Party’s problem with women, the Democratic Party benefits. However, the claim that this “problem with women” stems from a messaging issue is difficult to prove and is not widely discussed in the academic community as a feasible cause of the gender gap.

**Theory 3: The Issue of Abortion.**

This third explanatory argument regarding the cause of the gender gap analyzes the role that one particular issue plays on the gendered vote. Some argue that certain party issues, especially the issue of abortion, widen the gender gap. Some evidence seems to support this idea: Shortly after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the gender gap became a more visible phenomenon. Parties have responded by rebranding these issues as “women’s issues” and working to appeal to voters through this gendered lens. However, it is reasonable to question whether the issue of abortion caused the gender gap for two reasons. First, the data indicate that while a gender gap in presidential elections exists, the gender gap in the abortion issue does not explain it in its entirety.

---

28 Ibid.
29 See for instance Democratic National Committee, Homepage, *Democrats.org*. 
Pew Research Center Data is even more conservative in its estimation of the gender gap, indicating there exists just a two-percentage-point gender gap on the issue of abortion today while the gender gap itself remains much wider.\(^{30}\) This is quite an insignificant gap compared to what one might expect to find if realignment on the abortion issue specifically had shifted the female vote to the Democrats. In contrast, stances on other issues, such as the legalization of gay marriage, show a much broader gender gap, questioning the practicality of the parties’ emphasis on abortion as the all-inclusive “women’s issue.”\(^{31}\) Also, the Republican Party took a strong pro-life stance around 1980, while even in the 1950s we already see some indication of the gender gap.\(^{32}\) The pro-life stance of the Republican Party may play into the Democratic Party’s narrative of the Republican War on Women. Thus, the argument that abortion caused the gender gap may benefit the Democratic Party, but it does not explain the gender gap.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.
Theory 4: Physical Attractiveness.

The fourth argument for the cause of the gender gap relies on the premise that women care more about how a candidate looks than men do. This argument claims that because Democrats have “more attractive” candidates than Republicans, women vote Democrat while men do not.

The first step in examining this argument is to find whether the physical appearance of a candidate influences the chances that candidate has in an election. Research has indicated that attractive candidates tend to win more races than non-attractive candidates. Some scholars have attributed this desire within voters for an attractive candidate to a desire for a healthy leader as opposed to a handsome one. Either way, voters seem to respond positively to physical beauty and/or negatively to the perceived lack thereof.

The second step in examining this argument is to determine whether the image voters have of the attractiveness of a candidate differs by the gender of the voter (and of the candidate). This argument, however, relies on several assumptions that make this step difficult to complete with any modicum of precision. To do so would require a research design that accounted for the sexual orientations and genders of voters as compared to politicians in a way that the general argument does not. If indeed women of all sexual orientations did change their votes more based on the physical appearance of a candidate while men of all sexual orientations did not, we might see some evidence for this theory. Because such a survey has not yet been done, the best we can call this theory is plausible.

---

The third step in examining this argument is to measure the difference in attractiveness between Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. I was unable to find any evidence indicating that Democratic nominees were more attractive than Republican nominees. In fact, at the congressional level, Democrats only recently received ratings comparable to Republicans in The Hill’s 50 Most Beautiful People list released each year.\(^{35}\) Additionally, one study that has yet to be published found that right-wing politicians are generally rated as more attractive than their left-wing counterparts.\(^{36}\) These three steps indicate that this theory of attractiveness causing the gender gap has very little evidence supporting it.

Theory 5: Socialization and the Size of Government.

A fifth possible explanation of the gender gap relies on the gendered breakdown of issues. This explanation seems to be the most likely. Much research has been done that indicates that men and women care about different issues.\(^{37}\) This phenomenon prompts two questions: First, what are the different issues that men and women respectively care about? Second, why is there a gender gap on those particular issues?

\(^{36}\) Ian Sparks, "Are Republican politicians better looking? Study says voters find right-wingers more attractive than their rivals on the left," Daily Mail (March 2, 2011).
Statistically, more women than men want a bigger government, which may well link to the fact that a higher percentage of women than men think government fails to adequately support the elderly, children, and the poor.\(^{38}\) Women also tend to be more supportive of pro-environment reforms and less supportive of nuclear weapons.\(^{39}\) On the other hand, more men than women want smaller government, support tax breaks for businesses, and advocate the stockpiling of nuclear weapons.\(^{40}\)

Why do men and women think differently about these issues? Perhaps men have been socialized to think in terms of defense and finances, while women have been socialized to think in terms of caregiving.\(^{41}\) It would be logically consistent that, in a culture where men are taught to be the breadwinners and women are taught to be the caregivers, the men would think about issues of money and the women would think about issues of the environment. This argument also follows with the information that this trend is occurring worldwide. Some scholars argue that the gender gap in issues in United States politics is just part of the global realignment of women toward the Left because of the connection between the issues the Left champions and the issues that matter to women.\(^{42}\) However globally valid this argument may be, it is difficult to prove since it is based on the idea that men and women are indoctrinated to act differently even from birth by society. Society’s natural involvement in these issues then makes it nearly impossible to solidly prove that this theory, however sensible it may be, is the most correct idea of the cause of the gender gap.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.  
\(^{40}\) Ibid.  
Who benefits from promoting the idea that the gender gap exists because of issues and socialization? The answer is almost everyone. Republicans benefit because they can tout the issues on which economically conservative women align with the party or on which “financially responsible” women agree with men. Democrats benefit because they can tout the issues on which socially liberal women align with the party or on which “enlightened and compassionate” men agree with women. The media benefits because it has another angle to promote whenever certain issues come into the limelight.

Which explanation for the gender gap is most correct is heavily contested. While an understanding of these arguments and who benefits from each is important to understanding the role that gender plays in United States presidential elections, it is also important to understand what aspects of that role the gender gap may miss.
Chapter 2: A Model of the Swing Vote

When academics, politicians, and journalists discuss gender in politics, they focus on the difference between how men and women vote or voted on a particular ballot (the “gender gap”). In the following chapters, I argue that a clearer understanding of the role gender plays in politics comes from an examination of how differently men and women choose to vote over time. The gender gap quantifies the variance between the voting behaviors of the two genders in one snapshot of time without regard to party. One aspect of gendered voting that is not expressed in the gender gap is the level of party loyalty each gender exhibits in its voting preferences. Because the role gender plays in United States politics occurs over time and within a party system, a complete understanding of gender in politics must include an understanding of the swing vote. Specifically, while we can say that women tend to vote more for Democratic candidates than men do, including the swing vote in the conversation indicates that this is less a result of cohesiveness among women than it is about variability among men. This chapter contains an examination of the swing vote more broadly, and the following chapter will focus specifically on the gendered swing vote.

Types of Voters

Current literature on the topic of the swing vote, especially in popular media, can fall into the trap of using the terms independent and swing voter interchangeably.43 This does not accurately describe either independent voters or swing voters.

43 For example, see Peter Wallsten and Neil King, "Swing Voters are Flocking to GOP," Wall Street Journal (October 30, 2010).
There are six types of voters within American presidential elections (see Figure 3). Core Democrats and core Republicans are voters who identify themselves as members of one particular party and generally vote the party ticket on most or all candidates or initiatives. All remaining voters who do not identify themselves as Democrat or Republican are classified as independent. This category of Independent breaks down into four more specific categories: Lean Democrats and lean Republicans, or attitudinal independents, are voters who identify as independents but vote for one party’s candidates or initiatives consistently. Third-party voters, who are also attitudinal independents, are voters who identify as independent because they vote loyally for a party that is not one of the two major parties. The fourth and most amorphous category is the swing voter. Swing voters are, once again, voters who do not loyally vote for one particular party and are persuadable to vote for different parties or candidates. Swing voters are also referred to as behavioral independents, individuals who switch their vote from one party to another over the course of two elections, or pure independents, individuals who do not claim to identify with any party “even when offered the opportunity to express a preference indicating only limited commitment.”

---

45 Ibid., 125.
46 Ibid., 124.
The Importance of the Swing Vote

The United States has a two-party system where both parties are minority parties, meaning that neither party has enough core voters to hold the majority during elections based on those core voters alone. Thus, the parties must reach out to independents in order to achieve a majority and win an election. The parties can reach out to their lean supporters, the other party’s lean supporters, third-party voters, and/or swing voters.

There are two major schools of thought regarding the importance of reaching out to swing voters. The first holds that swing voters win elections; thus, it is imperative that party strategists respond to the interests of swing voters in order to secure victory.

Proponents of this idea often say that the Republican and Democratic parties are simply
two minority parties and that the majority of powerful voters are actually swing voters.\footnote{Black and Black, \textit{The Rise of Southern Republicans}, 242.} The parties seem to agree. For example, in September 2008, shortly before Obama’s first election, the Democratic Party published a study looking at how to win elections in the contemporary political climate. The conclusion was that “If recent patterns hold, the ability of Democrats to run competitively among key categories of swing voters could prove to be the difference between victory and defeat.”\footnote{The Democratic Leadership Council, “Who Are the Swing Voters?: Key Groups That Decide National Elections,” September 2008.} This theory is represented within media and popular understanding as well.\footnote{See Linda Killian, "4 Types of Independent Voters Who Could Swing the 2012 Elections," \textit{The Atlantic} (February 2, 2012) and Pat Toomey, "Swing Voters Don't Want Big Government," \textit{The Wall Street Journal} (November 6, 2008).} In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary even apparently ascribes to this theory, as its definition for “swing vote” includes the statement that the swing vote “often decisively influences the result of a poll.”\footnote{"swing vote." OED Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed January 2, 2016.}

The second school of thought claims that core voters, not swing voters, are the key to winning an election. The influence of core voters is supported by evidence indicating that independents have lower turnout than core voters, making the majority of active voters core voters.\footnote{Hershey, \textit{Party Politics in America}, 124.} 2004 is an excellent example of the application of this school of thought. During that cycle, one of George W. Bush’s campaign strategists specifically told the press that the Bush campaign was targeting core voters in order to win the election, in which he was ultimately successful.\footnote{Frontline, "Karl Rove: The Architect," \textit{PBS} (April 12, 2005).} Another example is the (non-presidential) election of 1998, where core voters were the target for both parties.\footnote{For the 1998 election, see David Broder and Thomas Edsall, "Amid Election Apathy, Parties Bet on Core Voters," \textit{Washington Post} (September 7, 1998: A01) and Jill Lawrence, “Parties Channel Efforts, Funds to Get Out the Vote,” \textit{USA TODAY} (October 19, 1998): 16A.} The emphasis campaigns and parties put on “Get Out the Vote” initiatives provides public
support for this school of thought, as do various scholars and journalists. However, even proponents of this view do not dismiss the importance of swing voters. Many scholars and journalists claim that certain elections support the first theory and others support the second. For example, Bush strategist Karl Rove, who focused the campaign on core voters, argues that turning out core voters wins some races and convincing independent voters win other races.54

While the power of swing voters to decide elections is disputed, parties or campaigns can choose to appeal to swing voters in order to bolster their chances of winning. To do so, these strategists must determine how to attract swing voters to their sides. Often, strategists will group these voters in blocs. A voting bloc is a specific subset of voters grouped due to demographic traits but associated with a particular ideology. A voting bloc is dependent on characteristics such as race (the black vote) or religion (the Muslim vote). It is not dependent on an ideological trait.55 This formation of groups is based on the assumption that people in these groups will generally vote a particular way. Thus, a strategist can work to make a certain candidate appealing to a certain group of voters because of a certain characteristic or policy stance and therefore win the votes of that voting bloc. In an ideal world for the strategist, this would ultimately lead to the strategist’s party receiving core votes plus swing votes and therefore winning the majority of the vote in that election.

55 Voting blocs and lobbies are opposites in this way. Lobbies are specific subsets of voters grouped due to ideological traits and associated with certain demographics. Think for example of the gun lobby or the abortion lobby. These are policy- or ideal-oriented groups. The mention of these groups also invokes some image of the demographics of the typical member of the group (for example, a common understanding of a member of the gun lobby may be a redneck; a common understanding of a member of the abortion lobby may be a feminist woman; etc.).
The General Demographics of the Swing Vote

There are two ways that strategists often divide voters into blocs. The first is by regions (the Bible Belt, the Midwest, etc.). The second, and the more relevant for a paper on gender and voting, is by demographics.

How do we determine which demographics tend to be core voters and which tend to be swing voters? Often Americans think of core voters for the Republican Party as businessmen who want lower taxes and hold traditional family values, while core voters for the Democratic Party are viewed as compassionate and empathetic activists who want to increase welfare and rearrange social dynamics.\(^{56}\) Often when Americans think of swing voters, they think of voting blocs that stereotypically tend to fall in both categories, such as the elderly, Catholics, Hispanics, and women.\(^ {57}\) This is because many polls on “swing voters” ask whether someone might change their mind on whom they are voting for before the election. Individuals who answer “yes” are counted as swing voters.\(^ {58}\) However, in the process of making a decision, contemplating a switch does not equate to making a switch. Instead of asking whether someone might change his or her mind, studies ought to ask whether someone switched his or her vote. In one such study that covered nine presidential elections, the only consistent bloc of these stereotypical “swing voter” blocs that was prominently featured in the swing vote was Catholics.\(^ {59}\) Thus, the understanding of the average swing voter as, say, an elderly Hispanic Catholic woman was quite unrepresentative of who the average swing voter actually is.

\(^{58}\) For example, see Joseph Carroll, "'Swing Voters' in the 2004 Presidential Election," Gallup (September 7, 2004).
\(^{59}\) Mayer, "The Swing Voter in American Presidential Elections.," 382.
Entire books have strived to answer the question of who the swing voters are.\textsuperscript{60} This fascination is due in part to the important role they play, especially in deciding presidential elections. We will now focus on one aspect of the swing vote: gender. As discussed, the common perception of a gendered swing vote is that women as a voting bloc are more likely to swing their votes than men are. However, as we are about to discuss, the data seem to indicate that that common perception is incorrect.

\textsuperscript{60} For example, Mayer, \textit{The Swing Voter in American Politics}. 
Chapter 3: The Gendered Swing Vote

How do the demographics of gender fit with the idea of a swing vote? There are three different answers to this question.

Argument 1: Both genders swing because neither gender swings.

Some scholars argue that the cause of the gender gap is that men started voting more Republican rather than women starting to vote more Democrat.\textsuperscript{61} If this is true, then each gender would tend toward a certain party and the swing vote would not appear to have a gendered slant. In other words, if men usually vote for Republicans and women usually vote for Democrats, then the swing voters are the abnormal men and the abnormal women rather than a voter typical of either gender.

This argument has been articulated by strategists on such high levels as the Democratic Party’s Leadership Council.\textsuperscript{62} The logic behind this certainly makes sense: if women and men tend to vote differently, and women tend to vote for the Democrat Party, then men must tend to vote for the Republican Party. If women tend to vote Democrat and men tend to vote Republican, there is no reason to believe that the swing voters are one gender as opposed to the other.

Argument 2: The typical swing voter is a woman.

While party strategists may think one way, the common theme according to the media seems to be that women are more likely to swing their votes than men are.\textsuperscript{63} When reading just the title of one 2012 New York Times article, “Critical Subset: Female Voters Still Deciding,” the public is exposed to two arguments that may or may not be

\textsuperscript{61} See Karen Kaufmann, John Petrocik, and Daron Shaw, \textit{Unconventional Wisdom Facts and Myths about American Voters} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Wolbrecht, "Parties and the Gender Gap."


\textsuperscript{63} Gerald Seib, "Who Will Be the Swing Voters in 2016?" \textit{The Wall Street Journal} (May 25, 2015).
true: first, that voters who are still deciding are critical (a reliance on the swing vote as the deciding vote in presidential elections), and second, that swing voters are women.  

These arguments are common themes throughout United States journalism and rhetoric surrounding elections. Another article explained that regarding changing their votes, “single women are doing what only single women can do: switch alliances, hold out for the best deal, express their outrage by suddenly going cold on a candidate who has irritated them and then warm up quickly to a new one who makes a better offer.” The argument that single men do not switch alliances is not even implied here: it is explicit.

**Argument 3: The typical swing voter is a man.**

In fact, the truth may lie in the opposite argument: that men are more likely to swing their votes than women are. William Mayer, a leading scholar on the swing vote, provides an understanding of swing voters that is inconsistent with women as a bloc in the swing vote. However, Mayer did not pursue the possibility that these statistics may provide insight into a male swing vote, noting that women do not comprise the swing vote but stopping short of investigating the question of whether or not men do. A small number of articles, academic and popular in nature, have indicated some level of support for this theory.

---

66 Mayer, "The Swing Voter in American Presidential Elections," 382. Mayer presents four hypotheses in his definition of swing voters: that swing voters are less partisan than non swing voters; that swing voters are more likely to be moderates than non swing voters; that swing voters are less interested in politics than non swing voters; and that swing voters are demographically different from both non swing voters and the common perception of swing voters. Specifically, the only consistent group common to popular ideas of who comprises the swing vote that Mayer finds actually prominently featured in swing vote is Catholics.
67 Ibid.
68 One argument [represented by Libby Copeland, "Why Do Women Vote Differently Than Men?," Slate (January 4, 2012)] states that “Despite stereotypes, men are actually more fickle at the voting booth.” Another argument [represented by Paul Kellstedt, David Peterson, and Mark Ramirez, "The Macro Politics of a Gender Gap," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (2010): 477-498] is that men change their stances on
In order to determine which, if either, gender comprises the swing vote, we ought to examine gender not in terms of the gender gap (comparing how differently men and women vote) but rather in terms of how women have voted as far as party loyalty over time compared to how men have voted as far as party loyalty over time.

How the Genders Swing

To compare which gender is more likely to swing its vote (if either), I charted the Gallup polling data from the U.S. Presidential Election Surveys, which includes demographic questions (specifically asking the gender of the participant) going back to 1952. Gallup data has consistently mirrored election data over time, indicating a strong level of credibility in its polling. This data informed Figure 1, which indicated the gender gap in United States presidential elections since 1952. In addition to learning about how differently the genders voted, we can use the same data to examine the party loyalty trends within each gender. Here is where we find the key discrepancy between how society thinks of men and women as gendered voters and what the data indicate.

In Figure 2, we see the voting patterns of women listed without the impact of or comparison to voting patterns of men. Rather than examining the gender gap, we examine simply the party loyalty of women if we consider them a bloc.

---

69 For arguments regarding the validity of Gallup polling data, see Gallup, "Election Polls -- Accuracy Record in Presidential Elections" and Gerhard Peters, "Election Year Presidential Preferences: Gallup Poll Accuracy Record: 1936-2012," The American Presidency Project.
These charts show the percentage of each gender that voted for a particular party. The data shows that contrary to popular belief, women as a voting bloc have not been solidly Democrat (creating the gender gap) but instead have switched from one party to another party three times (swinging their votes). These three realignments occurred in 1960, 1968, and 1992. From at the latest 1952 until 1960, women tended to vote for the Republican Party. From 1960 to 1968, women tended to vote for the Democrat Party. From 1968 to 1992, women voted Republican, and from 1992 until the present, women have voted Democrat.

What is the use of understanding that women have realigned three times since 1952? First, this undermines many of the theories regarding why the gender gap exists. As we discussed, many of these are predicated on the idea that women vote for the Democrat party and that men vote differently than women do. This way of approaching the topic of gender in politics only shows the difference between how men and women
vote. It does not reflect the subtlety of how the genders act as blocs in aligning and realigning with different parties. The common idea is that women are solidly Democrat. In reality, women only seem to be solidly Democrat when one compares them to men.

Second, this understanding of the realignments of women as a voting bloc raises the question of how men as a voting bloc have voted in regards to party loyalty. Let us turn to a similar chart showing men’s voting patterns over the same span of time.

**Figure 5:**
Men’s Voting Patterns from 1952-2012

![Men’s Voting Patterns from 1952-2012](chart.png)

Source of Data: Gallup U. S. Presidential Election Surveys

In the amount of time that women took to realign three times, men realigned (or in one case, equally split their votes) on seven separate occasions. These realignments occur in 1960, 1968, 1976, 1980, 1992, and 1996, while the year when Democrat and Republican men equaled out but did not realign was 2008. This data seems to indicate that men, not women, are more likely to be swing voters.

The women’s vote and the men’s vote both vary in intensity. However, the key difference is women vary in a higher Democratic range while men vary in the middle.
Therefore, while the female vote stays consistently Democrat over the course of these elections, the male vote continues to flip back and forth. These sets of data together show the variance in the party identification of the male swing vote as it flip-flops over the 50% line. Because of the ranges in which women and men move, the men’s vote is more of a swing vote and the women’s vote is more of a captured vote.

The focus on the gender gap leads many to overlook this phenomenon. When news articles and party strategy memos indicate that women vote differently than men in regards to party, they overlook the fact that men vote differently than women in regards to loyalty. This prevents media and party strategists from understanding that women only seem strange in their voting behavior when one assumes that men’s voting behavior is normal or standard. If we instead place the voting behavior of men under scrutiny, the data indicate that men, not women, are the swing voters.

This theory of a male swing vote is not the commonly accepted understanding. In fact, it contradicts the commonly accepted understanding. So how credible is this theory? In other words, is this narrative of a male swing vote consistent with what we see in trends of political behavior other than voting? To answer this, we turn to three key aspects of the political behavior of swing voters: issues, ideology, and interest.

First, men and women tend to care about different issues. As discussed in Chapter 1, men tend to want smaller government while women tend to want bigger government. If men make up the swing vote, we should see that swing voters generally want smaller government. We do see swing voters disproportionately desiring smaller government. This desire is consistent with the idea of a male swing vote.

---

70 Toomey, "Swing Voters Don't Want Big Government."
Second, men and women may vary in intensity of ideology. Swing voters also are set apart from core voters by level of commitment to ideology. Swing voters tend to be less partisan than core voters. If swing voters tend to be less partisan than core voters and if men make up the swing vote, we would expect to see that men make up the swing vote. We do. Think tank research indicates that women tend to be more ideologically extreme while men are more ideologically moderate. A 2011 study showed that men and women who identify with the Republican Party tend to score similarly as far as intensity of ideology while women who identify more with the Democratic Party are significantly more liberal than the corresponding group of men. This once again is consistent with the idea of a core female voting bloc and a swing male voting bloc.

Third, men and women have different levels of interests in politics. Swing voters statistically have indicated less interest in politics than core voters. If men are more likely to be swing voters and swing voters have a lower interest in politics, we would expect that men would have a lower interest in politics. This standard is difficult to measure. One way to do so is by voter turnout rates. Women have had higher rates of turnout than men since the 1980s, and the gender disparity in turnout increases each presidential election.

None of these points prove that certainly the swing vote is predominantly male, but they do emphasize the plausibility of this argument. If this theory of a swing vote made of men were true, we would expect to see certain results, which we do see. By putting characteristics of swing voters and of men into conversation with each other, we

72 Matthew Yglesias, “If You Don’t Like Moderate Democrats, Encourage More Women To Run For Office,” Center for American Progress (June 21, 2011).
74 Center for American Women and Politics, “Gender Differences in Voter Turnout,” 1.
approach gender in politics in a new way that may add something to our understanding of this topic that a continued examination of the gender gap does not. That being said, the data itself comparing party loyalty among men and party loyalty among women does serve as strong evidence for a male swing vote. The data tells the story of women realigning over time, but it tells of men realigning far more frequently.

If this narrative of a male swing vote is true, the realization of its implications could revolutionize party strategy. If parties that currently work to appeal to women as swing voters began to appeal to men as swing voters, elections could look very different. Issues stressed on the campaign trail or on party websites could look very different. Overall, the way that political strategists approach voters could look very different.
Chapter 4: Party Strategy and a Gendered Swing Vote

We have briefly examined the arguments for and against the idea that the swing voters determine elections. The swing vote has significant power in the winner-takes-all system that pervades most of the United States. In similar fashion to the proverbial two men running from a bear, all a candidate must do to win a state is get more votes than the competition. Therefore, earning just a few new votes in certain states can win a candidate a disproportionate number of new electoral votes. This makes voters who could switch sides easily very valuable.

In this chapter, I will explain how parties respond to voting blocs. I will then give an analysis of what factors would affect whether a party would switch from an understanding of a female swing vote to an understanding of a male swing vote.

Party Responses to Voting Blocs

Parties have a vested interested in convincing non-core voters to vote for them. Therefore, parties make strategic decisions in order to encourage this type of behavior. For example, when the geographic regions of the United States were more distinct than they are now, geography used to play a bigger role in the selection of a vice presidential candidate; a presidential candidate would have a running mate from a different geographic region in order to secure more votes.75 As a more recent example, during this election cycle, one party has begun doing mock caucus training sessions in Spanish while

---

another has focused $300,000 on advertising, both specifically to pursue the Hispanic vote.\(^76\)

The party websites provide a wealth of examples of this appeal to non-core voters. A link on the Republican Party’s homepage leads viewers to the “Black Republican Activists” page, which highlights the beginnings of the Republican Party in the anti-slavery movement.\(^77\) The homepage also links to a blog targeting millennials which features articles such as “8 Songs Missing From Hillary Clinton’s Playlist.”\(^78\) These attempts to appeal to groups that do not turn out for the Republican Party in high numbers illustrate the party’s desire to secure these voting blocs. Similarly, the Democratic Party’s homepage prompts people of faith to learn about how the Democratic Party shares common values of tolerance and charity with many faiths.\(^79\) The resource listed on the home page for small business owners stresses the actions President Obama has taken that Republicans often champion, such as cutting taxes for businesses.\(^80\) Once again, these appeals exemplify the efforts of the Democratic Party to secure votes of blocs that do not usually vote Democratic (specifically, religious people and small business owners).

While websites are just one example of how parties can reach out to demographics, they do provide insight into how the parties categorize voters into blocs. Other messaging tools, such as print, television advertisements, or radio spots, also provide opportunities for parties to target voting blocs. This targeting of blocs sometimes


\(^77\) Republican National Committee, Black Republican Activists, gop.com on March 30, 2016: “The face of Black Republican activism is diverse. We played an important role in the early founding and growth of the Republican Party.”

\(^78\) Team GOP, “8 Songs Missing from Hillary Clinton’s Playlist,” Republican National Committee (March 11, 2016).

\(^79\) Democratic National Committee, Faith Community, Democrats.org on March 30, 2016.

\(^80\) Democratic National Committee, Small Business Community, Democrats.org on March 30, 2016.
happens covertly so that other blocs do not feel excluded. For example, one 2013 study found that both Republican and Democratic candidates attempted to appeal to black voters only if it was unlikely that white voters would see that specific campaign material. Because of the ideally covert nature of this targeted messaging, parties can adjust their message to different voting blocs if and only if they can somehow separate voters by demographics.

Party Strategy, Race, and Gender

Two of the most commonly discussed breakdowns of demographic blocs are race and gender. Similar to the way the Republican Party is purported to have a “problem with blacks” and a “problem with Latinos,” it also is said to have a “problem with women.”

However, the Republican Party’s lack of appeal to these groups may not be so much of a “problem” as a deliberate strategic choice. Some authors argue that the Republican Party has chosen strategies of appealing to certain groups of core voters with the intended consequence of alienating other voters. As an example, scholars point to the Republican Southern strategy of 1968, whereby the Republican Party made strategic decisions to draw in white southern conservatives, which required it to deliberately “dealign” black and moderate voters. Some scholars claim that this strategy was still being used in the 2000s.

Is the same strategy occurring for women? Do appeals to white male voters mean that the Republican Party must delalign women voters? As tempting as this inference

may seem, neither evidence nor strategic considerations support it. First, we do not see an
indication of this strategy in public leadership memos, so if this strategy is being
executed, it is secretly. Second, if this is the strategy the Republican Party has chosen to
implement, it is going very poorly. Even those who do not accept the idea of a male
swing vote do not count men as a core voter bloc for any party, let alone the Republican
Party. These two points would indicate that this is not or will not for much longer be the
Republican Party’s strategy.

The broader question here is: does it make sense for parties to think of women
voters as a voting bloc in the same way as they think of black voters as a voting bloc?
When we consider the targeted messages that parties send different demographics, the
answer is no. The use of media in party strategy highlights the breakdown of the
connection between gender and other forms of demographic divisions. It is far more
likely that a male voter and a female voter live in the same household and therefore
observe the same marketing strategies (through print ads, television commercials, etc.)
than a black voter and a white voter do or than a Catholic voter and a Muslim voter do.
Even age can divide households into blocs – given society’s expectation that most
children leave the home upon turning 18 or 22, households usually have voters of similar
ages grouped together as well. In most cases, this serves the interests of parties that have
messages tailored to different groups: a party that advocates for better Medicare coverage
can send relevant information to homes with older inhabitants. A party that works for
religious freedom can share its stance specifically with the Muslims, Catholics, or Jews
who may be experiencing discrimination. However, gender defies such geographic
separation. Parties have a difficult time appealing to one gender without the other finding
out by reading the same paper or watching the same television. This integration of the
two demographic blocs has created a situation wherein parties must strategically navigate
any attempts to appeal to men or to women. A gendered breakdown is more complicated
from a messaging standpoint than a racial breakdown.

However, there are ways in which thinking of gender and racial divides in voting
blocs may be helpful for a party. One reason for this is *electoral capture*, the idea that
once a voting bloc becomes a core voting bloc for a party, that party will no longer
uphold that bloc’s interests. Black voters are frequently talked about as a captured group
for the Democratic Party because they so reliably vote for that party that the party no
longer needs to woo them.\(^\text{84}\) Similarly, women vote reliably for the Democratic Party as
well out of habit or on the basis of a few key issues. However, we see the Democratic
Party still courting the female vote for reasons discussed in the next section.

**Why Parties Do and Will Focus on Women**

Parties still focus on women as swing voters because of a misunderstanding of the
impact the gender gap has on the swing vote. This misunderstanding leads both parties to
emphasize issues that matter to women voters. For example, both major political parties
devote pages on their website to women’s issues, while neither have a page making a
similar appeal to men.\(^\text{85}\) However, even if parties did extend their understandings of
genders to allow for a male swing vote, several factors may still influence them to
continue to focus on issues that poll as more important with women than with men.

---

\(^{85}\) As of March 30, 2016.
1. **All’s Fair in Votes and War.**

   The more that Party A emphasizes that they care about women, the more it can emphasize that Party B does not care about women.

   As we discussed in Chapter 1, the Democratic Party has benefited from many incomplete rationales for the gender gap over the years because these arguments play into the Democratic Party’s narrative that the Republican Party has a War on Women. The content of this War seems to be in the eye of the beholder and can range from the GOP stance on abortion to the choices the GOP has made, whether deliberately or for lack of better options, to nominate so many male candidates and so few female ones at a national level. This broader story of a War on Women is highlighted by the Democratic Party’s pro-choice stance and proportionally higher representation of women in candidate positions.

   The Democratic Party therefore has little motivation to work under the concept of a male swing vote, as it can benefit in its struggle with the Republican Party for votes by continuing the narrative of a Republican War on Women. In this case, appealing to women and dealigning men seems to be the Democratic Party’s version of the Republican Southern strategy.

2. **Nobody Wants to Be a Bigot.**

   If Party A suddenly stops discussing issues women care about and starts discussing issues men care about, Party A could become known as the party of bigots who discriminate against women.
The reports published by parties analyzing their strategies are a helpful way to identify which voting bloc or blocs a party is pursuing. Particularly interesting are reports published after a loss of a presidential election as the party tries to uncover what went wrong. Some of these reports are released soon after the election (see below) while others are kept under wraps until shortly before the next election (see point 4).

In the Growth and Opportunity Project the Republican Party created in December 2012, experts examined different demographics that the party consistently loses, one of which is women. After conducting focus groups, the authors of the report recommended that the Republican Party include women more in activities, campaigns, and media while responding more aggressively to the Democratic idea of “Republicans’ War on Women” and emphasizing the role the Republican Party played in the women’s rights movement. Women, far more than men, were the focus. As long as the Democratic Party continues its narrative of a War on Women, the Republican Party has pressure to respond by appealing to women. A narrative of a male swing vote may prompt the Party to pay less attention to the issues that matter to women in favor of men, thus confirming the allegations leveled against the GOP by the Democratic Party. It is thus unlikely that the Republican Party would adopt such a narrative.

3. **But He Can Change.**

Rather than try to focus on issues that men care about, Party A may try to change what those issues are, making men care about the issues that matter to women and thus appealing to both blocs by addressing those issues.

---

If the Democratic Party decided to adopt the narrative of the male swing vote, it would face an interesting decision regarding the issues that it focused on. As we discussed in Chapter 1, the issues that matter to each gender differ. For example, men statistically do not want bigger government, and they tend to approve of increased oil and gas drilling. These are stances usually associated with the Republican Party. If the Democratic Party wanted to appeal to male swing voters through issue stances, it may need to adapt a more Republican-like approach or rhetoric surrounding issues men care about. Alternatively, the Democratic Party could work to convince men that the issues that matter to women that the Party champions (such as the environment and social welfare) should also matter to men, similarly to how it has worked to convince the heterosexual population that issues of marriage equality should also matter to them.

Since the Party has tried this tactic before, it would not be surprising to see it do so again. However, under the subpage on Women, the website gives no indication of similar language of equality or discussion of how issues that women care about are issues men should care about. Perhaps the Party has been too hampered by the other factors listed here to proceed forward with this strategy.

4. **Tried and True.**

Party A may focus on issues that matter more to women than to men because both parties know that this approach works for them some of the time. It would be too risky for Party A to switch this approach, not knowing if Party B will follow suit or will stick with the dependable method.

---

87 Pew Research Center, “The Gender Gap: Three Decades Old, as Wide as Ever.”
88 Democratic National Committee, LGBT Community, *Democrats.org* on March 30, 2016.
89 Ibid., Women, *Democrats.org* on March 30, 2016.
If the Republican Party were to switch to an understanding of the swing vote as male, it would face an interesting decision regarding its pursuit of voting blocs. It could make more of an effort to appeal to women voters, as it has done in the past, with the continued intention of splitting the female voting bloc and making it a swing voter bloc. Alternatively, it could simply drop any attempt to appeal to women and focus solely on appealing to men, the swing voters who are so crucial in presidential elections. Granted, this strategy would only be useful for presidential elections and could prove to have very negative unintended consequences during non-presidential elections. Or, the Party could appeal to women enough to make women feel like a bloc whose concerns are being heard, without the Party jeopardizing its support among its male core supporters. This would allow the male vote to overwhelm the female vote without causing as much of a rift between the GOP and women. The first option seems unlikely to succeed based on history; the second and third could be disastrous for the image of the Party if the Democratic Party continued its narrative of a Republic War on Women.

On the other side of the aisle, party strategy has given us a clearer indication of what the Democratic Party would do if faced with the prospect that men are more likely to swing their votes than women are. Specifically, the Party appears to have already realized this to some extent and regardless has chosen not to pursue the male vote. In the Democratic Party’s report released September 2008, the report stated that regarding women, the party should target white women with a high school diploma. The report also explained that in key areas where just a few votes can make a difference, white men with high school diplomas can shift the vote 3.7% while white women with high school diplomas can shift the vote 3.7%.

---

diplomas can shift it only 3%.\textsuperscript{91} Even in the Democratic Party’s report of suggestions, the authors realize that men are potentially more influential, yet they choose to focus on women instead. The realization that certain men are at least as likely to impact the vote as (if not more that) similar demographics of women has not changed the Democratic strategy of appealing to women. This may be because of the other factors listed here that can affect party strategy, or it may be because the Democratic Party is unwilling to take stances men tend to hold on issues such as nuclear warfare or business regulations.

Overall, even if parties realize the potential value of appealing to the male swing vote, several factors may encourage them to continue strategically appealing to the captured female voting bloc. The fact that men and women vote differently prompted both parties to address issues women cared about. However, the fact that men are more likely to swing their votes than women are has prompted no apparent party strategies due to the forces that encourage parties to focus on appealing to women.

\textsuperscript{91} The Democratic Leadership Council, “Who Are the Swing Voters?: Key Groups That Decide National Elections.”
Conclusion

Gender and political behavior today is most commonly quantified as the gender gap. However, this simplification of the issue leads to a misunderstanding as to who makes up the swing vote. Polling data indicate that the Democrats currently have the female vote solidly in their pocket and that men tend to swing their votes between the parties. One would assume that the Democrats and Republicans are both now trying to appeal to men. However, what we see today is actually the opposite. Both parties appear to be trying to appeal to women either because of this misunderstanding of gender and political behavior or because of factors that would dissuade them from appealing to men even if they understood the swing vote as male.

The implications of a male swing vote extend beyond simply party strategy. An understanding of the swing vote as male could influence strategy on the part of women. If this theory holds, in order to maximize their voter influence and to gain more bloc power, women should start to vote less cohesively, thus becoming more of a swing vote and ensuring that their concerns continue to be addressed. In other words, if parties begin to treat swing voters as male voters, women may be able to maximize their voter influence by strategically becoming swing voters. This could hold not only for women but for other captured blocs too, especially black voters. Diversifying the vote from these blocs will ensure that their concerns are addressed by party strategists. When a party loses its core supporters, it must pursue the swing voters even more vigorously. Thus, for greater bloc power, women voters, black voters, Hispanic voters, evangelical Protestant voters, and more may find it in their best interests to become less reliable in their voting patterns in order for parties to further pursue bloc interests.
Researchers should look into the ways in which other simplifications of demographics have influenced party views of voting blocs. More research should also be done on how issues that matter to voting blocs change or stay steady over time and how flexible party strategy is in response to those issues.

Overall, the interpretation of gender and voting behavior that we see quantified in the gender gap tells only part of the story of how men and women vote. Understanding the gendered dynamic of the swing vote gives us a better view of how parties can best appeal to swing voters during United States presidential elections and of how men and women can maximize their voter influence on party strategy. In encouraging parties to address a bloc’s concerns, while loyalty to a party may be admirable, fickleness may be the best gendered strategy for voters.
Acknowledgements

Professor Josh Kaplan, Jeffery and Suzanne Bartels, and Rasmus Schmidt Jørgensen: this thesis would not have been possible without you. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Margaret Cabaniss, Kelly Marous, Doug Archer, the University Writing Center, and the Hesburgh Library Thesis Camp Coordinators: thank you all so much for your contributions to the writing process behind this document. I am grateful for all of the work you have done for me and for so many others.
Bibliography


Lawrence, Jill. “Parties Channel Efforts, Funds to Get Out the Vote.” *USA TODAY*, October 19, 1998: 16A.


*TIME*. “G.O.P. dilemma: Why can’t a woman vote more like a man?” October 18, 1982.


