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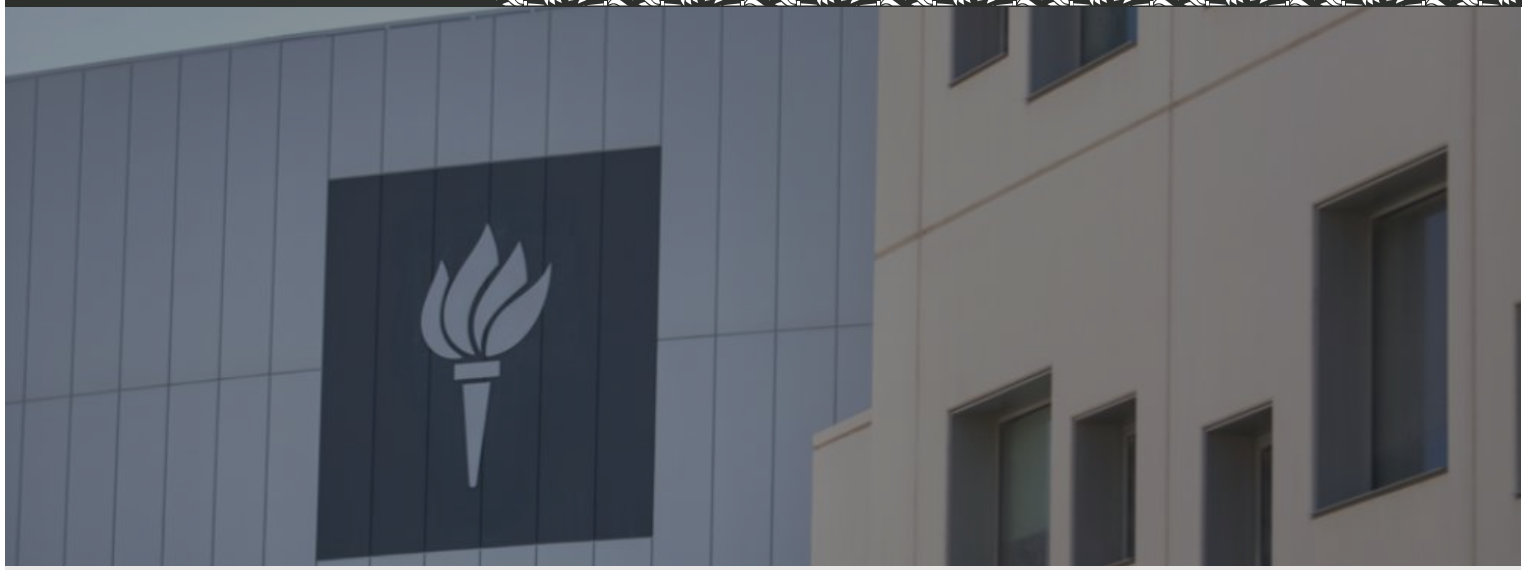

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The Gender Gap in Voting Democratic, 1972-2016: Intersections of Gender with Marital Status and Race

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Abstract

We examine the gender gap in voting Democratic or Republican in U.S. presidential elections from 1972 to 2016. The gap has gone up and down with no unidirectional trend. We find that the gap is smaller among married than never-married or divorced voters. We show that women voters are disproportionately Black, due to the serious underrepresentation of Black men among voters, especially among voters who have never married. The higher representation of Blacks among women than men voters, combined with the strong tendency of Blacks to vote Democratic, explains a large share (up to half in some elections) of the gender gap among the never-married. Contrary to expectations, socioeconomic disadvantage, including income, explains virtually none of the gender gap in voting; although single women are poorer than single men, and lower income predicts voting Democratic, these relationships are small enough that they do not combine to explain even a tiny share of the gender gap. Regarding ideology, while women hold more progressive attitudes than men on gender and social welfare, and these attitudes are predictive of voting Democratic, these relationships are not strong enough that ideology significantly mediates the effect of gender on voting. We used data from the General Social Survey, and show that our conclusions hold explaining the gender gap in party identification as well as in voting Democratic or Republican. Where possible, we undertook a parallel analysis of the American National Election Survey, finding that our key results replicate.

The Gender Gap in Voting Democratic, 1972-2016: Intersections of Gender with Marital Status and Race

When journalists discuss presidential elections, it is now a staple to mention the gender gap—that a higher percent of women than men vote for Democrats. Using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), we examine this gender gap for presidential elections from 1972 to 2016. Our paper is the first to show that gender and marital status interact such that the gender gap is quite small among married individuals, but larger among the unmarried, and that what explains the gap among unmarried individuals varies by whether they are never-married or divorced.[1]

Our paper also contributes a multivariate analysis of whether a number of sociodemographic and ideological factors help explain (mediate) the gender gap. In order to affect the gender gap in voting Democratic, a factor must be correlated both with gender and with voting Democratic. We consider the potential role of sociodemographic measures, including region, birth cohort, race, education, labor force participation, whether there are children in the household, and income. We also consider the role of ideological positions voters hold regarding gender—whether they favor homemaker/breadwinner families—and regarding whether they believe the government should offer social welfare programs for the poor.

Our paper also contributes a long-term view of the gender gap; we consider 12 elections extending from 1972 (Nixon-McGovern) to 2016 (Trump-Clinton). Many analyses of the gender gap use data from a single election, usually in the 1980s. One paper, by Manza and Brooks (1998), examines a similarly long period, but a much earlier one, 1952 to 1996.

PAST RESEARCH ON THE GENDER GAP IN VOTING FOR DEMOCRATS

Trends in the Gender Gap

Many claim that the gender gap began in 1980, with the first election Reagan won, and our analysis, which begins with the 1972 election, finds this as well. Manza and Brooks (1998), analyzing the trend in the gender gap in voting for Democratic versus Republican presidential candidates between 1952 and 1996, using the American National Election Study (ANES), provide evidence that a gender gap, albeit small, existed decades earlier, and that, while it was not continuously increasing, it showed a net increase between 1952 and 1996. They focused on what factors were responsible for the *rise* in the gender gap, providing evidence that the rise in women's employment contributed to the rise in the gender gap, in part because it increased women's propensity to favor governmental social welfare programs, and thus to vote more Democratic. Because, as we will show, the gap is not even close to continuously increasing, we focus on what explains the gap in any given year rather than what explains its trend. We will reappraise the conclusion of Manza and Brooks about the roles of women's employment and of their attitudes toward social welfare programs in encouraging them to vote Democratic in the course of our analysis.

[1] We ignore widows and widowers because they are a small group.

Other analysts have explored a related question—the trend in the gender gap in partisan identification. Edlund and Pande (2002) show a net increase in the gender gap in identifying as a Democrat between 1964 and 1996, although the trend is not monotonic. Norrander (1999) discusses the realignment of the South from Democratic to Republican identification and voting, in which Southerners who had identified as Democrats, led first by men, started identifying as Independents during the 1960s, often voting for Republican presidents long before they began identifying as Republicans. Norrander's analysis thus implies that the early years of our analysis were a time of when many in the South who identified as Democrats or Independents voted for Republican presidential candidates. This is one reason we focus on voting rather than partisan identification. Subsequent analysis has shown that, since 1996, party identification has predicted voting increasingly well; lately trends in identification and voting move together (Pew Research Center 2016). Given the empirical link between voting and party identification, as a supplementary analysis, we examine the gender gap in political party identification and whether the same factors explaining the gap in voting explain this gap. Given the distinctive history of the South, we also include region in our models, interacting it with election year.

The Intersection of Gender and Marital Status

Our analysis will show that the gender gap in voting Democratic or Republican is larger among the unmarried (divorced or never-married) than the married. We have not seen this interaction reported in previous research, but we would expect it if spouses influence each other's political views. While the spousal influence could go either way, past research has focused on men's influence on their wives. Beck and Jennings (1975), following a sample of early baby boomers who were high school seniors in 1965 until 1970, found that, compared to their husbands, wives' political views were closer to the views of their parents-in-law, and farther from those of their own parents. Weiner (1978), using the same data, found that spouses' partisan preferences got closer together the longer they were married, and that women moved more toward their husbands' partisan preferences than men moved toward their wives' preferences. We know of no studies on whether any of these patterns hold more recently; more recent data might contain more egalitarian marriages. Another mechanism we might expect to produce a larger gender gap among divorced than married persons is that women typically lose more income upon divorce than men, which might make them favor government programs more. Consistent with this idea, another study which used the same panel referred to above followed people through 1982 and found that, after a divorce, more women than men moved toward Democratic party identification (Edlund and Pande 2002).

The Intersection of Gender and Race

Black Americans vote for Democrats at much higher rates than virtually any other group (Manza and Uggen 2006); in the data we analyze here 91% of all presidential votes by Black voters were cast for Democrats. While few analysts have linked this to the gender gap, in fact, U.S. Blacks are disproportionately female (Teixeira 1992), which implies that U.S. women are disproportionately Black. As we will show, this is more pronounced among voters than nonvoters and more pronounced among the unmarried than the married.

Black women make up a higher proportion of the female population of the United States than Black men are of the U.S. male population. Racial disparities in health and mortality (including from homicide) contribute to this fact as the disparities are larger among men than women (Masters et al. 2014). And the difference between the racial composition of women and men is even larger among voters than in the population at large. This is partly a result of the uniquely high incarceration rate of young Black men; not only is it often difficult or impossible to vote while incarcerated, but some states have laws disenfranchising those with a felony conviction even years after their sentence is served (Manza and Uggen 2006). Finally, even among those eligible to vote, there is a gender gap in voting such that a lower percent of men than women vote; this gap exists among Whites, Hispanics, Asians, and Blacks, but is largest among Blacks (Igielnik 2020). Given these intersections of race and gender, women voters are disproportionately Black, which we would expect to contribute to the Democratic tilt of women's votes even if there were no gender gap in voting Democratic *within* any racial group. One of our goals is to assess how much the differential racial composition of men and women who vote explains of the gender gap in voting Democratic.

Socioeconomic Factors in the Gender Gap

As mentioned above, we will show that the gender gap is larger for single than married voters. One reason we might expect this is that those with lower income are more likely to vote Democratic because they think Democrats' policies will be more redistributive, and single women are poorer than single men. One reason they are poorer is that women earn less than men; among all those employed full-time, women earned 83% what men earned in 2018, and the gap was larger previously (England et al. 2020). Many single women are single mothers who have custody of their children; given imperfect enforcement of child support laws, many of them are nearly the sole support of a household containing children despite their modest earnings. Thus, single women and men often have different material interests. By contrast, because most married couples pool resources, married women and men have more similar material interests. Of course, gender differences in income or other resources will only produce a voting difference if resources predict partisan voting. While there has been much recent discussion about Democrats losing the White working class, research still shows that lower income voters are more likely to vote Democratic (Bartels 2005; Gelman and Park 2010: 10), and we find this as well. Piven (1984) suggested that poor single mothers approved of Reagan less than men in part because they were the ones who needed social welfare programs. We will examine how much of single women's more Democratic voting can be explained by their socioeconomic disadvantage.

Ideological Factors in Gender Gap: Gender Ideology and Approval of Social Welfare Programs

In the 1980s, many commentators presumed that the gender gap in approving of or voting for Reagan stemmed from his conservative positions on "women's issues." The women's issues under discussion at that time included abortion rights as well as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would have struck down laws that discriminate on the basis of sex. Issuing an important corrective, Mansbridge (1985) showed that while there were gender differences in approval of the ERA, they were small enough that this difference explained only a tiny portion of why women voted for Reagan less than men in 1980. Similarly, Gilens (1984) showed that men

and women disagree much more on approval of social welfare programs than they do on the ERA or abortion rights. Gilens and Mansbridge, each doing analyses on a single year in the 1980s, focused on attitudes toward these two feminist issues as measures of gender ideology. The ERA was a topic of public debate throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, as proponents tried unsuccessfully to get the required number of states to ratify the ERA so that it would be added to the U.S. Constitution. Since then, the ERA has been discussed less often, and the GSS has not asked opinions about it regularly, making the variable inappropriate for our analysis. The GSS has asked under what conditions respondents believe abortion should be legal for decades, but past analyses have made clear that men favor abortion as much or more than women (Edlund and Pande 2002; Hout 1999; Gilens 1984). To assess the explanatory power of ideologies about gender, we use an item asking whether the respondent believes it is better if men focus on breadwinning and women on taking care of the family; this is a central issue in the organization of gender, and an item that has been asked by the GSS for decades.

A central dimension of political ideology is how much the state should take responsibility for social welfare programs. In an analysis of gender differences in attitudes using multiple datasets (GSS, Gallup, and the ANES), Shapiro and Mahajan (1986) showed that women were more favorable than men towards social welfare programs, including government programs providing jobs, income maintenance, health care, and civil rights, a conclusion also supported by Edlund and Pande's (2002) analysis of ANES data. But does the gender gap in these attitudes matter? Gilens (1988) found that gender differences in attitudes toward social welfare spending explained some of the gender gap in approval of President Reagan in the early to mid-1980s. Exploring elections in the 1990s, Kaufman and Petrocik (1999) found attitudes toward social welfare programs relevant to the gender gap in voting, as did Manza and Brooks' (1998) analysis that spanned the 1950s to the 1990s. An important caveat to this work is that the correlations of ideology with gender reflect overlapping distributions for men and women, and there are many liberal men and conservative women.

The gender gap in approval of social welfare policies could simply reflect material differences; among unmarried people, women need these programs more than men because they are poorer. But Lakoff (2010) suggested another source of men and women's divergent views of these programs that is not based in their economic interests. He found that liberals' "mothering'' view of the state resonates more with women, while conservatives' "stern father" approach appeals more to men. Writing decades earlier, Piven (1984) also argued that the gender gap in favoring the safety net was not merely because women are poorer and need the programs, although she acknowledged that might be a factor. She argued that women's distinctive life experiences, such as doing care work at home or for pay, beget an ideology more in favor of governmental welfare programs, even among women who aren't themselves in economic need. We will assess how much of the gender gap in voting can be explained by gender differences in ideology regarding social welfare programs.

DATA AND METHODS

Our primary data source for this research is the cumulative 1972-2018 General Social Survey (GSS). The GSS is designed to be representative of English- or Spanish-speaking adults living in households. The GSS interviewed approximately 1,200 people in most years from 1972 to 1993,

then roughly 2,400 people in even-numbered years 1994-2018.[2] Unless otherwise stated, our analyses are limited to the respondents who reported having voted in the most recent presidential election. To replicate parts of our analysis, we use the American National Election Studies (ANES) data, also for 1972 to 2018.

Our analyses of the GSS and the ANES use two dependent variables: voting and party identification. Every GSS asks respondents if they voted in the most recent U.S. presidential election, and, if so, asks for whom they voted. We converted that information into a four-category response that we could compare across years: voted for the Democratic nominee, voted for the Republican nominee, voted for someone else, and did not vote for president. For the analyses in the graphs presented below we use logistic regression to contrast (1) voting for the Democratic candidate to (2) voting for someone other than the Democratic nominee (either Republican or third party), treating those who did not vote as missing. Since few vote for those other than the nominated Democrat and Republican each year, the contrast between the Democrat and all other candidates serves our purpose adequately. However, given that John Anderson (1980) and Ross Perot (1992, 1996) ran significant third-party campaigns (both were Republicans prior to running for president), as a sensitivity test (results not shown), we reran the voting analysis contrasting the Republican candidate to all others. The findings did not change our conclusions.

In addition to studying voting, as a supplementary analysis, we analyze the gender gap in people's identification with a political party to ascertain if the gender gap in voting is paralleled by a gap in party identification. Values for this variable range from 1 (strong Republican) to 7 (strong Democrat). The GSS question and ANES questions are identical: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, or what?" There is a follow-up in both surveys. Republicans and Democrats are asked "Would that be a strong or not strong (X)?" Independents are asked if they lean to the Republicans or Democrats. The combination of questions results in a popular seven-point scale containing categories for strong Republican, Republican (not strong), Independent who leans Republican, Independent who leans to neither, Independent who leans Democrat, Democrat (not strong), and strong Democrat. We treat this scale as continuous and thus use linear regression. We restrict our attention to voters (i.e., those who report that they voted in the previous presidential election), just as in the voting analysis itself, so that the analyses are comparable and our analysis of political party identification serves as a robustness check on the same sample.

The two key independent variables in our study are gender, which is coded as binary in both the GSS and the ANES, and marital status. We distinguish four marital statuses: 1) married, 2) widowed, 3) divorced or separated, and 4) never married.[3] Because widows and widowers are a

[2] Quota sampling in 1972 and for some of the 1973 and 1974 interviews preclude calculating a response rate for the first three GSSs. Thereafter, response rates were excellent to very good until recently; an average of 77 percent of residences in the initial sample resulted in completed interviews 1975-1998, and 70 percent yielded completed interviews 2000-2014 (Smith et al. 2019, App A). The response rate abruptly fell to 60 percent in 2016 and stayed there for 2018. The GSS is designed to be face-to-face; 89 percent of interviews since 2004 have been face-to-face. In 2018, 92 percent of the interviews were in person; 8 percent were done by telephone.

[3] In a sensitivity test, we created a fourth marital status category, "remarried," for those who have been divorced but are currently married, removing them from the married category. They were much more like the married than the

very small group for which estimates are thus much less precise, we exclude them from the figures and discussion below, but they are in the underlying statistical analyses. Because gender interacts with marital status, many of our figures show predictions separately by marital status. All models also include a set of indicator variables for the year of the most recent presidential election, which is interacted with gender, so that we can show how the gender gap varies by year.

Our baseline model and subsequent nested models include election year, gender, and marital status and each two-way interaction between them. (The three-way interaction among year, gender, and marital status was never statistically significant so is excluded.) To the baseline model we added additional variables in stages to explore what explains (mediates) the gender gap. We added two broad types of variables—sociodemographic (a subset of which are socioeconomic) and ideological (attitudes about gender and social welfare spending)—in several steps.

The first mediators we add to our baseline model are birth cohort and region of residence to the models. We defined five cohorts: before 1928, 1928-1945, 1946-1965, 1966-1979 and 1980-2000. The divisions are those used by Pew Research (https://pewrsr.ch/2GTG00o). We split the country into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, corresponding to the U.S. Census Bureau's four-category classification. The Census Bureau includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Maryland in the South. We would have preferred to add them to the Northeast. Unfortunately, the public data from the GSS and ANES do not identify geography more detailed than the Census Bureau's divisions; the South Atlantic division includes Delaware, DC, and Maryland along with Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Region is interacted with election year in all models to capture the realignment of the South.

Next we add race to the model, to see, within marital status categories, how much the different racial composition of men and women voters affects differences in who they vote for, net of cohort and region. We defined four racial categories: Black of any ancestry, Hispanic of any race except Black, non-Hispanic White, and all other. The GSS did not ask about Hispanic heritage explicitly until 2000. In all years of the survey, however, the GSS asks "From what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?" Non-Black respondents who answered Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, West Indies or Other Spanish were marked as Hispanic. While it is more common to assign Hispanic Blacks to the Hispanic category, the Hispanic classification in the GSS is less certain than the racial classification in the early years. Race is interacted with gender, marital status, and education, reflecting the possibility that the magnitude of racial differences in voting Democratic vary by these factors.

Subsequently, we added three measures of socioeconomic status: educational attainment, labor force participation, whether or not the respondent had children living at home with them. We distinguish five education levels: no credentials, high school diploma, some college, college degree, and advanced degree. Because Blacks typically vote Democratic at all education levels, which implies an interaction between education and race, we include this interaction. We distinguish three labor force categories: in the labor force, retired, and neither in the labor force

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divorced in having a smaller gender gap that was not much explained by any of our mediators, which supports our decision to categorize remarried individuals with the married.

nor retired. More detailed categories are available but these three suffice to capture most politically relevant variation. Because the social meaning of labor force participation is so different for men and women, and thus it might affect voting differently by gender, we interact it with gender. The variable for children in the household was coded as a dummy variable: children in the household (1) and no children in the household (0). Children are relevant to socioeconomic disadvantage because those with children have more household members to support, and are thus probably poorer at any given education and labor force status. We interact children with gender as well.

In supplementary models, we add another measure of socioeconomic status: household income adjusted by household size. It is added last among the socioeconomic variables because we assume it to be endogenous to education, labor force participation, and presence of children. In the GSS and ANES, income is given as a categorical variable. For all but the highest income category, we assigned the midpoint value for each category to its members. For those in the highest category, we used the methods described by Hout (2004) to assign a dollar value for income. To adjust these values for inflation, we then use the Consumer Price Index for Urban Consumers Research Series (CPI-U-RS) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (http://www.bls.gov/cpi/cpirsdc.htm). This gives us a continuous (rather than categorical) value for income, adjusted to be expressed in 2018 dollars. To adjust income by household size we take the log base two of income and divide this by the square root of the number of people in the respondent's household, including only the respondent and persons related to the respondent (Hout 2011). This adjusted version of income is interacted with gender, marital status, and election year. Because it introduces more missing values than most variables, reducing the *N* by approximately 35%, and, to foreshadow, it explains nothing of the gender gap, we omitted it from subsequent nested models to preserve sample size.

All models discussed above are estimated on the GSS, and, for replication, on the ANES. The number of GSS observations that do not have missing values on voting Democratic, gender, marital status, and election year is 39,602. Removing cases that are missing on any of the sociodemographic mediators—birth cohort, region, race, education, labor force participation, and presence of children—further reduces the *N* by less than 1%, to 39,219. Given the very slight percent of missing values it creates, in order to have a common *N* for most of our analyses, we deleted all cases that were missing on any of the sociodemographic mediators from all models. Thus, all our nested models, through the model that includes all sociodemographic variables (other than income), were estimated on this common *N* of 39,219. We then estimated a model that added income. We describe its results, but don't include income in subsequent models, because, as mentioned above, it reduced the *N* substantially but offered no mediation.

We follow the same strategy of nesting models and missing values deletion for our models using the ANES as just described for GSS. Subsequent analyses including ideological factors are not replicated on the ANES, because measures of ideology are not the same in the two data sets.

Adding measures of ideology concerning gender and social welfare programs to our models raises difficult issues with missing values, because GSS asked most attitudinal questions of only a portion of respondents each year to include more content without lengthening the interview. The assignment of respondents to different "ballots" that asked one question versus another was

random, so the sub-samples getting each ballot are equally representative of the population (subject only to random error), but the smaller *N* reduces statistical power. For gender ideology we use a question that asks respondents to agree or disagree on a four-point scale with this statement: "It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family." Adding just this gender ideology measure to the model with all sociodemographic measures discussed above (except income) leads to a loss of over half the N, from 39,219 to 18,763. Thus, to assess whether gender ideology mediates the gender difference, we compare predicted gender differences from two models on the common N of 18,763—models that do and don't include gender ideology. The social welfare measure we selected asks whether or not it is the responsibility of the government to improve the standard of living for all poor Americans. Responses range from 1 (the government should do everything possible to improve the standard of living for the poor) to 5 (it is not the government's responsibility). If we add just this measure of ideology to the model with all sociodemographic variables we also lose about half the respondents, ending with an *N* of 20,381, so we test whether welfare ideology mediates the gender gap by comparing the gap from models that do and don't include welfare ideology on the common N of 20,381. We avoid including both ideological measures in the same model, because, given that they were on different ballots, the *N* is reduced by approximately 75%; to avoid such a huge loss, we assess mediation for each attitude with separate model comparisons as described above. This should introduce little omitted variable bias, because the bivariate correlation between the two ideology measures is only .07. Both ideology measures are entered linearly and interacted with gender, marital status, and election year. Our mediation analyses with ideological variables include interactions between gender and the possible mediator to allow for the possibility that gender or social welfare ideologies are more salient to one gender in deciding who to vote for.

Our decisions about the order in which variables enter the nested models are based on assumptions about their causal order. Although the cross-sectional data of the GSS cannot support strong causal inference, we follow the logic of path analysis (Alwin and Hauser 1975), starting with variables we assume to be more exogenous. The order in which we add variables can affect our conclusions about which factors mediate the gender effect, so we consider here how vulnerable our conclusions are to mistakes in these assumptions. We first control birth cohort (which is as at least as exogenous as any other measures as it is determined at a respondent's birth) and region (which may have changed, but is constant from birth for many). We then add race, which, except for people who change racial identity, is determined at birth, and thus exogenous. Among these variables, supplementary analyses show that it doesn't matter in which order they are added; race is the only one that mediates some of the gender effect regardless of the order in which they are added. Because we will conclude that race has an important mediating effect, we adopt a strategy that is conservative to our conclusion, and enter race last among variables that are arguably equally exogenous in that they are often fixed at birth. Our decision to add socioeconomic variables only after controlling race was based on the assumption that race is exogenous to education, labor force participation, the presence of children, and family income. We will show that none of the sociodemographic variables added after race mediate any nontrivial portion of the gender gap, and supplementary analyses (not shown) demonstrate that this is true regardless of the order in which we add them. Thus, while the causal order between variables in this group is debatable, the conclusion does not hinge on

getting that right.[4] Finally, we enter ideological variables last, based on the assumption that the sociodemographic variables are more likely to affect ideologies than vice versa. As explained above, because only a subset were asked each question, we do a separate mediation analysis for each of the two ideological variables to avoid the extreme loss of cases entailed in having them in the same model.

We present the results of our regression modeling and mediation analyses in the form of graphs showing predicted probabilities of voting Democratic, or the gender difference in such predictions. We say that a sociodemographic or ideological variable (at least partially) mediates the gender effect for a given year if the model-predicted gender gap for that year is significantly different when the variable is and is not in the model. Our predictions of percent voting democratic, and gender differences in these, use an average marginal effects (AME) approach, implemented via "margins" in Stata. Using a similar approach, but for OLS analyses, the supplementary analyses predicting party identification are presented in graphs (in the Appendix) showing predicted scores on the 7-point scale from Strong Republican to Strong Democrat. All predicted probabilities or predicted means are presented separately by year and gender, and, except in Figures 1 and 2, separately by marital status.

While we present only the graphical results in the paper, the online appendix will contain coefficients from all regression models on which the figures below are based. It also presents the regression results and graphical results from the supplementary analysis predicting party identification (GSS and ANES), and the replication of our voting analysis with the ANES.

RESULTS

Our analysis extends from the election of 1972 to that of 2016 (using GSSs of 1973-2018), and shows that, within this period, the gender gap in U.S presidential voting first appeared in 1980 when men preferred Reagan over Carter by a larger margin than women did. It has remained a fixture of national politics, as Figure 1 shows, giving the observed percentages, neither smoothed nor statistically adjusted for other factors.[5] Gender differences after 1980 were too large to be dismissed as sampling fluctuations, as the confidence intervals for the estimates in Figure 2 do not include zero.[6]

[4] Putting marital status in all mediation models is necessary so that we can interact it with gender and estimate how much covariates mediate the gender effect separately by marital status. Yet, one could question conditioning on marital status in models assessing the effects of ideology on voting, since becoming or staying married may be partly endogenous to ideology. We know from Edlund and Pande's (2002) panel analysis that divorces were more often followed by a shift toward identifying as a Democrat for women than men, suggesting that ideologies are at least partly endogenous to marital status. Nonetheless, we could worry that holding a gender ideology stating that the breadwinner/homemaker arrangement is best might make marrying or staying married more likely. In this case, our estimate of the net effect of gender ideology on voting is conservative, meaning it perhaps mediates gender more than we show. It seems less likely that social welfare ideology would affect marital status, but if it did, our assessment of the effect of this ideology would also be conservative.

[5] We did, however, apply design weights.

[6] Nor do the confidence intervals around the men's estimates include the women's estimates. The women's and men's confidence intervals overlapped substantially, so we dropped the men's confidence intervals to simplify the graph.

Figure 2 shows the gender difference (positive means women were more Democratic than men) each year starting in 1972. The gender gap was nonexistent in 1972 and 1976, appeared in the Reagan/Carter and Reagan/Mondale elections of 1980 and 1984, and continued to grow through the 2000 Bush/Gore race. (We mention the winner of each race first.) The gap got much smaller in the Bush/Kerry race of 2004, opened wider in the 2008 Obama/McCain and 2012 Obama/Romney races, and was its largest ever in 2016 for the race between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, a 15-percentage point gap. Although the gap was at its largest in 2016, it has not steadily increased, as Figure 2 makes clear, and Figure 1 makes clear that men and women generally move in the same direction between any two elections. However, when Democrats have gained overall, women have typically made a larger shift, as between the 1984 Reagan/Mondale election and the 1996 Clinton/Dole/Perot election, and between the 2004 Bush/Kerry and the 2008 Obama/McCain election. In the shift away from Democrats between the 2012 Obama/Romney and the 2016 Trump/Clinton race, men moved more than women.[7]

Is the gender gap smaller among married people? Yes. Figure 3 presents the percentage voting for the Democrat for men and women within each marital status category, statistically adjusted to improve precision, and Figure 4 shows the gender gap in each marital status. Married women and men diverged later, with their gap not becoming statistically significant until 1988 but remaining so every year since. The gender gap has been significantly larger for the divorced and never-married than for the married since 1988, as Figure 4 shows.

Since our analysis has shown that marital status and gender interact significantly, we include this interaction as we estimate nested models to see what factors mediate the gender gap, i.e. move the net gender gap toward 0. For a variable to mediate a portion of the gender gap in voting Democratic, it must be correlated with both gender and with voting Democratic (net of other covariates).

Figure 5 adds sociodemographic factors in three steps. Starting from a model with no sociodemographic covariates (i.e. a model that predicts vote from gender, year, marital status, and all two-way interactions), we add the respondent's year of birth (cohort) and region first. As mentioned above, past research showed that region has changed in its effect on voting over time, because Southerners moved toward Republican across the period we examine; thus this model and subsequent models include an interaction between region and year of election. Because all birth cohorts and regions have similar sex ratios, and these two variables are thus uncorrelated with gender, region and cohort cannot explain any of the gap. Also, our models do not show significant cohort differences in voting Democratic. Hence, the "no covariates" and "add cohort and region" lines are on top of each other in Figure 5.

We next add race to the model, as well as its interactions with gender and marital status. These additions show that race explains none of the gender gap for married people. Figure 5's visualization shows that race does explain a bit of the gap for the divorced, but in results not shown we ascertain that the mediation is not significant (i.e. for each year, the point estimates of the gender gap for divorced persons from the model controlling for race are inside the confidence interval around the estimate of the gap when not controlling for race). However, race explains a

[7] The design of the 2020 GSS called for re-interviews in December 2020 and January 2021 to measure vote in the 2020 presidential election. If possible we will add these data before publication of the paper.

very substantial share (approximately one-third to one-half, depending on the year) of the gender gap for never-married individuals. In results not shown in the figure, we ascertain that, among the never-married, the mediation is significant, i.e. the predicted gender difference in voting Democratic is significantly different in each year when estimated from a model excluding race than when the model includes race.[8]

Why does race explain a significant and nontrivial share of the gender gap among never-married voters? In these data, 91% of Black voters voted Democratic. It is well known that Blacks vote heavily Democratic; what is less recognized is that Blacks comprise a higher percent of women voters than men voters. Thus, the disproportionately Black composition of female voters and the fact that Blacks vote strongly Democratic combine to increase the gender gap in voting Democratic.

A look at sex ratios in various groups in our data on voters helps show why Blacks make up a higher proportion of women than men voters, especially among those who are never married. We reviewed past research above showing important gender/race intersections: that racial disparities and health and mortality are greater among men than women. We also reviewed evidence that Black men are disproportionately ineligible to vote because of their uniquely high rates of incarceration and laws that disenfranchise those convicted of felonies.[9] And we mentioned that Black women vote more than Black men among eligibles. Consistent with these past findings, in our sample, the ratio of Black women to Black men in the entire sample is 1.57, higher at 1.67 among voters, and even higher among never-married voters, 1.88. By contrast, among Whites, the ratio of women to men in the entire sample is lower than for Blacks overall, almost identical to the ratio for voters, and no higher among never-married voters.[10] All these factors contribute to why women voters are disproportionately Black, especially among the unmarried, contributing to the Democratic tilt of unmarried women's votes.

We then added socioeconomic controls—education, labor force participation, and whether the respondent has children at home. We interacted education with race, given that Blacks of any educational level tend to vote Democratic. We interacted both labor force participation and presence of children with gender, given that they could have different effects for men and women. Adding these variables explained nothing of the gender gap; hence the pink line in Figure 5 showing estimates after these controls is right on top of the orange line showing effects

[8] The model reflected in Figure 5 does not include interactions between race and election year. In results not shown, we added these interactions, and, while some are significant, they are small, so that the visualization looks indistinguishable from the one in Figure 5.

[9] GSS questioning about whether and for whom respondents voted included an option for saying one was ineligible to vote. Either not being a citizen or having a past criminal conviction are reasons someone might be ineligible. In results not shown, we find some GSS support for the idea that past convictions affect Black men's eligibility; 7% of Black men reported being ineligible to vote compared to 4% of White men. However, a much larger proportion of men, and more Blacks than Whites, say they didn't vote but didn't indicate ineligibility—33% of Black men and 26% of White men, suggesting that other factors also discourage Black men from voting.

[10] The ratio of white women to white men is 1.21 for the entire sample, 1.21 for voters, and .84 for never-married voters. The 1.21 is much higher than the ratio of women to men in the U.S. population of voting age, and is probably explained by women agreeing to be surveyed at higher rates than men (this survey disparity is even more true for Blacks). Our point here, however, is that for whites, the ratio of women to men is no different among the population than among voters, and no higher among never-married than other voters, but for Blacks it is much higher among voters, and especially never-married voters.

including race but before these controls. This null finding surprised us because one compelling hypothesis about why we would expect a gender gap among the divorced or never-married is that women earn less than men and yet are often supporting children, which might lead them to favor funding for safety net programs and child care more favored by Democrats. This is why we added the socioeconomic variables as potential mediators, but Figure 5 clearly shows that they do nothing to explain the gender gap. Education could mediate the gender gap if more education led to voting more Democratic and women had less education, or if more education discouraged voting Democratic and women had more education. In reality, results not shown reveal complicated patterns with Democratic voting among Whites greatest among those with less than high school and those with graduate degrees, the latter being disproportionately male.[11] Kids at home will, by the formula, push a family into a lower income-per-capita category, and single women voters are more likely to have kids at home (results not shown); however, regression results (see Appendix) show that the presence of kids predicts voting more Republican for men and women, regardless of marital status, so single women having children at home cannot explain why they vote more Democratic.[12] As mentioned above, Manza and Brooks (1998), examining what is mostly an earlier period, find evidence suggesting that increased women's employment contributed to the rising gender gap by making women vote more Democratic. In contrast, the coefficients (shown in the appendix) from our model do not show labor force participation to have a significant effect on voting Democratic for women or men.[13]

The hypothesis we failed to support—that unmarried women vote more Democratic than unmarried men because they are more socioeconomically disadvantaged—can be tested more directly by adding family income, adjusted for household size, as a mediator to the model with other socioeconomic variables. In results not shown, we added it and found that, like the other socioeconomic measures, income explains no discernable amount of the gap. It is true that two necessary conditions of mediation hold—that people with lower income vote more for Democrats (shown in our regressions in the appendix), and that unmarried women (whether never-married or divorced) have lower family-size adjusted income than unmarried men (we ran supplementary analyses not shown to ascertain this). Yet these associations are small enough that income explains no nontrivial amount of the gender gap in voting Democratic among the divorced or never-married. (We would not expect any explanation among the married since married men and women share a household income.) We did several sensitivity tests measuring income different ways and still concluded that it does not significantly mediate the gender effect.[14] Apparently being poorer is not an important reason that women vote more Democratic than men.

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[11] Our model does not interact education with gender, but an analysis containing this interaction (not shown) reveals that, while the shape of the curvilinear relationship varies by gender, it is true for both men and women that those in the middle of the distribution vote the most Republican, while those with the least and the most education vote the most Democratic.

[12] In results not shown we added all two and three variable interactions between gender, marital status, and kids, and found that the effect of children at home on voting Democratic is negative for both men and women, and neither the marital X kids or marital X kids X gender interactions are significant.

[13] In a model not shown we added interactions between marital status and labor force participation, as well as the 3-way interactions between them and gender. Plots like those in Figure 5 find that adding the socioeconomic variables explains no more of the gender gap than was explained before adding the interactions.

[14] Whether using household income, household income adjusted for family size, or individual income, the variable never mediated the gender effect (not shown). This was true on the entire sample as well as the sample of only Whites.

Next, we consider whether the gender gap in voting is explained by men and women disagreeing on ideological issues which past studies suggest to predict partisan voting. Starting with gender ideology, descriptive statistics (not shown) reveal that more women than men disagree with the statement that it is "much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.'' Regression analyses (shown in the appendix) confirm that men and women with a more feminist perspective, i.e. who disagree with the statement, are more likely to vote Democratic. Thus, the necessary conditions for gender ideology being a mediator are present, and indeed when we compare the predicted gender differences in voting Democratic from the two models that differ only in whether they include gender ideology, the control for gender ideology reduces the gender gap a bit in each year for divorced and never-married voters. However, the difference between the gender effect in the two models is not significant (i.e. in each year the estimated gender gap after the control is within the confidence interval of the estimated gap without the control). Thus, while there is a slight suggestion of the relevance of gender ideology to the gender gap in voting Democratic, we can't reject the null hypothesis that gender ideology explains none of the gap.[15]

The evidence that attitudes about social welfare spending explain some of the gender gap in voting Democratic is similarly weak. Controlling for how important respondents think it is for the government to support the poor reduces the estimated gender gap a bit, especially among the divorced, but this reduction is not statistically significant (i.e. in each year the estimated gender gap after the control is within the confidence interval of the estimated gap without the control). Here too the conditions for mediation are present—our regressions (in the appendix) show that a more positive view of government spending to help the poor is predictive of voting Democratic, and descriptive statistics not shown reveal that women hold more positive views of such programs, especially among the divorced. However, the associations are too small to produce significant mediation of the gender gap, even among the divorced, in any year.[16]

SUPPLEMENTARY ANALYSES

To provide further evidence relevant to our main conclusions, we performed two supplementary analyses. First, we ran analyses parallel to those above, also using the GSS, but changing the dependent variable to party identification. Second, we ran analyses parallel to those above on the ANES. The ANES did not have fully comparable measures of ideology so we limit our comparison of results to our earlier models summarized in Figure 5. Graphs from these analyses are available in the online appendix, and they are summarized below. In general, the analyses support our conclusions.

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[15] An analysis not shown using alternative measures of gender ideology (whether employed moms can have as warm a relationship with their child, and whether abortion should be legal under various circumstances) also showed that gender ideology does not significantly mediate the effect of gender.

[16] In results not shown, we used another measure of social welfare ideology, asking if we as a country are spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on welfare. This did not significantly mediate the gender gap either when entered as the only ideological variable or when entered together with our measure of how important it is for the government to support the poor. Then, because welfare attitudes often reflect incorrect beliefs about the proportion of welfare recipients that are Black, as well as stereotyped views about Blacks' work ethic, we tried replacing the welfare measure with one asking whether the government is spending too little, the right amount, or too much on improving the conditions of Blacks. This also failed to significantly mediate the gender gap.

We showed above, using the GSS, that the gender gap in voting is larger among the divorced and never-married than among the married. The supplementary analysis shows that this is also found in the ANES.[17] And our supplementary GSS analysis shows that, on average, women identify more to the Democratic end of the partisan identification scale than men do, and that the gender gap in partisan identification is smallest among the married.

Our analysis of effects of racial composition on the gender gap can be seen in all three analyses. Above we showed that when race is added to the model predicting voting Democratic, none of the gender gap is explained among the married, but a small (but nonsignificant) amount some is explained among those who are divorced, and a substantial amount is explained among never-married individuals. This is found in our ANES analysis as well. Moreover, the analogous pattern appears in the GSS analysis predicting party identification. (Figures are in the Appendix.)

We replicate our null finding regarding socioeconomic differences as well. Controlling for education, labor force participation, and presence of children did nothing to explain the gender gap in our main analyses above, nor did controlling for income. This was true in the ANES analysis predicting voting,[18] and remained true even if we limited the analysis to Whites. Nor did any of the socioeconomic measures mediate the gender gap in party identification in the GSS supplementary analysis. Thus, robust evidence suggests that, despite the fact that single women are poorer than men, this explains virtually none of why women vote more Democratic and identify more as Democratic.

Since the ANES didn't ask the same questions about ideology as the GSS, we don't provide a comparative ANES analysis of whether gender differences in attitudes about gender or social welfare programs explain the gender gap in voting gap. We do, however, provide a supplementary GSS analysis of whether gender differences in ideology explain the gender gap in party identification. Like our analysis predicting voting, both ideological variables provided some suggestive evidence of mediating the gender gap present after adding all sociodemographic variables, but the mediation was not significant in any year but 2016. Thus the preponderance of evidence points toward retaining the null hypothesis that neither attitudinal factor explains a significant share of the gender gap, even for the unmarried where the gap is largest.

CONCLUSION

Commentators first noticed the gender gap in voting in the 1980s with the rise of Reagan. Many attributed the fact that slightly more women than men voted against Reagan to the fact that he had campaigned against the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion access, thinking that women might be especially offended by his stands on these issues. But social scientists and soon issued

[17] The ANES analysis differs from the GSS analyses in that the ANES shows fewer people voting for Trump, and does not show a large increase in the gender gap for the 2016 Trump election. Also, probably because ANES has a smaller N, the marital status differences are not significant, nor is the mediation of race, but magnitudes are similar to the GSS analysis.

[18] The ANES did not ask about children in the household, so we did not include that measure in our model to test whether socioeconomic variables mediate the gender gap, and our ANES test of whether income mediates the gender gap could not adjust household income for household size. We were able, however, to ascertain that neither education nor labor force participation mediated the gender effect, nor did (non-adjusted) household income.

correctives (Manza and Brooks 1998; Gilens 1984; Mansbridge 1985), providing evidence that the gender difference in attitudes about these two issues explained little of the gender gap in voting or poll responses in the 1980s.

In this paper, we have updated our understanding of the trend in the gender gap and what explains it, using GSS data asking respondents about who they voted for in presidential elections from 1972 to 2016. We show that the gender gap is smaller among married voters than among those who are never-married or divorced.

We discovered that the gender gap cannot be understood without an intersectional understanding of gender and race. Past research shows that Black men face uniquely high mortality risks, incarceration, and loss of voting rights. This contributes to a situation in which, not only are there more Black women than Black men in the population, but the gender disparity featuring women voting more than men is more pronounced in for Blacks than other races. Thus, women voters are disproportionately Black. And this difference between the racial composition of men and women voters explains approximately a third to half of the gender gap among those who are never-married. Controlling for race explains a small (nonsignificant) amount of the gender gap among the divorced, but no discernible amount among married voters.

Voting is partly about ideology, and, while we find women to have attitudes toward gender arrangements and social welfare spending that make them more likely than men to vote Democratic, controlling for these ideological factors does not provide a significantly different estimate of the gender gap in voting Democratic. Thus, while the direction of associations is suggestive of a role for ideology in the gap, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that these factors don't significantly change the gender gap, even where it is largest, among the divorced and never-married.

What about the importance of economic interests in voting? Despite the defection of some less-educated and working-class White men to Republicans, especially in the South, recent evidence shows that poorer Whites are more likely to vote Democratic than more affluent Whites (Bartels 2005) and we confirm this. And our analysis shows that single women are poorer than single men. These two facts suggest the hypothesis that the economic disadvantage of single women might explain why they vote and identify more Democratic than men. But our analyses from both the GSS and the ANES find that income and other socioeconomic variables explain *virtually none* of the gender gap in voting Democratic or identifying as a Democrat because the relevant associations—between income and gender on the one hand and income and voting on the other—are too small to significantly reduce the gender gap. In short, while divorced and unmarried women are poorer than their male counterparts, this is not why they vote more Democratic, or identify more as Democrats.

Commentators seldom mention marital status or race when talking about the gender gap in voting. In an era where we increasingly realize how dominant race is in American politics, our analysis has shown some intersectional realities about race, gender, and marital status. The gender gap in voting Democratic is larger among those who aren't married, and, among voters who have never married, a third to half of it is explained by the fact that women voters are disproportionately Black, in part because Black men face unique barriers to voting—

incarceration leading to felon disenfranchisement as well as premature death from homicide. Put another way, among those never married, a third to half of the gender gap in voting results from the greater representation of Blacks among women than men voters, and Black women's strong commitment to voting Democratic.

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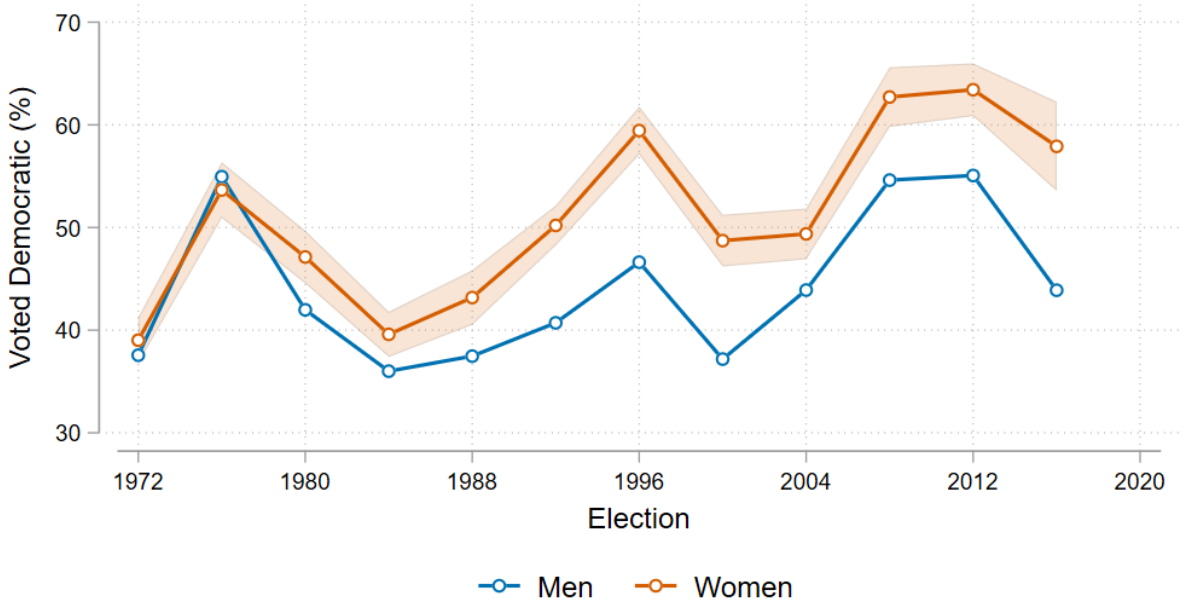
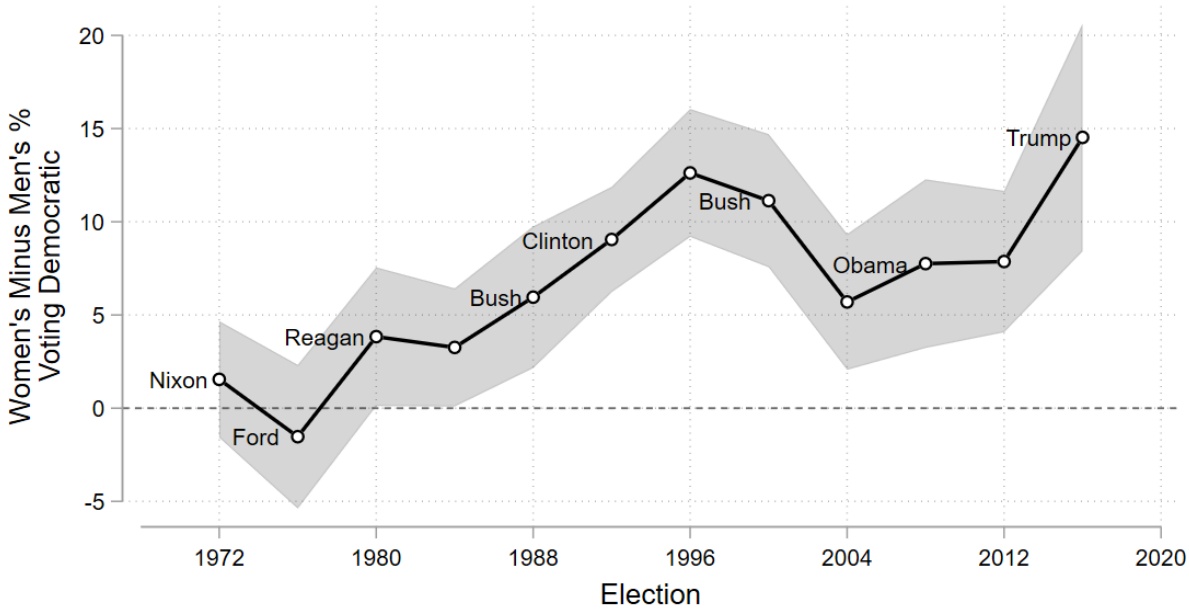
Figure 1. Percent of Women and Men Voting Democratic in Presidential Elections, 1972-2016.



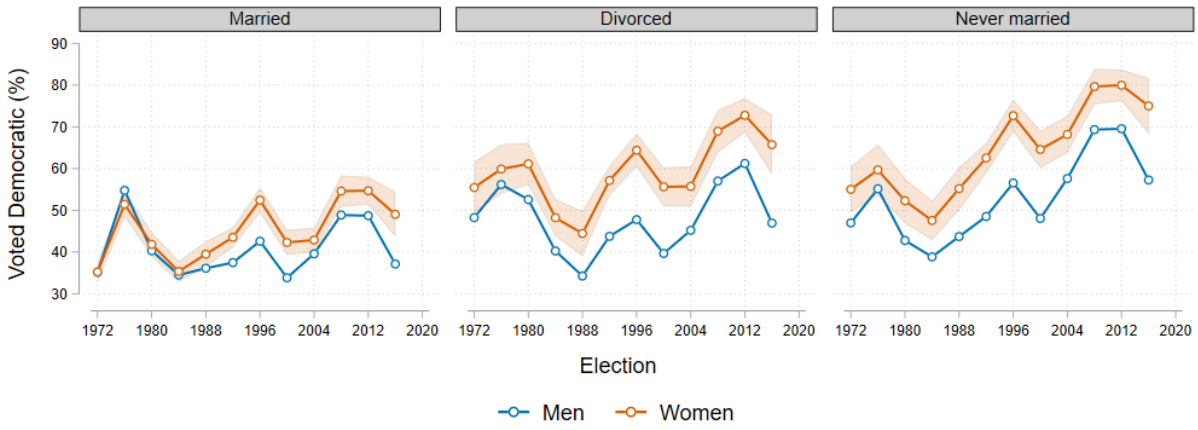
Note: Source: GSS, 1973-2018.

Figure 2. Gender Gap in Voting Democratic, 1972-2016.



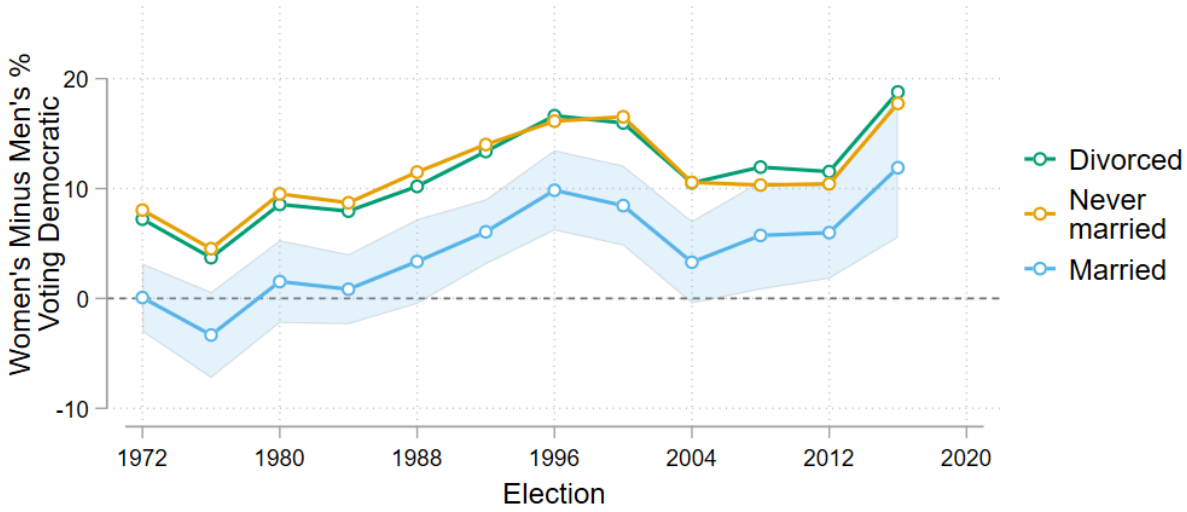
Note: Shaded area is 95% CI around model-based gender difference from model with no covariates. **Source:** GSS, 1973-2018.

Figure 3. Predicted Percent of Women and Men Voting Democratic in Presidential Elections by Marital Status, 1972-2016.



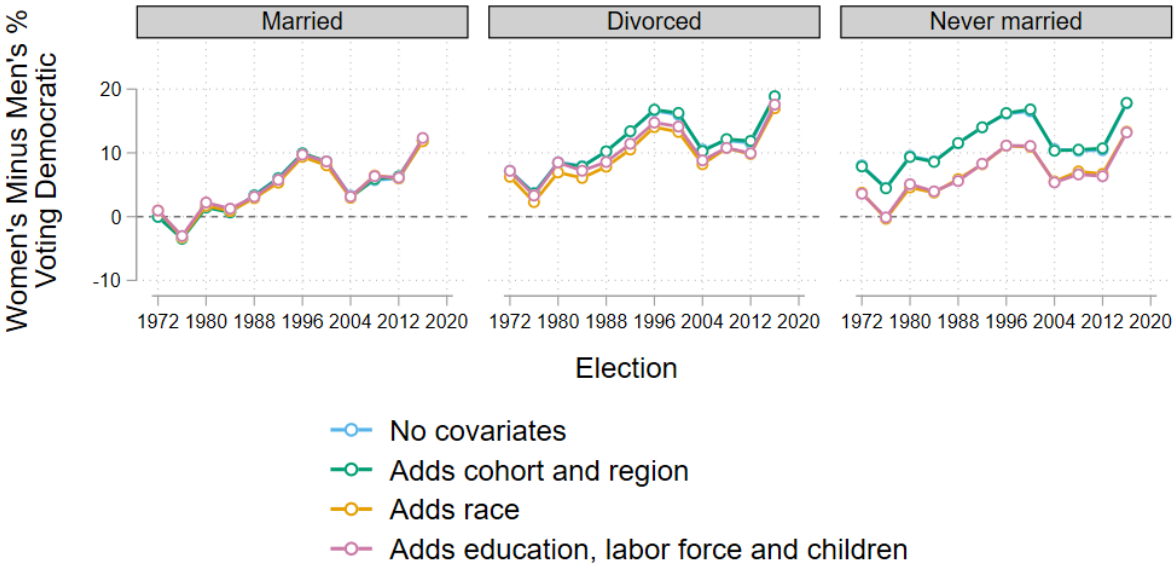
Note: No covariates are controlled. All interactions included except 3-way interactions between year, marital status and gender indicators, none of which were significant. **Source:** GSS, 1973-2018.

Figure 4. Predicted Gender Difference in Voting Democratic, by Marital Status, 1972-2016.



Note: Shaded area is 95% CI around model-based gender difference for married persons. All interactions included except 3-way interactions between year, marital status, and gender indicators, none of which were significant. **Source:** GSS, 1973-2018.

Figure 5. Predicted Gender Difference in Voting Democratic in Presidential Elections, by Marital Status, Under Four Nested Models, 1972-2016, Adding Sociodemographic Variables.



Note: Interactions included discussed in text. **Source:** GSS, 1973-2018.