

Women to the Left? Gender Differences in Political Beliefs and Policy Preferences

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Gender and Elections in Canada

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The 1993 federal election witnessed the emergence of a significant gender gap in support for the new party of the right: women were much less likely than men to vote Reform, a trend that continued in the 1997 federal election.¹ Although the Reform Party subsequently reconstituted itself as the Alliance Party and sought to reshape its image, the gender gap in support persisted in the 2000 federal election.² Meanwhile, in the 1997 election, a gender gap also opened up on the left and it, too, appeared again in the 2000 election. In both 1997 and 2000, women were more likely than men to opt for the NDP, the traditional party of the left.³ In this chapter, we examine whether these gender gaps in vote choice are paralleled by differences between women and men in their basic political beliefs and policy preferences.

The gender gap literature suggests that there should be significant differences in women's and men's opinions on questions relating to social welfare policy, free enterprise, and questions relating to the use of force. There is a growing body of evidence showing that Canadian women are more sceptical about the workings of the free enterprise system and more supportive of the welfare state than Canadian men (Terry 1984; Kopinak 1987; Wearing and Wearing 1991; Everitt 1998b). And women attach a higher priority to social welfare issues than men do (Gidengil 1995; Everitt 2002). There is also compelling evidence that women are more reluctant than men to resort to the use of force (Terry 1984; Everitt 1998b). By contrast, gender gaps on other issues have typically been weak or inconsistent. This is true of feminist beliefs and women's issues more generally (Terry 1984; O'Neill 1995; Everitt 1998a, 1998b)⁴, as well as issues relating to questions of morality and social mores in general.

As Pippa Norris (forthcoming) has recently reminded us, though, context matters to both the size and direction of gender gaps. The 2000 federal election provides a novel context for examining gender gaps in a variety of domains. With a federal budget surplus, the question was no longer where cuts should be made to social programmes, but where new monies should be allocated. And with the unemployment rate now clearly on the decline, jobs were no longer the central issue that they had been in the two preceding elections (see Nadeau et al. 2000; Nevitte et al. 2000). Meanwhile, with the Liberals campaigning to portray the Alliance as a party of social conservatives out of step with mainstream Canadian society and with the religious beliefs of the Alliance leader a matter of media scrutiny, issues relating to traditional moral standards and lifestyle choices assumed a new electoral importance.

We use data from the 2000 Canadian Election Study to examine gender differences in this changed electoral context.⁵ We begin with a review of the reasons that have been advanced for the existence of gender gaps in political beliefs and policy preferences. Then we see how much difference gender makes to opinions in each of the relevant attitudinal domains. For each domain, we create a scale in order to have a summary indication of the overall gender gap in that domain.⁶ In order to get a better sense of the importance (or not) of these gaps, we compare the male-female differences with the differences across Canada's most consequential electoral cleavage, namely, region. These composite measures also provide us with a parsimonious way of evaluating the various explanations that have been advanced for the gender gap phenomenon.

Explaining the Gender Gap Phenomenon

Structural and Situational Explanations

A recent study of the gender gap phenomenon in the United States was aptly titled, “The Complexities of the Gender Gap” (Howell and Day, 2000). As the authors observe, “No single explanation has been generally accepted, possibly because they all contribute a piece of the puzzle” (p. 859). The various explanations fall into two broad types: the first type focuses on structural and situational factors that differentiate the life experiences of women and men, while the second type focuses on socio-psychological differences that reflect gender role socialization in childhood.

One of the most prominent structural arguments links the gender gap to women’s greater reliance on the state. According to the *welfare state dismantlement hypothesis* (Erie and Rein 1988; see also Piven 1984; Deitch 1988), women should be more supportive than men of the government’s role in providing a “social safety net” and more opposed to policies that threaten it. The “feminization of poverty” means that women are more likely than men to need the social safety net provided by the welfare state. At the same time, women are more likely than men to rely on the public sector for their employment. Whether as recipients of social welfare or as service providers, it was women who bore a disproportionate share of the costs of retrenchment in the 1990s (Bashevkin 2000). The implication of this argument is that sex differences in support for the welfare state would disappear if the material circumstances and employment patterns of women and men were more similar. While the welfare state dismantlement thesis emphasizes women’s distinctive experiences, the *welfare backlash thesis* switches the conceptual focus to men (Greenberg 2000). This variant of the argument points to changes in the nature of welfare provision and in particular to the fact that men have ceased to be the primary beneficiaries of social welfare programmes (Mettler 1998). The result, it concludes, is an erosion of support for the welfare state among men.

A second structural argument looks beyond women’s role as state workers to the effects of *gendered patterns of employment* more generally (see De Vaus and McAllister 1989; Manza and Brooks 1998; Togeby 1994). Entry into the paid workforce is assumed to have a radicalizing effect on women as they find themselves disproportionately concentrated in low-paying jobs or confined to “pink-collar ghettos”. These distinctive experiences in the work place may foster a feminist consciousness on the part of working women and a questioning of traditional roles (Klein 1984; Manza and Brooks 1998).⁷ Participation in the paid work force may also enhance support for collective provision since working women have more need of state services to assist them with childcare and other parental responsibilities (Manza and Brooks 1998).

Where these arguments emphasize differences in women’s and men’s material interests, other accounts of the gender gap focus on interests that are explicitly linked to gender *per se*. These accounts revolve around the *mobilizing effects of feminism*. One variant focuses on the impact on women of feminist issues like abortion, discrimination in the workplace, the lack of female representation in politics, and patriarchal structures in society at large. A second variant switches the conceptual focus to men, pointing to a possible anti-feminist backlash on the part of those men who resent the transformations in gender roles wrought by second-wave feminism (Kitschelt 1995). There are also suggestions that this anti-feminist backlash may be part of a

larger resentment toward changes in cultural values and practices that have challenged the status of the white male. This resentment is seen as manifesting itself in a renewed emphasis on traditional social values and respect for authority (Ignazi 1992).

These structural explanations all revolve in some way around the notion of gender differences in self-interest, whether material or not. The *gender roles* interpretation, by contrast, focuses on women's traditional role as care givers. As Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks (1998) observe, this type of explanation emphasizes the effects of adult socialization as women experience motherhood and parenting. Sara Ruddick (1989) has been the leading exponent of the argument that these experiences foster a form "maternal thinking" that promotes a more compassionate view of those in need. While this is generally seen as encouraging a liberal stance on issues relating to the use of force and social welfare, the argument has also been made that having children can be a conservative influence in women's lives, especially on questions of morality (De Vaus and McAllister 1989).⁸

Socio-Psychological Explanations

All of the explanations discussed so far point to objective differences between women and men. A second type of explanation centres instead on socio-psychological differences that transcend these differences in objective circumstances. This type of explanation focuses on differences in women's and men's values and priorities that have their origin in childhood socialization. Its theoretical underpinnings derive from Gilligan's (1982) work on gender differences in moral reasoning. Her counterposing of the female and male "voices" suggests that women will be less individualistic than men (see also Phelan 1990). In her study, men's moral reasoning tended to emphasize competing rights and give primacy to the individual, while women's moral reasoning put the emphasis on conflicting responsibilities and treated relationships as primary. And where the moral imperative for men took the form of an "injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfilment," the moral imperative for women appeared as an "injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world" (Gilligan 1982, 100). Applied to the realm of politics, this contrast in moral reasoning suggests that women will be more sceptical of market solutions than men and will be more willing to endorse government intervention on behalf of the needy. The implication is that these sex differences will persist regardless of material circumstances, sector of employment, or adult roles.

Gilligan's work also provides a possible explanation for sex differences in opinions on issues relating to law and order and the use of force. While the men in her study tended to favour a hierarchical conception of society and to value separation, the women were more likely to conceive of society as a web of connection and to value inclusiveness. These contrasting conceptions translated into differing views about human aggression and how it should be dealt with. As Gilligan (1982, 43) argues, "If aggression is tied, as women perceive, to the fracture of human connection, then the activities of care...are the activities that make the social world safe, by avoiding isolation and preventing aggression...In this light, aggression appears no longer as an unruly impulse that must be contained but rather as a signal of a fracture of connection, the sign of a failure of relationship." The masculine model of hierarchy and subordination, by contrast, find its counterpart in a greater readiness to resort to the use of coercion and control, or what Pratto and her colleagues (1997) have termed a "social dominance orientation."

The gender gap in support for the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement in the 1988 federal election provides some support for Gilligan's model (Gidengil 1995). Not only were women less receptive than men to market-based arguments, but these arguments had less effect on their opinions about the agreement. For women, the agreement's implications for Canada's social programmes were the more important concern. Tellingly, these differences in women's values and priorities could not be explained in terms of their material disadvantage. O'Neill (2002) has recently taken Gilligan's model a step further to argue that there is "a women's political culture," albeit one that is overlapping with men's. As she readily acknowledges, it is difficult to provide direct evidence of the existence of gendered subcultures, but to the extent that gender differences in opinion cannot be explained by differences in other social background characteristics, the idea gains plausibility. Indeed, social-psychological interpretations of the gender gap imply that the differences between women and men will cut across other social divisions (see Elshtain 1984; Sears and Huddy 1990).

This should not be taken to mean, of course, that women constitute some sort of monolithic opinion bloc. On the contrary, we need to take account of the many differences among women—and men—themselves. To this end, we examine a number of possible sources of opinion heterogeneity among women, including education, marital status, age cohort, and religiosity.

Free Enterprise, the Welfare State and Health Policy

We begin with views about the role of the state versus the market, our focus gradually narrowing from general questions about the workings of the free enterprise system to specific questions about health policy. As we noted above, previous studies of the gender gap phenomenon have consistently found that women are less sanguine than men about the virtues of free enterprise, more supportive of social welfare programmes, and less open to market solutions. It turns out these differences are not just a function of hard economic times and cutbacks in the welfare state.

Even in the changed context of the 2000 federal election, women remained consistently more sceptical than men about the workings of the free enterprise system, though the degree of scepticism depends very much on which aspect of those workings is under discussion (see Figure 1). Women are especially sceptical of the notion that "When businesses make a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor". On the other hand, they tend to believe that "People who don't get ahead should blame themselves, not the system" and that "If people really want work, they can find a job". Clearly, though, they are less persuaded than men that individual effort will be rewarded. Similarly, women are more reluctant than men to rely on market solutions. Indeed, only a minority of women believe that "The government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs". And they are less ready than men to agree that, "Unemployed people should move to regions where there are jobs". Still, on the latter question, a majority of women do seem to prefer the market solution. When these items are combined to form a scale (that runs from 0 to 1), we can clearly see that women (.52) are more ambivalent than men (.59) about the free enterprise system. The difference is fairly modest but it is statistically significant ($p < .01$) and it exceeds the differences among income groups and across Canada's regional divides.⁹

[Figure 1 about here]

Similar sex differences appear when we look at views about the welfare system (see Figure 2). First, improving social welfare programmes was clearly a much more important election issue for women than for men. Of the eight issues that respondents were asked to rate, improving social welfare programmes (along with improving health care, see below) revealed the largest difference in the priorities of women and men. Second, women were more likely than men to believe that more should be done to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in Canada, and they were also more likely to think that “The government should see to it that everyone has a decent standard of living” rather than “leave people to get ahead on their own”. And finally, women were more likely than men to reject the notion that the welfare state undercuts the work ethic by making “people less willing to look after themselves”.

[Figure 2 about here]

However, the fact that a majority of women did *not* reject this argument should temper any characterization of women’s support for the welfare state. Only a minority of women rated improving social welfare programmes as being “very important”. And despite their concern with income disparities and despite endorsing the government’s role in providing a social safety net, both men and women are reluctant to support an increase in welfare spending. By the same token, views about welfare spending provide little support for the notion that resentment of the welfare state is a distinctively masculine orientation. With close to half thinking that the federal government should continue to spend “about the same as now”, any *anti-welfare backlash* is very much a minority phenomenon among women and men alike.¹⁰

The difference between women and men on social welfare questions should certainly not be overstated. When we combined the items to form a 0 to 1 scale (with ‘1’ representing the highest level of support for the welfare system), the difference between women (.64) and men (.58) was statistically significant ($p < .01$) but it was clearly much smaller than the gap that separated the lowest (.68) and the highest (.55) income groups. And with mean scores ranging from a low of .54 in the West to a high of .70 in Quebec, the regional differences also outstripped the sex differences.¹¹ The fact remains, though, that the advent of an era of federal budget surpluses has not eliminated the differences between women and men in their views about social welfare.

Opinions about health care provide further evidence that women are more inclined than men to favour state provision. Improving health care was the single most important issue in the 2000 federal election for women and men alike. But the issue was more salient for women than for men (see Figure 3). It is easy to understand why such importance was attached to the issue and also why it was even more important for women: two-thirds of men and fully three-quarters of women believed that the quality of health care had deteriorated over the previous five years. Not surprisingly, women and men largely agreed that this was an area where spending by the federal government should be increased. Interestingly, though, a substantial number of those who perceived the quality of health care to have worsened blamed the deterioration on poor management rather than lack of money. This was true of both women (40 percent) and men (36 percent).

[Figure 3 about here]

Even though women were more likely to think that the quality of health care had deteriorated, they were more opposed than men to market solutions, such as allowing private hospitals in Canada or allowing doctors to charge a fee for office visits. When we combined these two items into a simple additive scale that ran from 0 (favour both private hospitals and user fees) to 1 (oppose both private hospitals and user fees), women received an average score of .67, compared with .57 for men ($p < .01$). Again, the difference between women and men is hardly huge, but it rivalled the difference between the lowest (.67) and the highest (.56) income groups and it exceeded the regional differences, at least outside Quebec.¹²

Whether we look at views about free enterprise, the welfare state, or health policy, a similar pattern of sex differences appears. Women are more ambivalent about the free enterprise system, more sympathetic to the welfare state, and more reluctant to turn to the market for solutions. But a key question remains unanswered: is this because women tend to be more reliant on the state or is it because women in general tend to be less individualistic than men, as Gilligan's (1982) work suggests?

The *welfare state dismantlement* thesis implies that women will be less persuaded of the virtues of free enterprise than men because they are less likely to be among its beneficiaries. While the gap is narrower among women (.52) and men (.56) in the lowest income group ($p < .10$), women in the highest income group prove to be only slightly more pro-free enterprise (.54) than less affluent women.¹³ A similar pattern holds for views about the welfare state. If the *welfare state dismantlement* thesis explained the gender gap in support for the welfare state, we would expect the gap to disappear once we control for income differences. The gap between women (.69) and men (.67) does narrow in the lowest income group, but affluent women remain significantly ($p < .01$) more supportive of the welfare system (.61) than similarly affluent men (.52), and income clearly makes less of a difference to women's opinions than it does to men's. Differences in the material circumstances of women and men made even less difference to their views about health care. True, the gap between women (.70) and men (.64) was smaller in the lowest income category, but it still met conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < .05$), and the gap ($p < .01$) actually widened among the most affluent women (.63) and men (.51). In fact, high-income women were almost as committed to universal provision as low-income men. Clearly, something other than differences in material self-interest must be driving these gender gaps.

This conclusion is reinforced when we look at the effects of sector of employment. According to the *welfare state dismantlement* thesis, part of the explanation for these gender gaps in views about the role of the state versus the market lies in the fact that women are more likely than men to be employed in the public sector. Regardless of sex, public sector workers should be more committed to state provision and universality: once we take sector of employment into account, the gender gaps should disappear. It turns out, though, that the gender gaps persist, regardless of sector of employment. Whether they are employed in the public sector or in the private sector makes little difference to women's and men's opinions about the free enterprise system. A similar pattern holds for views about welfare. Men employed in the public

sector are no more supportive of the welfare system than their counterparts in the private sector, and women employed in the public sector do not score significantly higher (.64) than women employed in the private sector (.61). And far from eliminating the gender gap in support for universal health care, the gap is actually wider among women (.72) and men (.60) in the public sector ($p < .01$).

Similarly, *gendered patterns of employment* more generally cannot explain these differences in the views of women and men. According to this argument, entry into the paid work force has a radicalizing effect on women by exposing them to gender inequalities and discrimination. However, labour force participation has little or no effect on women's (or men's) perceptions of the economic system, and women remain more supportive of universal health care whether they are in the paid workforce or not. As for views about welfare, support for the welfare system is if anything a little lower among women who are in paid employment (c.f. Everitt 2001), though they remain significantly ($p < .01$) more supportive (.62) than men who are employed (.55).

Having children is also said to have a radicalizing effect on women by pushing them in a more liberal direction, at least on questions having to do with collective provision and the role of the state. Togeby (1994) suggests that this effect will be most evident when there is only one child. This *gender roles* argument does not fare well, though. If anything, women with a single child are slightly more persuaded (.55) of the virtues of free enterprise. And far from having a radicalizing effect, women who have one child tend to be a little *less* positive in their views about welfare. Surprisingly, having children has no effect on women's views on health policy. The effect is confined to men and it is consistent with Togeby's argument that having one child has a radicalizing effect, whereas having more than one child has the opposite effect.

The fact that none of these structural and situational explanations can account for the gender gaps in views about the role of the state versus the market lends plausibility to socio-psychological interpretations that emphasize gender differences in fundamental values. To the extent that women are less individualistic than men, this cannot be explained in terms of differences in material interests or experiences in the workforce or the home. As we noted above, though, there are a variety of differences among women themselves that need to be taken into account.

First, the *women's autonomy* argument suggests that women require economic and psychological independence from men in order to express their distinctive values and priorities (Carroll 1988). To achieve psychological independence, women have to transcend traditional sex-role socialization. One of the most potent factors in encouraging such independence is higher education. Economic independence, meanwhile, is more likely to be achieved by women who are in paid employment and who are not married. As Carroll (1988) notes, "economic independence is highly, although not perfectly correlated with marital status".

This argument implies that scepticism about the free enterprise system should be most apparent among women who are in paid employment, who are more highly educated, and who have either never married or are separated or divorced. The same should be true of support for the welfare system and public provision of health care. However, these expectations receive only

mixed and weak support. We have already seen that labour force participation does not have the expected effect. The same holds for marital status: the gender gaps are not confined to those who have never married but appear regardless of marital status. Women who have never married (.46) are a little more sceptical of the virtues of free enterprise, but married women remain significantly ($p < .01$) more sceptical (.54) than married men (.61). A similar pattern holds for views about welfare and health care. With one notable exception, education has little effect on women's views on all of these questions. The exception is health care: as the level of education increases, the gender gap widens. The mean score for university-educated women is .70, compared with only .54 for their male counterparts ($p < .01$). Aside from this, though, there is little to suggest that the gender gaps are more likely to occur among women who enjoy sufficient autonomy to express their difference from men.

Norris (1999) meanwhile has pointed to the existence of a *gender-generation gap* that she attributes to the impact of the second-wave women's movement on the cohorts of women who reached maturity in its wake. The effect of this feminist mobilization is to make younger women more liberal in their views than men and older women alike.¹⁴ In order to pursue this possibility, we compared opinions across four age cohorts that correspond to distinct phases in the evolution of the women's movement: the pre-second wave cohort born before 1942; the second-wave cohort born between 1942 and 1957; the post-movement cohort, born between 1958 and 1972; and finally the third-wave cohort born after 1972 (see Everitt 2001).

However, this feminist catalyst argument fares little better than the *women's autonomy* argument. Women who came of age during the rise of third-wave feminism *are* a little more sceptical of the virtues of free enterprise (.48) than women whose formative experiences predated the rise of the second-wave feminism (.56), but a parallel effect appears for men. On the other hand, there is no association between age and support for the welfare system: the gender gap cuts across age cohorts. And if exposure to the feminist movement has a radicalizing effect on women's views about health care, that effect is modest and it is confined to women who came of age during the rise of third-wave feminism (.74). The gender gap persists, regardless of age cohort, and even in the pre-second wave cohort, women (.67) are significantly ($p < .01$) more opposed to market solutions than men (.58).

An Anti-Feminist Backlash?

So far, we have been treating feminist mobilization as a possible catalyst for the expression of women's difference, but we also need to compare women's and men's orientations toward the feminist movement and indeed toward gender issues more generally. One possible explanation for the rightward tilt on the part of some men is a reaction against changes in gender roles over the past three decades that have challenged their traditional position of dominance within both the public and private spheres. Given the central role of the feminist movement in instigating this challenge, we should expect to find much more negative views about feminism among men.

[Figure 4 about here]

If we focus simply on how much sympathy respondents express with feminism, we could immediately discount the notion of an anti-feminist backlash on the part of men. If anything, it is

women, not men, who are less likely to be sympathetic (see Figure 4). However, men do tend to have less positive perceptions of the feminist movement. They were less likely than women to think that the feminist movement “just tries to get equal treatment for women” and encourages women “to be independent and speak up for themselves”. Significantly, though, only a minority of men opted for the view that the feminist movement “puts men down” (27 percent) and encourages women “to be selfish and think only of themselves” (18 percent).¹⁵ And these views had less impact on men’s sympathy with feminism than on women’s: only 42 percent of men who said the movement puts men down and 50 percent of those who said it encourages women to be selfish were unsympathetic, compared with 63 percent and 68 percent, respectively, of women.

When the three items are combined into a pro-feminism scale, there is a statistically significant ($p < .01$), albeit modest, difference in the mean scores of women (.72) and men (.67) on a 0 to 1 scale.¹⁶ With average scores ranging from a low of .67 in both Ontario and the West to a high of .77 in Quebec ($p < .01$), where a person lives clearly has more of an effect on their views about feminism than whether they are a man or a woman. As the *gender-generation gap* thesis would lead us to expect, there is even less difference among women (.68) and men (.65) who came of age before the advent of the second-wave women’s movement. That said, the differences across age cohorts in support for feminism are surprisingly modest, even among women. It is only among women who were socialized during the rise of third-wave feminism that there is much of an increase in support for feminism (.78).

O’Neill (2001) argues that *religiosity* acts as a countervailing force to feminism in many women’s lives and this may well be one reason why the gender gap in support for feminism is so modest. Religion is typically a more salient factor for women than for men: Canadian women are more likely to state a religious affiliation than Canadian men and they are also more likely to say that religion is personally important to them. Religiosity does indeed help to explain why the gender gap in support for feminism is so modest. The gap disappears altogether among women (.64) and men (.64) for whom religion is very important, and there are significantly more women (36 percent) than men (26 percent) who say that religion is important in their lives. Tellingly, secularism is associated with a sizeable increase in support for feminism among women (.80) but not among men (.68).¹⁷

The *women’s autonomy* argument would predict that support for feminism would also be higher among women who enjoy economic and psychological independence from men. However, labour force participation has virtually no impact on women’s (or men’s) support for feminism, and full-time homemakers in particular are no less supportive than women in general. Education, meanwhile, has only very modest effects, with support ranging from .69 among women who did not complete high school to .77 among university graduates ($p < .05$). The one dimension of the women’s autonomy argument that does make a difference is marital status, with support ranging from a low of .69 among women in traditional (that is, non-common law) marriages to .81 among those who have never married ($p < .01$). There are no indications that having children has a radicalizing effect on women.¹⁸

The lack of effect for labour force participation may seem surprising given that women are more likely than men to believe that “discrimination makes it extremely difficult for women

to get jobs equal to their abilities” (see Figure 4). It turns out, though, that this belief is *less* prevalent among women (and men) who are in paid employment (53 percent) than among those who are not (63 percent). This poses something of a challenge to the notion that participation in the labour force radicalizes women by exposing them to gender inequalities.

As with views about feminism, opinions about gender-related issues do not lend much support to the notion of a backlash on the part of men. Women and men alike generally reject the suggestion that “If a company has to lay off some of its employees, the first workers to be laid off should be women whose husbands have jobs”. Only a small minority would countenance such blatant discrimination and they are as likely to be women (11 percent) as they are to be men (12 percent). And when it comes to conceptions of gender roles, women are actually a little less likely than men to reject the traditional notion that “society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children”.

On the other hand, women are more likely than men to say that more should be done for women and they are much more likely to agree that having more female MPs is the best way to protect women’s interests. That said, they do not necessarily see the lack of women in the House of Commons as a serious problem and they are only a little less reluctant than men to endorse the idea of requiring parties to nominate as many women as men candidates.

The questions on discrimination, doing more for women and having more women MPs were combined into a scale. The scale revealed a significant ($p < .01$) gap between women (.62) and men (.54) on attitudes toward gender-related issues. The gap may be modest but it rivals the differences (ranging from a low of .55 in the West to a high of .64 in Quebec) to be observed across Canada’s regions.¹⁹ There is little evidence, though, of any *gender-generation gap*. Attitudes on gender-related questions are even less affected by age cohort than was support for feminism. Whether socialized before the advent of second-wave feminism or during the rise of third-wave feminism, women on average hold very similar views on these questions. And if the gender gap narrows in the oldest cohort, it is because older men actually score a little higher than younger men. In contrast to support for feminism, *religiosity* has only very minor effects on views about gender-related issues.

There is even less support for the *women’s autonomy* argument. Labour force participation has little discernible impact on women’s views and now marital status, too, makes only a small difference (and it is women who are divorced or separated who have the highest mean score at .69). The impact of education is actually stronger among men, with scores ranging from a high of .61 for men who did not complete high school to a low of .50 for university graduates. Education has very little impact on women, and it is women who did not complete high school who score highest (.67). Finally, far from radicalizing women, if anything having children is associated with a slightly less pro-woman stance on these questions (.60 versus .64 for women who have no children).

Moral Traditionalism

Whether we look at support for feminism or at views about gender-related issues more generally, the differences between women and men are too modest to support a charge of a

significant anti-feminist backlash on the part of men. However, this does not preclude the possibility of a more generalized *cultural backlash* against changes in values and lifestyles.

[Figure 5 about here]

There are certainly indications that men tend to be a little more conservative than women when it comes to issues of moral traditionalism, but the differences are nowhere near large enough to justify referring to a cultural backlash on the part of Canadian men (see Figure 5). The one issue on which women and men really differ is gay marriage. Only one third of the women interviewed were opposed to allowing gays and lesbians to get married, compared with almost half of the men. Among women, a clear majority (58 percent) came out in favour of allowing gay marriages. The other sex differences were much more modest. Women were even less likely than men to agree with the statement that, “Only people who are married should be having children” or to reject the notion that “We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own standards, even if they are very different from our own”. They were also a little less likely to agree that “Newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society” and that “This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values”. It should be noted, though, that over two-thirds of women did agree with the latter proposition. And when it came to the notion that “The world is always changing and we should adapt our view of moral behaviour to these changes”, women were actually more likely to disagree than were men. Finally, to the extent that there was any difference at all on abortion, it was women who thought it should be more difficult for a woman to get an abortion.

Not surprisingly, then, when these items are combined into an additive scale, women (.47) score only marginally lower than men (.49) on moral traditionalism, a difference that barely reaches conventional levels of statistical significance ($p < .05$).²⁰ The impact of gender on moral traditionalism pales beside that of other social background characteristics. Differences among regions, for example, range from a high of .52 in Atlantic Canada to a low of .41 in Quebec ($p < .01$).

Age has an even stronger effect than region, with average scores ranging from a low of .35 for the youngest cohort to .58 for the oldest cohort ($p < .01$). However, the pattern of age effects does not conform to the notion of a *gender-generation* gap. On the contrary, the effect of age is virtually the same for women and men.

O’Neill (2001) shows that religion has a conservative influence in many women’s lives (see also De Vaus and McAllister 1989; Mayer and Smith 1995), and serves to limit the size of the gender gaps on questions relating to civil liberties (like pornography, capital punishment, and the rights of gays and lesbians). If this argument applies to issues of traditional morality more generally, we would expect the gender gap to be wider among women and men who are more secular. Religiosity is indeed one of the most important correlates of moral traditionalism for women and men alike. Average scores on the moral traditionalism scale range from a low of .34 among respondents to whom religion is not important at all to a high of .60 among those to whom it is very important ($p < .01$). However, women’s greater religiosity does not explain the modest size of the gender gap on these questions as a whole. The gender gap is only slightly wider among women (.30) and men (.36) to whom religion is unimportant ($p < .05$).

A similar pattern holds for marital status. Women who are living in common law relationships clearly take more liberal positions on these questions (.37) than those who are living in traditional marriages (.50), but the same is true of their male counterparts (.38).²¹ Surprisingly, perhaps, having children makes no difference to women (or men), despite the assumption of some *gender role* theorists that parenthood increases concern on women's part for moral standards in society.

There is some support, though, for the *women's autonomy* argument. Education has more impact on women than on men. The more education women have, the less likely they are to be moral traditionalists. Average scores range from .57 among women who did not complete high school to only .40 among university graduates, compared with a range of .55 to .44 for men. And to the extent that labour force participation makes a difference, women (but not men) who are in paid employment do tend to take less traditional positions on questions of morality (.44) than women who are not part of the labour force (.51).²²

Crime and Punishment

As we noted above, Gilligan's (1982) work suggests that women will be less likely than men to favour a punitive approach in dealing with crime. This turns out to be the case. The fact that women were even more concerned about crime than men were makes the differences in views about crime and punishment all the more interesting. Among women and men alike, crime ranked second only to health care in the number of times it was described as being a very important issue to the respondent. However, it was even more important to women than to men (see Figure 6). One reason may be that women were more likely to think that crime had increased over the previous five years. Even among those who thought that crime had gone down, though, women (66 percent) were more likely than men (56 percent) to describe it as a very important issue. Three quarters of women and almost as many men concurred that "We must crack down on crime even if that means people lose their rights". Where women and men parted company was on the treatment of those who commit crimes. Women were less likely than men to advocate a punitive approach in dealing with young offenders. Men clearly opted for tougher sentences (53 percent) over rehabilitation (33 percent), but women were divided, with almost as many choosing rehabilitation (41 percent) as choosing the get-tough approach (43 percent). Similarly, women were much less likely than men to favour the death penalty. Indeed, more women opposed (43 percent) the death penalty than favoured it. Moreover, there seemed to be a good deal of ambivalence about the question: 20 percent of women responded that they did not know, compared with 14 percent of men.

[Figure 6 about here]

The division was even sharper when it came to gun control. Two-thirds of the women agreed that "only the military and police offices should be allowed to have guns", compared with only half of the men. This finding is very much in line with prior research in Canada and elsewhere that has consistently found sizeable gender gaps on issues relating to the use of force (Smith 1984; Terry 1984; Everitt 1998b). Surprisingly, perhaps, this reluctance to resort to force even extends to peacekeeping. Women (53 percent) were much less ready than men (67 percent) to agree that, "Canada should participate in peacekeeping operations abroad even if it means

putting the lives of Canadian soldiers at risk". As with the other issue of life and death, many women (13 percent) were unsure how to respond (compared with only 4 percent of men).

When we combined the two items dealing with offenders into a simple additive scale, running from 0 (rehabilitate young offenders and oppose the death penalty) to 1 (tougher sentences for young offenders and favour the death penalty), men (.58) clearly emerged on the get-tough side, while women (.49) were close to the midpoint ($p < .01$).²³ Moreover, women's views on dealing with offenders were little affected by the region of Canada in which they live. The same cannot be said of men, with mean scores ranging from a low of .50 in Quebec to a high of .64 in the West ($p < .01$).

According to the *gender-generation gap* argument, younger women should be more liberal than men and older women alike. This is very much the pattern that appeared for views about crime and punishment. The gender gap was widest among women (.41) and men (.56) in the youngest age cohort ($p < .01$). And while young women were clearly more opposed than older women to treating offenders harshly, young men were little different from their elders.

There is also some support for the *women's autonomy* argument. The key idea here is that women require psychological and economic independence from men in order to express their "difference". Two key indicators are education and marital status. As the argument would predict, the more formal schooling women had, the less likely they were to favour a get-tough approach to crime: mean scores range from a high of .54 for those who did not complete high school to a low of .37 for university graduates ($p < .01$). Meanwhile, education had little effect on men's views, though men with a university education were less likely to embrace the get-tough approach (.49).²⁴ It bears emphasis that the difference across educational levels among women easily exceeded the overall difference between women and men. Marital status also had the predicted effect: women in traditional marriages tended to take a tougher line on crime than did women who had never married. This said, the gender gap persisted, regardless of marital status. The other factor that is assumed to limit women's autonomy is confinement to the domestic sphere, but participation in the paid work force had little effect on women's (or men's) opinions. Women who had children at home (.54) were a little less liberal than those who did not (.46) when it came to matters of crime and punishment, but the effect is not consistent enough to claim much support for the *gender roles* argument.²⁵ A similar conclusion holds for the impact of religiosity.²⁶

Discussion

Despite the change in the economic context and the advent of budget surpluses, women clearly remain more sceptical of the virtues of free enterprise, more supportive of the welfare system, and more reluctant to endorse market solutions than men in the 2000 federal election. The fact that these gender gaps could not be explained in terms of differences in women's and men's material interests lends weight to the socio-psychological argument that women tend to be less individualistic than men. The gender gap in views about crime and punishment also provides support for a socio-psychological interpretation of the gender gap phenomenon.

In contrast to a number of earlier studies, we also find consistent evidence of gender gaps in opinions on both feminism and gender-related questions more generally. However, these gaps

do not extend to the broader domain of traditional social values, despite the fact that the 2000 election brought questions of traditional morality to the fore. There are signs that men tend to take slightly more conservative stances on these questions than women do, but with the notable exception of gay marriage, the gender gaps are small and/or inconsistent. And even on the issues that are explicitly gendered, the differences among women themselves exceed the differences between women and men, as do the regional differences. Religiosity, in particular, clearly served as a conservative influence when it came to views about feminism and questions of traditional morality.

Other sources of difference among women prove to be less important. Of the factors that might enhance women's autonomy, education and marital status were the most consequential, but their effects were not uniform. There is little indication that participation in the paid workforce makes a significant difference to women's views. Meanwhile, having children either had no effect or had contradictory effects.

While the socio-psychological approach generally fared better than the structural and situational explanations, the gaps we observed would seem too modest to support the notion of a distinctive "women's political culture" (O'Neill, 2002).²⁷ That does not mean, though, that they are inconsequential. The gender gaps on free enterprise, health policy, and crime and punishment all exceed the differences across Canada's regional divides. And because gender is the "fault line of maximum potential cleavage" (Jennings 1988, 9), even small differences between women and men can have important implications for party fortunes. Finally, to the extent that younger women, but not younger men, are more left-wing than their elders in domains like health care, feminism, and crime and punishment, we can expect these gender gaps to increase through generational turnover. Gender, in short, is a source of cleavage than must be taken seriously in any analysis of Canadian politics.

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Appendix: Question Wording

Note: the text in square brackets indicates in which wave of the survey the question was asked. The prefix 'cps' indicates the campaign telephone survey, 'pes' indicates the post-election telephone survey, and 'mbs' indicates the self-administered mail back survey.

Free Enterprise

For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

When businesses make a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor [pesg16]

People who don't get ahead should blame themselves, not the system [pesg15]

If people really want work, they can find a job [mbsa11]

The government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs [cpsf6]

If people can't find work in the region where they live, they should move to where there are jobs [cpsf20]

The Welfare State

To you personally, in this federal election, is improving social welfare programmes very important, somewhat important or not very important [cpsa2f]

How much should be done to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor in Canada: much more, somewhat more, about the same as now, somewhat less, or much less? [cpsc13]

Please circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

The government should [mbsb1]:

See to it that everyone has a decent standard of living

Leave people to get ahead on their own

For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

The welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves [mbsa4]

Should the federal government spend more, less, or about the same as now on welfare? [pesd1b]

Health Policy

To you personally, in this federal election, is improving health care very important, somewhat important or not very important [cpsa2e]

Has the quality of health care in Canada over the past five years got worse, got better, or stayed about the same? [cpsc6]

Should the federal government spend more, less, or about the same as now on health care? [pesd1d]

Would you favour or oppose having some private hospitals in Canada? [pesd7]

And would you favour or oppose letting doctors charge patients a [\$10][\$20] fee for each office visit? [pesd8a/b] note: the amount of the fee was randomly varied

Feminism and Gender-Related Issues

Are you very sympathetic towards feminism, quite sympathetic, not very sympathetic, or not sympathetic at all? [pesg20]

Please circle the number that best reflects your opinion:

The feminist movement encourages women [mbsb7]:

- To be independent and speak up for themselves
- To be selfish and think only of themselves

The feminist movement [mbsb2]:

- Just tries to get equal treatment for women
- Puts men down

For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

Discrimination makes it extremely difficult for women to get jobs equal to their abilities [mbsa5]

If a company has to lay off some of its employees, the first workers to be laid off should be women whose husbands have jobs [mbsa3]

The best way to protect women's interests is to have more women in Parliament [mbsa15]

Society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children [cpsf3]

How much should be done for women: much more, somewhat more, about the same as now, somewhat less, much less or haven't you thought much about it? [cpsc10]

As you may know, there are many more men than women in the House of Commons. In your view, is this a very serious problem, quite a serious problem, not a very serious problem, or not a serious problem at all? [pesg7a]

Would you favour or oppose requiring the parties to have an equal number of male and female candidates? [pesg7b]

Moral Traditionalism

For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

Gays and lesbians should be allowed to get married [cpsf18]

Only people who are legally married should be having children [mbse4]

We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own standards, even if they are very different from our own [mbsa2]

Newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society [mbsa7]

This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values [mbsa9]

The world is always changing and we should adapt our view of moral behaviour to these changes [mbsa8]

And now a question on abortion: do you think it should be very easy for women to get an abortion, quite easy, quite difficult, or very difficult? [pesg8]

Crime and Punishment

To you personally, in this federal election, is fighting crime very important, somewhat important or not very important [cpsa2b]

Do you think that crime in Canada has gone up, gone down, or stayed about the same in the last few years? [cpsj50]

Which is the best way to deal with young offenders who commit violent crime: one, give them tougher sentences, or, two, spend more on rehabilitating them? [cpsj51]

Do you favour or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? [cpsc15]

For each statement below, please indicate if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

We must crack down on crime, even if that means that criminals lose their rights [mbse5]

Only the police and the military should be allowed to have guns [cpsf19]

Endnotes

The authors are grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding under its Major Collaborative Research Initiatives Programme. The authors would also like to thank Cameron Anderson for his research assistance.

¹In 1993, 15 percent of women voted Reform, compared with 23 percent of men. In 1997, 18 percent of women voted Reform, compared with 26 percent of men.

²Alliance attracted the votes of 32 percent of men, but only 22 percent of women.

³In 1997, 13 percent of women voted NDP, compared with 8 percent of men. In 2000, 12 percent of women opted for the NDP, compared with 9 percent of men.

⁴Focusing on feminist consciousness, as opposed to feminist issues, O'Neill (2001) has recently found evidence of larger gender differences in this domain.

⁵Funding for the 2000 Canadian Election Study was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Elections Canada, and the Institute for Research in Public Policy. The field work was conducted by the Institute for Social Research at York University (outside Quebec) and Jolicoeur (in Quebec). The study consisted of a 30-minute campaign interview, a 30-minute post-election interview, and a self-administered mail back questionnaire. The response rate for the campaign survey was 59 percent. Of the 3,647 respondents interviewed during the campaign, 2,918 completed the post-election survey and 1,539 returned the mail back questionnaire. This chapter uses items from all three waves of the study. The demographic composition of the three waves is similar, except for the fact that the mail back has fewer respondents in the youngest age group. To the extent that any of the gender gaps are wider among young people, the overall size of those gaps may be underestimated.

⁶Each scale is a simple additive scale. The individual items were all re-scaled to run from 0 to 1 and then summed to form the scale. Dividing the total scores by the number of items yielded a scale that runs from 0 to 1. Wording for all questions used in this chapter can be found in the Appendix. Scalability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The coefficients ranged from .47 to .74. On the basis of his meta-analysis of the magnitude of alpha coefficients obtained in behavioural research, Peterson (1994) reports that the average alpha coefficient for scales measuring values and beliefs is .70. The average coefficient for the scales used in this chapter is .60. Scales with a small number of items typically yield lower coefficients.

⁷As they readily acknowledge, it is possible that the arrow runs both ways. In other words, it may also be the case that a growing feminist consciousness encourages women to enter the paid work force.

⁸Togeby (1994) found that the effects of parenthood on women vary depending on the number of children. In her study, having a single child was associated with more left-wing views, while subsequent children appeared to make women more conservative.

⁹The pro-free enterprise scale has a reliability coefficient of Alpha = .51. Average scores range from .55 in both Atlantic Canada and Ontario to .58 in the West ($p < .05$) and from .54 in the lowest income tercile to .59 in the highest income tercile ($p < .01$).

¹⁰Twenty-two percent of men favoured spending less on welfare, compared with 20 percent of women.

¹¹The pro-welfare scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .69. Both the income differences and the regional differences are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

¹²The universal health care scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .47. The income differences are significant at the $p < .01$ level. Regional scores ranged from .60 in the West to .68 in Ontario ($p < .01$). Quebec was the outlier, with an average score of only .55.

¹³The gap between women and men in the highest income tercile remains significant at the .01 level)

¹⁴However, Everitt (1998a) found that feminist mobilization appears to have affected young men and young women alike, at least on questions relating to feminism and equality.

¹⁵The figures for women are 15 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

¹⁶The pro-feminism scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .66.

¹⁷The gap is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

¹⁸If anything, women with one child are less supportive of feminism (.65)

¹⁹The gender scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .58. The questions on the lack of women MPs and requiring parties to nominate equal numbers of women and men could not be included because they were only asked of a random half-sample. The inclusion of the stay home item would result in a much lower coefficient of reliability (Alpha = .45). The regional differences are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

²⁰The moral traditionalism scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .74.

²¹The impact of marital status is significant at the $p < .01$ level for women and men alike.

²²The differences within and among these groups are all significant at the $p < .01$ level)

²³The crime and punishment scale has a coefficient of reliability of Alpha = .53.

²⁴Mean scores ranged from .60 for men who did not complete high school to .62 for those with some post-secondary education.

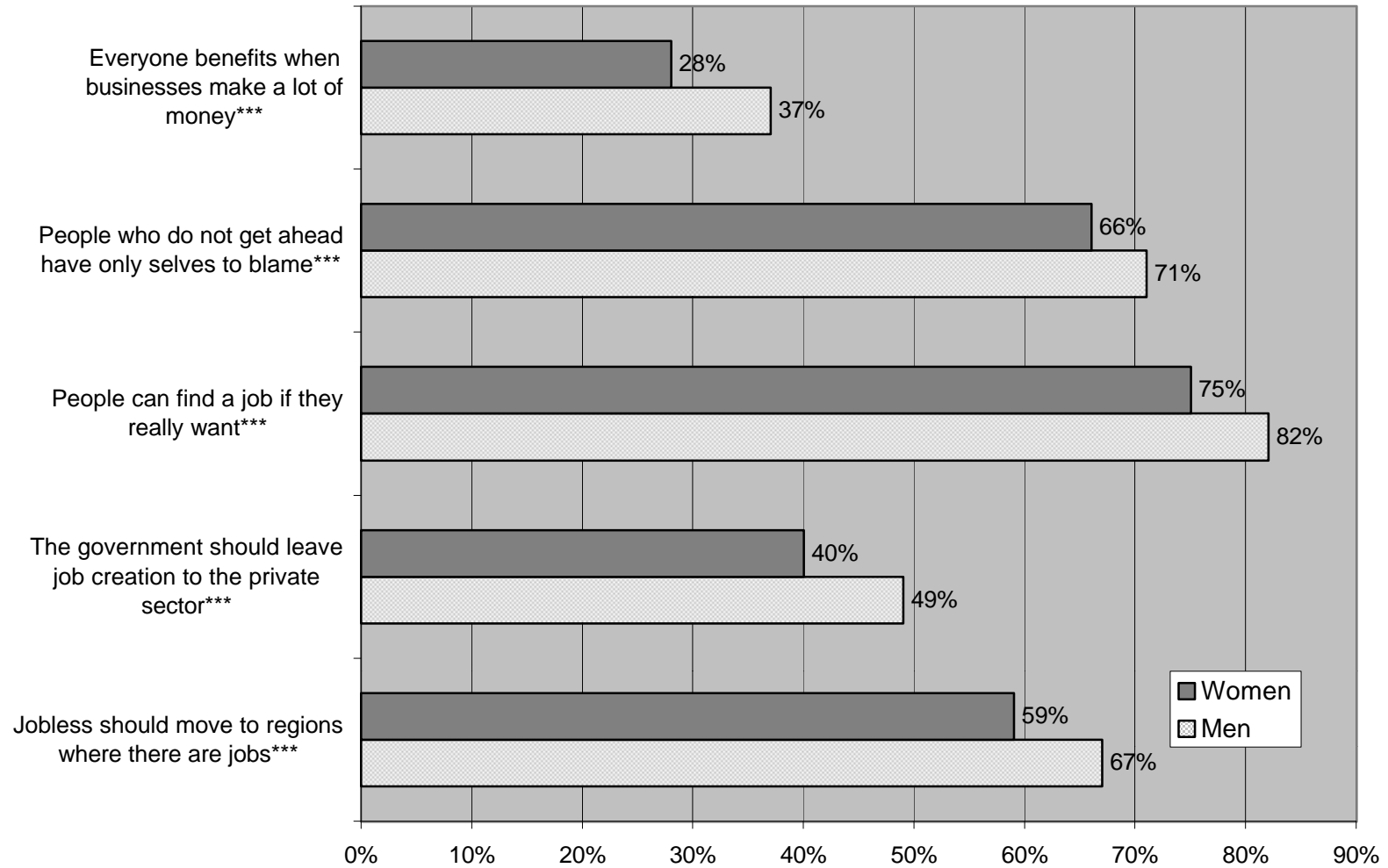
²⁵While the overall difference is statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level, the effect of children-rearing declines with the number of children. The average score for women with one child at

home is .56, compared with .49 for those with three or more children.

²⁶Mean scores range from .45 for women to whom religion is not at all important to .51 for those to whom it is very important.

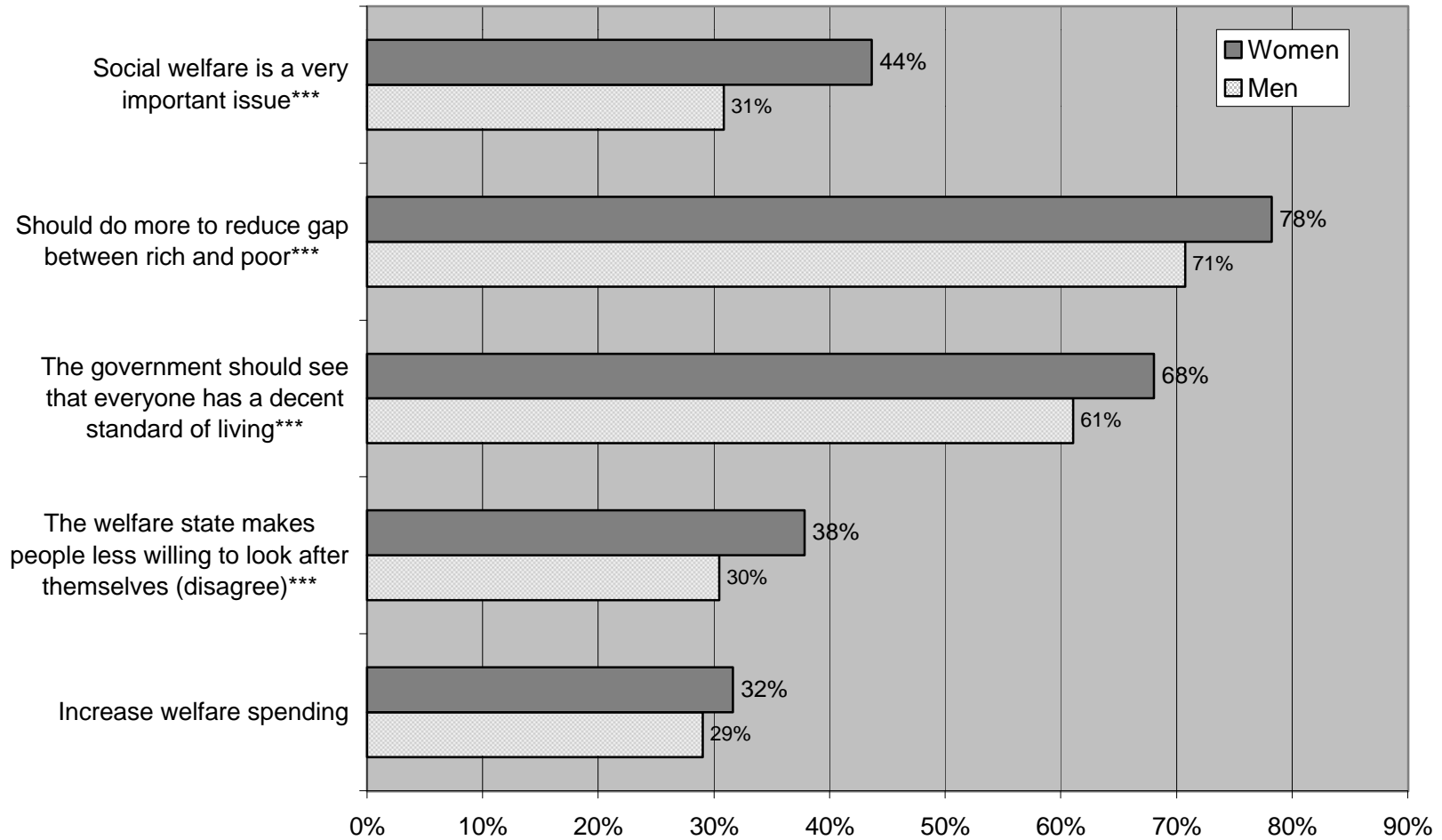
²⁷It should be noted that O'Neill looks beyond survey-based studies of public opinion and cites evidence from in-depth interviews that women and men differ in their conceptions of politics and democratic citizenship.

Figure 1: Free Enterprise



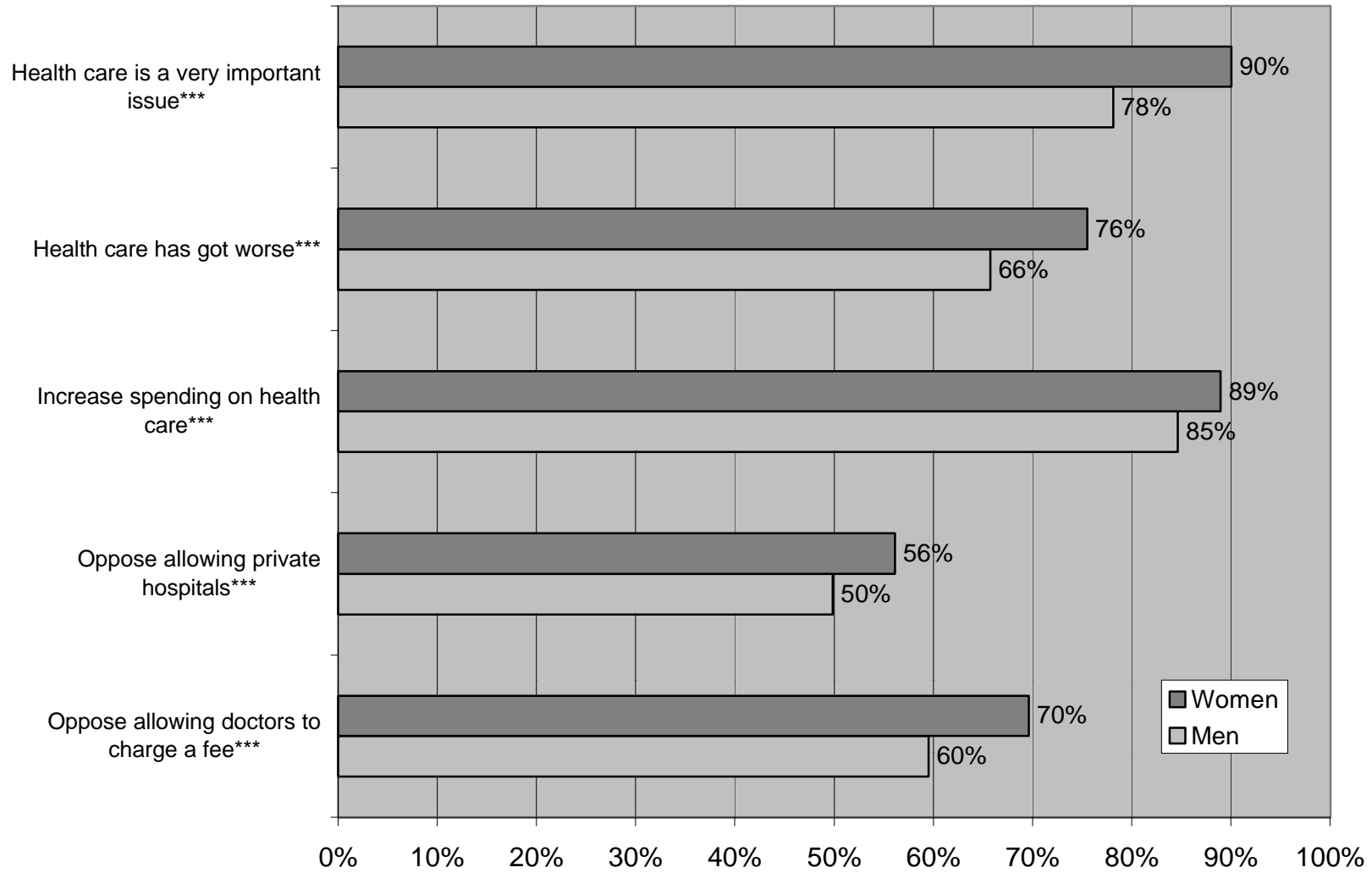
Significance levels for female-male differences: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

Figure 2. The Welfare System



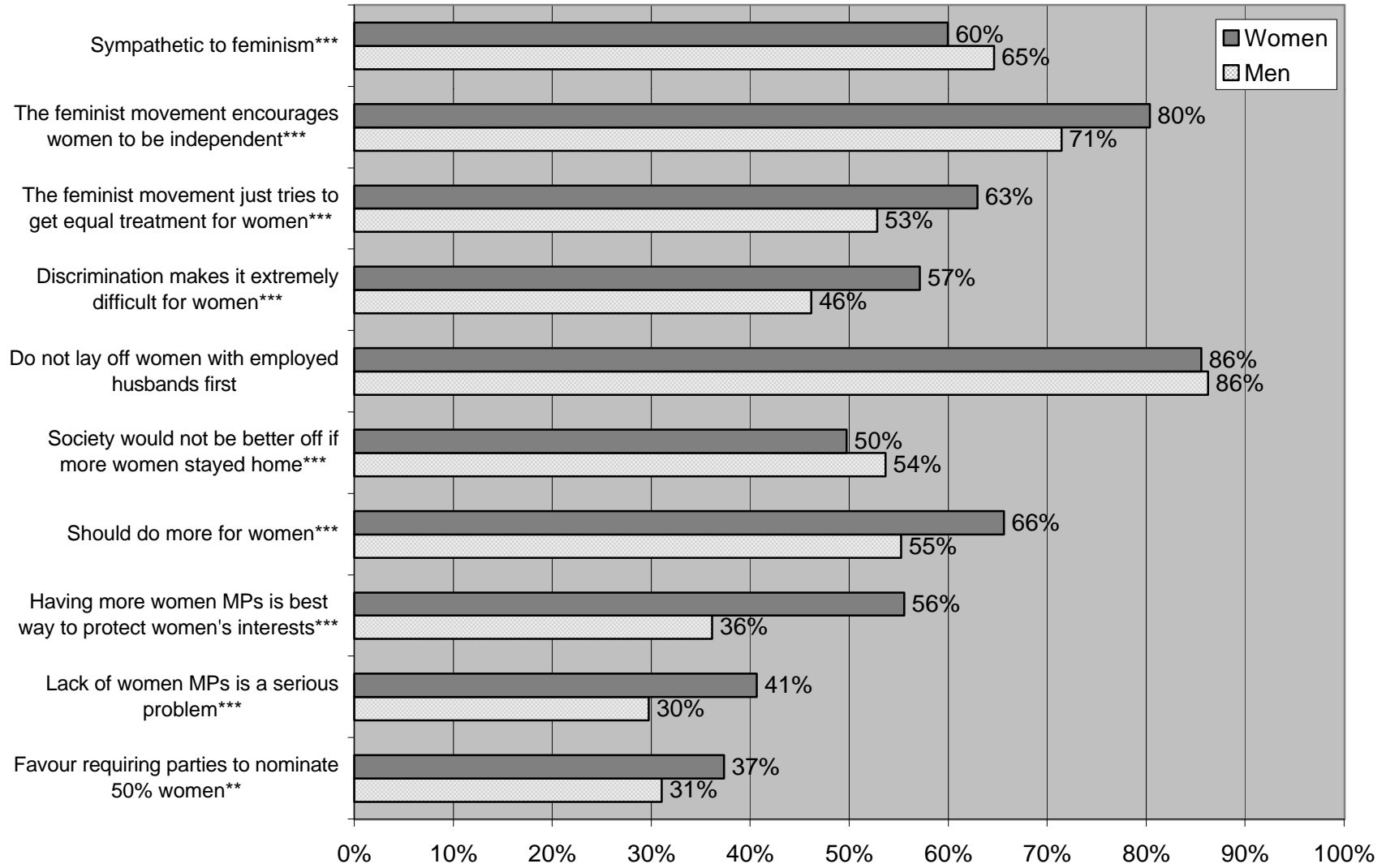
Significance levels for female-male differences: *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Figure 3: Health Care



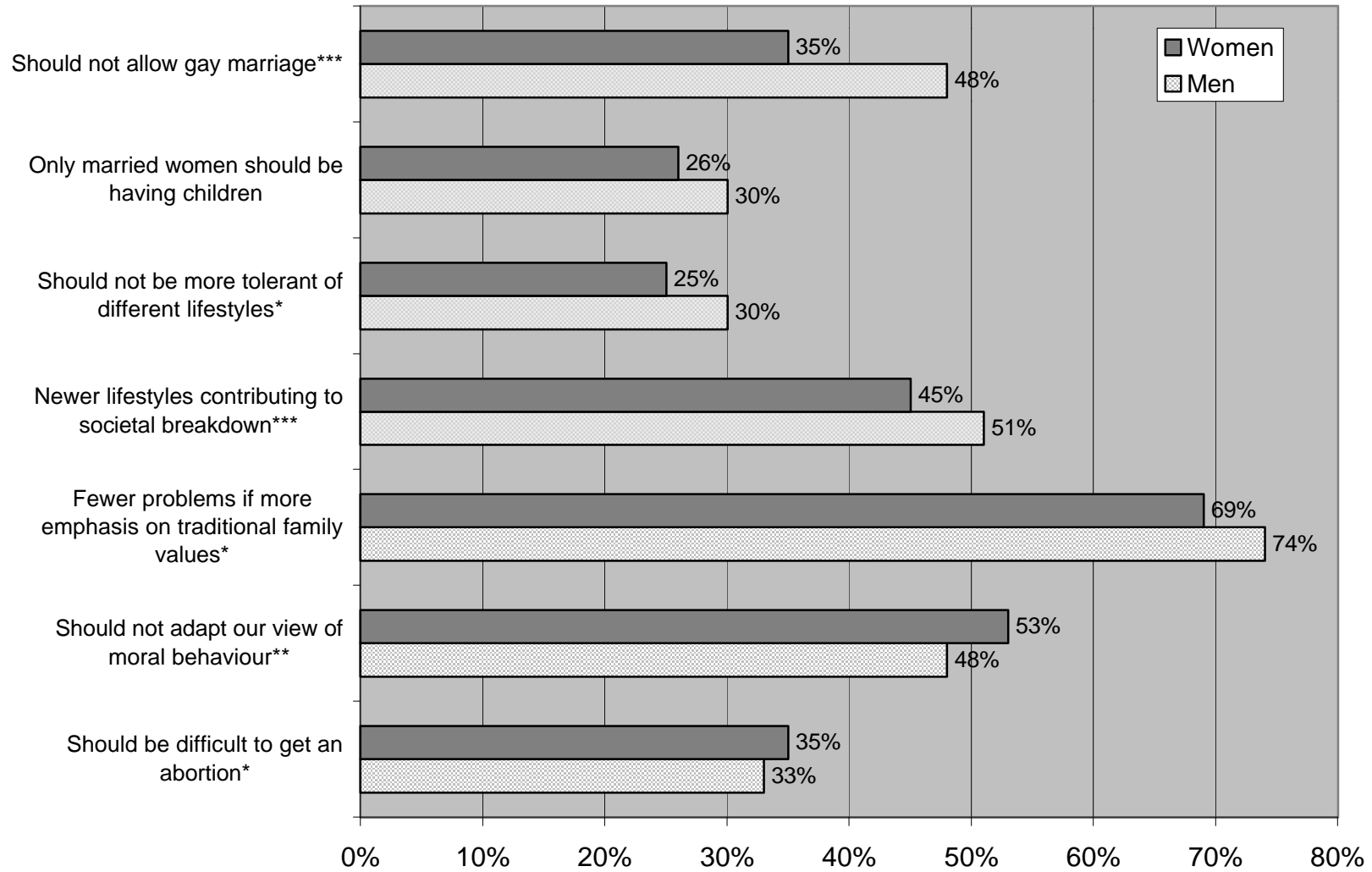
Significance levels for female-male differences: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

Figure 4: Feminism and Gender-Related Issues



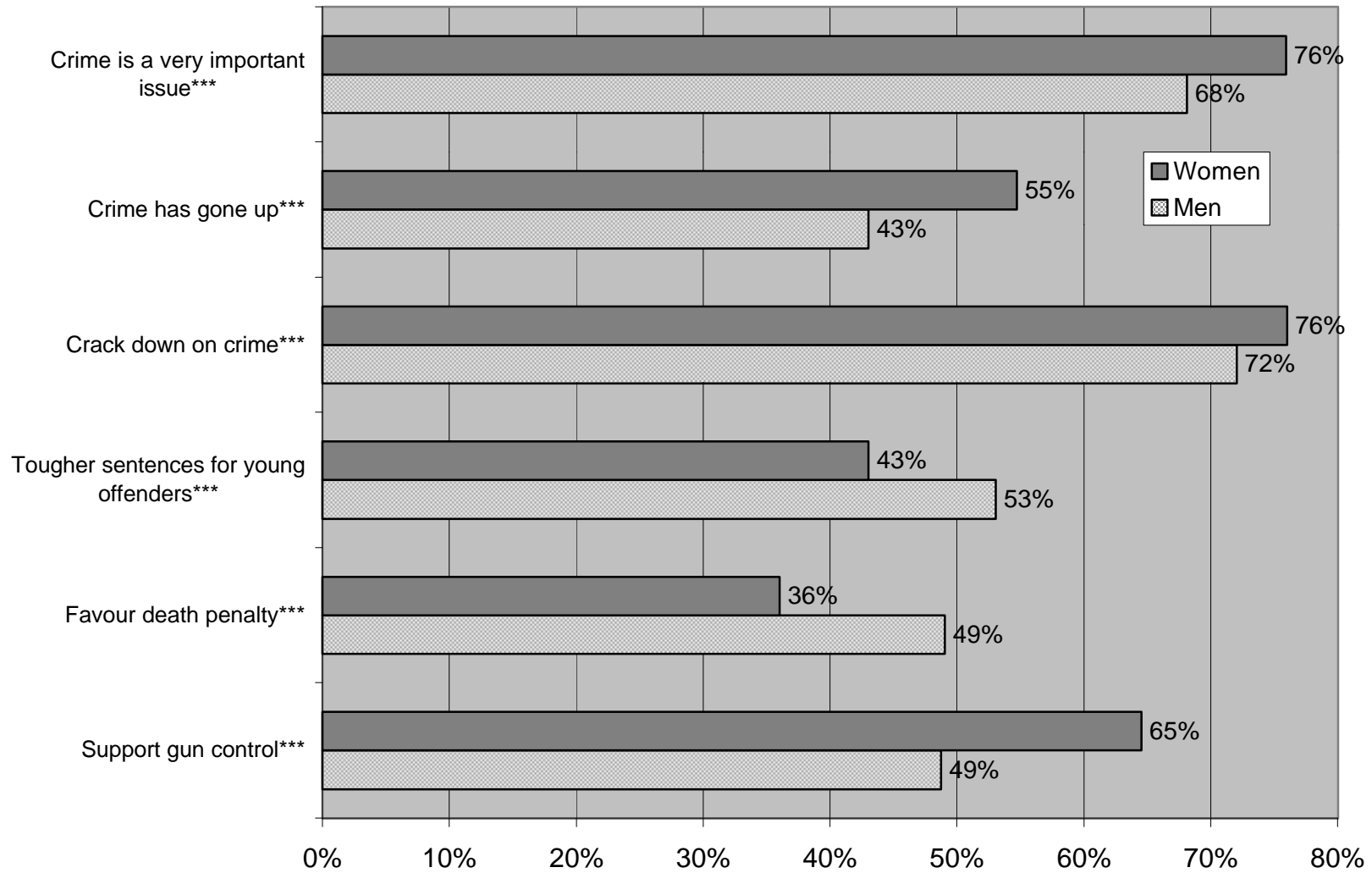
Significance Levels for female-male differences: *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10

Figure 5: Moral Traditionalism



Significance levels for female-male differences: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

Figure 6: Crime and Punishment



Significance levels for female-male differences: *** p<.01 ** p<.05 * p<.10