

## **Gender and Vote Choice in the 2006 Canadian Election**

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### **Abstract**

Inglehart and Norris (2003) have argued that a process of gender realignment is pushing men to the right and women to the left. This paper uses data from the 2006 Canadian election study to assess their argument that the “modern gender gap” is rooted in cultural differences between women and men rather than in structural and situational differences. While there is some evidence that public sector employment and higher education help to explain why women are more likely than men to vote for the NDP, their impact is offset by religiosity. Women tend to be more religious than men and this helps to explain why many women remain attracted to the Conservatives. The most important factors in explaining why men are more likely than women to vote for the right-wing party and women are more likely than men to vote for the left-wing party are clearly cultural. Women are more skeptical than men of market-based arguments, less ready to embrace closer ties with the US, and more liberal when it comes to social mores and alternative lifestyles. The paper ends with a discussion of the implications of gendered patterns of voting for electoral politics in Canada.

## Introduction

According to Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003), a process of gender re-alignment has been underway in Western democracies: where women were once less likely than men to vote for parties of the left, men are now more likely than women to vote for parties of the right. Explanations for this “modern gender gap” range from structural and situational differences in the lives and experiences of women and men to differences in women’s and men’s value orientations. Using data from the World Values Survey, Inglehart and Norris (2003) conclude that value orientations play a greater role in accounting for these gaps than other factors. Their conclusion rests on the fact that when variables measuring structural and situational factors are added to a model containing only gender, the estimated impact of gender actually increases, suggesting that the aggregate impact of gender is suppressed, not enhanced by differences in women’s and men’s social backgrounds.

However, Inglehart’s and Norris’ claim about the importance of value orientations is not entirely convincing. While the estimated impact of gender does decrease when value orientations are added to their regression model, it is still larger than in the model with no controls. Furthermore, Inglehart and Norris used a pooled data set that included countries at different stages in the process of gender realignment. Focusing on a single country where the traditional gender gap has reversed would provide a more compelling test of the impact of both structural and cultural variables on gender differences in voting behaviour. Canada presents a particularly useful case for this analysis: data from the 2006 Canadian Election Study enable us to test Inglehart and Norris’s cultural explanation for gender gaps more thoroughly while at the same time assessing the implications of these persistent gender gaps in Canadian elections.<sup>1</sup>

In Canada, all trace of the “traditional gender gap” had vanished by the early 1970s and by 1979 women were as likely as men to vote for Canada’s party of the left, the New Democratic Party (NDP). Between the 1970s and the 1990s the main beneficiary of the women’s vote was the centrist Liberal Party. However, in the 1993 election the so-called “modern gender gap” began to take shape. This election witnessed the emergence of an 11-point gender gap in support for the newly created right-wing Reform Party outside Quebec.<sup>2</sup> This gender gap in support for the new right persisted in the 1997 election. Women were much less likely than men to vote Reform. At the same time, a gender gap emerged on the left: in 1997, women became more likely than men to vote NDP. By the end of the decade the Reform Party had re-constituted itself as the Canadian Alliance in an effort to soften its image, but the gender gap endured. Lack of appeal to women was a prime reason why the Alliance had failed to achieve its hoped-for electoral breakthrough in central Canada in the 2000 election (Blais et al. 2002). While the gender gap in support for the NDP declined slightly in this election, the party continued to draw more support from women than from men.

A second attempt to reunite the right through the merger of the Progressive Conservative party and the Alliance initially reduced gender differences in the 2004 election (Gidengil et al. 2006), making it seem as if the new Conservative Party of Canada had succeeded in shedding the Alliance’s radical right-wing baggage and overcoming one of its key electoral liabilities. Likewise, the advantage the NDP had among women diminished as the male union vote returned

to its traditional home. By the 2006 election, however, the gender gap had re-appeared: there was a six-point gender gap on the right and a five-point gender gap on the left outside Quebec. These gaps may be modest, but they were consequential. If the Conservatives had held as much appeal for women as they did for men in the 2006 election, they would not have ended up forming a minority government with the smallest share of seats in Canada's history. It is therefore worth exploring these gender gaps to better understand what produces them and to assess their implications for the future success of both the NDP and the refashioned Conservative Party of Canada.

### **Structural and Situational Explanations of the Gender Gap**

Much of the literature on gender gaps in voting behaviour has focused on structural and situational factors such as religiosity, labour force participation, reliance on the welfare state, age and marital status. Given the profound changes that have occurred in gender roles over the past 40 years, it would seem almost self-evident that many of these changes in women's lives and experiences are driving the process of gender re-alignment. The traditional gender gap has frequently been attributed to women's religiosity, their confinement to the domestic sphere, and their longevity (see De Vaus and McAllister 1989; Togeby 1994; Mayer and Smith 1995; Studlar, McAllister and Hayes 1998; Inglehart and Norris 2003). According to these accounts, women were less likely to cast a left-wing vote because they were more likely to be regular church-goers, they were less likely to be in paid employment, and they typically lived longer than men. If so, secularization and growing work force participation would explain why the traditional gender gap has disappeared.

Women's greater religiosity has frequently been invoked to explain why women were traditionally less likely than men to vote for parties of the left. The assumption was that regular church attendance fostered conservative values (Mayer and Smith 1995). In a similar vein, O'Neill (2001) has argued that religiosity serves as a countervailing force to feminism. She found that religious beliefs made for significantly more conservative positions on issues like abortion, gender roles, censorship of pornography, and gay marriage. However, Canadian women, while more religious than Canadian men, are not as religious as they once were. Growing secularism may be one reason why some women have been moving to the left.

At the same time, women have been joining the paid workforce in unprecedented numbers. Fewer and fewer women are full time homemakers. Indeed, the proportion of working age women in the work force has doubled since 1965. Women's role as homemakers supposedly insulated them from the radicalizing forces that motivate left-wing voting (Lipset 1981, 217). If this is the case, women's movement into paid employment outside the home could explain the disappearance of the traditional gender gap.

The increasing secularization of Canadian society and the dwindling number of full-time homemakers may help to explain why the traditional gender gap has disappeared, but they cannot explain its reversal. To understand why the changing electoral behaviour of women and men could lead to gender *realignment*, as opposed to gender *dealignment*, we have to consider some other possible explanations.

One such explanation focuses on women's distinctive experiences in the work place (Klein 1984; Togeby 1994; Manza and Brooks 1998). Gendered patterns of employment mean that women often find themselves confined to low-paying jobs in "pink-collar ghettos." If this results in a keener awareness of gender inequalities, increasing labour force participation may foster a growing feminist consciousness and a questioning of traditional gender roles. At the same time, the challenge of juggling full-time work and family responsibilities means that working women have a greater need of state services. Accordingly, women should be readier than men to support the party that favours public provision.

Indeed, women's greater reliance on the welfare state has been seen as an important source of their support for parties of the left. This reliance takes two forms. For some women, it entails reliance on the state for employment. Given that women are more likely than men to be employed in the public sector, they have a greater interest in maintaining (or expanding) current levels of state services. For many other women, it is a question of reliance on the state for basic forms of support. And the growing "feminization of poverty" means that there are more women who need this social safety net. According to the "welfare state dismantlement hypothesis" (Erie and Rein 1988; cf. Piven 1984), cutbacks in government spending in the 1980s and 1990s threatened women in their roles as both welfare service providers and welfare recipients (for Canada, see Bashevkin 2000). One result, it is assumed, has been to encourage more women to vote for the left.

According to the "senescence argument" (De Vaus and McAllister 1989, 246), people become more conservative as they age. If so, conservative women should out-number conservative men because women tend to enjoy greater longevity than men. This has been cited as one reason why women were more likely to favour parties of the centre and centre-right. However, Norris (1999) has pointed to the emergence of a "gender-generation gap." This gap is seen as reflecting the mobilizing effect of feminism on the generations of women who grew to adulthood in the wake of second- and third-wave feminism (Everitt 1998b). As a result of this feminist mobilization, younger women are more liberal in their views than both men *and* older women. Generational replacement, then, could explain the reversal of the traditional gender gap.

Plausible as these explanations are, structural and situational factors have proved to be of little help in explaining gender gaps in political preference. Far from accounting for gender differences in left-right self-placements, the structural and situational variables that Inglehart and Norris (2003) looked at only explained why the differences are not larger still. Similarly, one of the key findings to emerge from an analysis of the gender gap in Alliance voting in the 2000 Canadian election is how little of the gap can be explained by structural and situational factors (Gidengil et al. 2005). When these factors were added to the model the gender coefficient became bigger rather than smaller. Erickson and O'Neill (2002) report a similar finding for the gender gap in Reform voting in the 1993 and 1997 federal elections.

The one aspect of women's changing lives and experiences that did have the predicted effect on voting for the Alliance in 2000 was their marital status (Gidengil et al. 2005). Women who were not married were much less likely to support the Alliance. This is consistent with

Carroll's (1988) argument that the emergence of the gender gap in the US reflects women's increased autonomy. Rising levels of education, the increasing average age of first marriage, a growing divorce rate, and movement into the paid work force have all made for increased economic and psychological independence from men. The key point is that more women now have the autonomy they need in order to express their differences from men. These differences relate to fundamental values and priorities. Freed from the constraints of dependence on men, these values are assumed to find their expression in greater support for parties of the left. In a similar vein, Conover (1988 cf. Brodie 1991) has argued that feminism has served as the catalyst for the expression of women's "difference" at the ballot box by raising their consciousness of their latent "female" values.

### **Cultural Explanations of the Gender Gap**

Inglehart and Norris's (2003) work argues that it is these cultural differences, or differences in women's and men's values and priorities, that are really driving the modern gender gap. Gender differences in attitudes towards free enterprise and the role of the state and questions of moral traditionalism and accommodating diversity can lead to gender differences in voting behaviour.

One prominent line of theorizing that accounts for these value differences takes its inspiration from Gilligan's (1982) work on gender differences in moral reasoning. The men and women in her studies used very different criteria when faced with moral dilemmas. Where the men typically gave primacy to the individual, the women treated relationships as primary. Where the men focussed on competing rights, the women typically emphasized conflicting responsibilities. Where the men valued autonomy and self-determination, the women were more concerned about inclusiveness. For men, the moral imperative was "to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfilment." For women, on the other hand, the moral imperative was "to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world" (Gilligan 1982, 100). Gilligan's male and female "voices" find a ready parallel in the concepts of individualism and collectivism. Her findings suggest that women are less individualistic than men (see also Phelan 1990). Transposed to the realm of politics, this implies that women will be less persuaded of the virtues of free enterprise than men and that they will be more likely than men to favor government intervention over market-driven policies. In the case of Canada, it also implies that women will be less likely than men to want a closer relationship with the US, which is widely regarded as the bastion of free enterprise.

It is easy in the Canadian context to find evidence of these underlying value differences between women and men. Women have generally been found to be more skeptical than men of the market economy and more supportive of the welfare state (Gidengil et al. 2003; Everitt 2002). These differences were a key factor in explaining the 16-point gender gap in support for the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement in the 1988 election (Gidengil 1995). Women proved to be less receptive to market-based arguments and their opinions about the agreement were swayed more by their commitment to the welfare state than by economic considerations. These differences were not simply a function of women's material circumstances; they cut across

income lines, suggesting that they were indeed a function of differing values. Lending weight to Inglehart and Norris's (2003) arguments about the cultural roots of the modern gender gap, views about the role of the state versus the market also proved to be important in explaining the gender gap in Alliance voting in the 2000 Canadian election (Gidengil et al. 2005). The more people opposed government intervention, the more likely they were to vote Alliance. This was true of women and men alike, but women were more likely than men to favor government intervention over market solutions and so they were less likely than men to support the Alliance.

Canadian women also tend to be less conservative than men when it comes to traditional cultural values and practices. This is another reason why they were less likely to vote for the new parties of the right (Gidengil et al. 2005). There are two possible explanations for this difference. First, Gilligan found that women were more likely than men to value inclusiveness. This reflected differing conceptions of society: where men often favored a hierarchical conception, women tended to conceive of society as a web of connection. Second, men may feel more threatened by changing moral values and shifts in cultural practices. These changes have challenged the longstanding dominance of the white male. This is especially true of the transformation of gender roles and the movement of women into the paid work force. Indeed, some scholars have attributed the rise of the radical right to a "silent counter-revolution" against the libertarian left (Ignazi 1992, 2003; Minkenberg (1992), which may be why men are more likely than women to support radical right-wing parties.

In the past two decades voting patterns in Canada have undergone dramatic shifts. Like the Reform party before it, the Canadian Alliance's electoral chances were hurt by the fact that female voters viewed the party as too extreme (Blais et al. 2002; Gidengil et al. 2005; Nevitte et al. 2000). This is one reason why the Alliance merged with the Progressive Conservatives to form the new Conservative party. However, despite the merger, women were less likely than men to vote for Canada's right-wing party in 2006. In contrast, in recent years the NDP, Canada's left-wing party, has benefited from women's support while gender gaps in support of the centrist Liberal Party have virtually disappeared. As is the case in other western industrialized countries the "modern gender gap" in Canada appears to be solidifying as women are less likely than men to vote for parties of the right and more likely than men to vote for parties of the left. This pattern makes Canada an excellent case to examine the competing explanations for gender differences in voting behaviour.

### **Data and Methods**

The analysis focuses on the voting behaviour of Canadians outside Quebec in the 2006 election. Since the advent of the Bloc Québécois in the early 1990s, voting in federal elections in Quebec has revolved to a remarkable degree around the issue of Quebec sovereignty (Blais et al. 2002) as opposed to left-right issues. This has resulted in a party system too distinct from the rest of the country to include in this analysis.<sup>3</sup>

We estimate two sets of models. The first set contains only social background characteristics in order to test the various socio-structural and situational hypotheses. First, we estimate a model for women and men combined. If men and women choose different parties

because they differ in their social background characteristics, the gender coefficient should shrink when these variables are added to the model. Then we estimate separate models for men and for women to allow for gender differences in the effects of the various explanatory variables (Gilens 1988; Gidengil 1995; Sapiro with Conover 1997; Chaney, Alvarez and Nagler 1998; Kaufmann and Petrocik 1999). These models allow us to test whether men and women vote differently because they attach different weight to various factors when choosing a party. For example, the existence of “pink-collar ghettos” could make employment a more important factor for women than for men when it comes to voting for the left-wing NDP.

The social background characteristics are all represented by dummy variables: age (two dummy variables, one coded 1 for those under 35 years of age and the second coded one for those aged 55 and older), religion (four dummy variables, coded 1 for Catholics, 1 for Protestant fundamentalists, 1 for nonChristians, and 1 for those with no religion, with non-fundamentalist Protestants as the reference category), education (two dummy variables, one coded 1 for less than high school and the second coded 1 for university graduates), current marital status (coded 1 for married or living common law), parenthood (coded 1 if at least one child is currently living at home), employment status (coded 1 for actively employed or self-employed), employment sector (coded 1 for public sector), income (two dummy variables, one coded 1 for the bottom quartile and the second coded 1 for the top quartile) and housing tenure (two dummy variables, one coded 1 for renters and the second coded 1 for mortgage holders).

Controls are also included for variables that are known to affect vote choice in Canada (see Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al., 2002; Gidengil et al. 2006), namely, region (two dummy variables, coded 1 for Atlantic Canada and 1 for Western Canada, with Ontario as the reference category), urban/rural (coded 1 for rural residents), race (coded 1 for racial minorities), place of birth (coded 1 for outside Canada), language (two dummy variables, one coded 1 for French-speaking and the second coded 1 for speaking neither french nor English), and union membership (coded 1 for members).

The second set of models includes the relevant cultural values as well. Again, three models are estimated, one for women and men combined, one for women only and one for men only. Five value orientations are included: views about free enterprise, continentalism, social conservatism, religiosity, and racial minorities. Scales were created to measure free enterprise, continentalism, and social conservatism. The social conservatism scale taps into views about gender, feminism, and gays, while the free enterprise scale combines views about free enterprise and the role of the state versus the market. Details of the items composing the scales, along with reliability coefficients, are provided in the Appendix. All of these variables range in value from -1 to +1.

Multiple imputation was used to deal with missing data. Omitting cases with any missing values would have resulted in a smaller sample size.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, the deletion of cases with missing data could have resulted in faulty inferences as a result of selection bias (King et al. 2001). We used the ICE method developed by Royston (2004, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

Since the dependent variable has three unordered categories (Conservative, Liberal and NDP), all of the vote estimations are based on multinomial logistic regression. This enables us to model the vote as a choice among all three parties and thus capture the “multifaceted process of choosing among multiple parties at once” (Whitten and Palmer 1996). The advantage of this approach is that it highlights the inter-party dynamics of support and it allows for different variables to play into different sets of choices. Take a variable like public sector employment. Being a public sector worker may be very relevant to the choice between the Conservatives and the NDP, but count for little when the choice is between the Liberals and the NDP.

The coefficients estimated by multinomial logistic regression represent the predicted marginal impact of a given independent variable on the log-odds of choosing a given party relative to a baseline party. Their meaning depends on the values of the other variables included in the model. As such, they lack a straightforward, intuitively obvious interpretation. To facilitate interpretation, we use the coefficients to estimate the independent impact of each variable on the probability of voting for each of the parties. These estimations take the form of a series of “what if?” simulations. Say we want to estimate the impact of public sector employment on a woman’s probability of voting NDP. On the basis of the estimations, we can compute the mean probability of voting NDP, first if every woman was a public sector worker and, second if no woman worked in the public sector, keeping the effects of the other social background characteristics unchanged. The difference in the mean probabilities gives us an estimate of the average impact of public sector employment on the probability of a woman voting NDP, everything else being equal. We can do the same calculation for men and then compare the probabilities.

### **Findings**

Table 1 presents the most important findings, based on the models for women and men combined. The column entries indicate the estimated effect on vote choice of being female, beginning with a model that contains only the gender variable, then adding the structural and situational variables (and the socio-demographic controls), and ending with a model that includes value orientations as well.

It is quite clear that situational and structural factors cannot explain why women were more likely than men to choose the NDP over the Conservatives. When a wide array of potentially relevant structural and situational variables (and controls for other social background characteristics) are added to a model that includes only gender, the coefficient for being female barely changes. On the other hand, when values and beliefs are added to the model, the gender gap effectively disappears and the coefficient for being female approaches zero. As Inglehart and Norris (2003) argue, the roots of the modern gender gap in vote choice are clearly cultural. The modern gender gap in Canada reflects differences in women’s and men’s value orientations rather than structural and situational differences in their lives and experiences.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Structural and Situational Explanations**

It would be a mistake, though, to conclude that structural and situational factors are therefore irrelevant to understanding the impact of gender on vote choice. This becomes clearer

when we examine the effect of these variables on the predicted probability of voting for each party. The figures reported in Table 2 are based on the separate estimations for women and men. They indicate how much the average probability of voting for a party increases or decreases when a woman or a man has the specified characteristic. For example, being a public sector worker increases a woman's probability of voting NDP by almost eight points.

[Table 2 about here]

Clearly, any understanding of the gender gap in Conservative voting has to take account of the powerful effect of being a Protestant who believes that the Bible is the word of God and is to be taken literally word for word. Of all the social background characteristics (including region, results not shown), being a Protestant fundamentalist is the single most important predictor of a Conservative vote in our models.<sup>6</sup> Like the party's Western base, this is an important element of continuity between the Alliance and the new Conservative party. For women and men alike, the probability of voting Conservative is 25 points higher for Protestant fundamentalists, net of other social background characteristics (see Table 2). However, women (24 per cent) are more likely than men (19 per cent) to be in this category, and so the effect is to keep the gender gap in voting Conservative from being bigger.

Catholics remained more likely to prefer the Liberals to the Conservatives, but they were not the bedrock of Liberal support that they were during the years of Liberal dominance (Nevitte et al. 2000; Blais et al. 2002).<sup>7</sup> However, being Catholic mattered more to women's choice between the Liberals and the Conservatives than to men's. A similar pattern held for those with no religion. Indeed, whether they had religious beliefs or not made little difference to men's choice of party. The effect was confined to women: but for secular women, the NDP's female vote share would have dropped three points and the main beneficiary would have been the Conservatives.<sup>8</sup>

These findings lend weight to accounts that attributed the traditional gender gap to women's religiosity. Women (79 per cent) remain more likely than men (73 per cent) to profess a religion. Were it not for the countervailing impact of religion, the gender gap in Conservative voting would be wider. The same was true of the gender gap in support for the Alliance in the 2000 Election (Gidengil et al. 2005). This countervailing effect becomes apparent when the religion variables are added to a model containing only sex and controls for ascriptive characteristics (results not shown).<sup>9</sup> The coefficient for being female increases to .55 for the choice between the NDP and the Conservatives and it increases to .31 for the choice between the Liberals and the Conservatives. Moreover, *both* effects are statistically significant.

There is no support for either the senescence thesis or the notion of a gender-generation gap. If anything, older women were *less* likely than younger women to vote Conservative and more likely to vote Liberal. Any senescence effect was confined to men. Meanwhile, age made hardly any difference to women's probability of voting NDP. In fact, age had very little bearing on vote choice for women and men alike: none of the effects approached conventional levels of statistical significance.

Explanations revolving around work force participation *per se* also fare poorly. People who are employed or self-employed are significantly *less* likely to opt for the NDP over the Conservatives. This is the case for both men *and* women. What does matter is sector of employment. In line with the welfare state dismantlement thesis, women who work in the public sector are significantly more likely to prefer the NDP to the Conservatives. There is no comparable effect for men.<sup>10</sup> Like their female counterparts, men who work in the public sector are less likely to vote Conservative, but they are more likely to choose the Liberals over the NDP. Given that women (31 per cent) are more likely than men (16 per cent) to be public sector workers, sector of employment is an important factor in explaining gender differences in vote choice. If it had not mattered, the NDP's share of the female vote would have been two and a half points lower and the Conservatives' share three and a half points higher. Meanwhile, the Conservatives' share of the male vote would have dropped one and a half points and the Liberal share would have been two points higher, while the impact on the NDP share would have been minimal.

The other strand of the welfare state dismantlement thesis finds little support. The only significant effect was for women with household incomes in the top income quartile, who were less likely to vote NDP. However, there was little to suggest that the feminization of poverty is contributing to the gender gap on the left. The effects of low income, such as they are, fail to approach conventional levels of statistical significance. Low-income women were no more likely to support the NDP than middle-income women. The same was true of men. The results for housing tenure are not very supportive, either. What mattered here was not whether or not a woman was a renter, but whether or not there was a mortgage on her home. These women were significantly more likely to vote NDP. Indeed, this was one of the strongest predictors of NDP voting.<sup>11</sup> Having a mortgage made no difference to men's propensity to vote NDP.

The women's autonomy thesis fares somewhat better. University-educated women are much more likely to prefer the NDP to the Conservatives. Tellingly, there is no comparable effect for male graduates. This lends credence to the idea that women require autonomy in order to express their political difference. Carroll (1982) cites rising levels of education as one reason why more women are able to transcend the effects of traditional gender-role socialization. However, the key constraint on women, according to Carroll, is marriage. In the 2000 Canadian election, women who were married or living common law were significantly less likely to vote NDP and significantly more likely to vote Alliance than other women (Gidengil et al. 2005). Moreover, the effects of marriage were confined to women. There was little evidence of a marriage gap in 2006, however: marital status made no difference to women's (or men's) choice of party. This is in contrast to 2004 when married voters were significantly more likely to vote Conservative (Gidengil et al. 2006).

Finally, parenthood did not affect women's (or men's) choice of party. Explanations of the traditional gender gap pointed to women's child-raising responsibilities as a conservative force in their lives. However, the care of children could just as plausibly have a radicalizing effect by increasing concern for issues like social programmes (De Vaus and McAllister 1989). Either way, having children was simply not a factor in choosing one party over another.<sup>12</sup>

Support for the various structural and situational explanations of gendered voting patterns is mixed at best. To the extent that some of them find empirical support, their effects are offsetting: public sector employment pulls some women to the NDP, religious faith pushes others toward the Conservatives (or the Liberals). At most, structural and situational explanations help us to understand why the gender gaps are not bigger. They cannot explain the gender gap.

### **Cultural Explanations**

As Inglehart and Norris (2003) hypothesized, the modern gender gap is clearly cultural in origin. In contrast to the results from their pooled analysis of multi-country data, support for cultural explanations is unequivocal in the case of Canada. Once these variables are added, gender differences in vote choice effectively disappear (see Table 1). The Canadian case also helps us to discern which value orientations matter.

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 compares women's and men's mean values on the various value orientations. As predicted, women's views about Canada's relationship with the US are less positive than men's, and so are their views about free enterprise. Women also tend to hold more socially liberal views about gender roles and sexual orientations. At the same time, though, women are more likely than men to say that God is important in their lives. Finally, women are a little more open than men to accommodating racial diversity. While all of the differences meet or surpass conventional levels of statistical significance, it would not do to overstate them. Certainly, it would be an exaggeration to refer to a value divide. Nonetheless, the differences are consequential.

[Table 4 about here]

The most important value dimensions from the perspective of understanding gendered patterns of voting are views about free enterprise, continentalism, social conservatism, and religiosity. Views about free enterprise were clearly an important factor in motivating a man to vote Conservative (see Table 4). If views about the appropriate role of the state versus the market had not mattered, the Conservatives' share of the male vote would have dropped over one and a half points. The main beneficiary would have been the Liberals. Conversely, the NDP's female vote share would have been over one and a half points lower. Again, the Liberals would have increased their vote share. It bears emphasis that these effects hold even controlling for income. Regardless of their household income, women are less positive than men in their views about free enterprise. The fact that these differing views cannot be explained by differences in women's and men's material circumstances lends credence to the notion that women tend to be less individualistic than men.

The impact of continentalism is also consistent with Gilligan-inspired explanations. Views about Canada's relationship with the US were a significant factor for both women and men. As in the 2004 election, this worked very much to the benefit of the Conservative party (Gidengil et al. 2006): the more positive people's views, the more likely they were to vote Conservative. The views of women and men alike were positive, on balance. However, the

women's views were less positive and this contributed to the gender gap in Conservative voting. Had views about Canada's relationship with the US not mattered, the Conservatives' share of the male vote would have dropped five points, but their share of the female vote would have been less than three points lower.

Views about gender roles and sexual orientation were also an important factor behind the gender gap in Conservative voting. The more socially conservative people's views, the more likely they were to vote Conservative. Women's views were not only a little more liberal than men's, but they carried more weight in their choice of party. Had they not mattered, the Conservative share of the female vote would have been as much as six points higher. Meanwhile, the Liberal share would have dropped almost three and the NDP share over three points. The impact on the Conservatives' share of the male vote would have been more modest: the party would have gained four points with the NDP being the main loser.

It may seem surprising that the difference between women and men on this value dimension is not greater, given that it encompasses views about gender roles and feminism. O'Neill (2001) attributes this to the countervailing influence of religion in many women's lives. We have already seen the role that religion plays in muting the gender gap in Conservative voting. Here we look at the impact, not of religious denomination, but of religiosity more broadly conceived.<sup>13</sup> The greater the self-described importance of God in women's lives, the more likely they were to vote Conservative. The weakness of the effect for men is striking. To the extent that religiosity mattered to men's choice of party, it increased the probability of voting Liberal. Had religiosity not been a factor for women, the Conservatives' share of the female vote would have been almost three and a half points lower. This clearly helped to offset the effects of social liberalism and hurt the NDP and the Liberals about equally.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Inglehart and Norris (2003) have pointed to a process of gender realignment in Western democracies that is reversing the "traditional gender gap". Canada is one of the countries that have seen the emergence of the "modern gender gap": men are more likely than women to vote for the party of the right, while women are more likely than men to vote for the party of the left. By focusing on the voting behaviour of women and men in this single country we have been able to provide strong support for the claims put forward by Inglehart and Norris (2003) that the "modern gender gap" is attributable to cultural factors rather than structural or situational factors.

As our data clearly demonstrate, factors such as labour force participation, material disadvantage, age and marital status cannot explain gendered patterns of voting. The fact that university-educated women are more likely to vote NDP provides some support for the women's autonomy argument, but the absence of any effect for marital status undercuts it. There is some support for the argument that women's dependence on the welfare state for employment is encouraging a vote for the left, but the effects of public sector employment are offset by religiosity. Women are more religious than men and this serves to suppress gender differences in vote choice, leading more women to vote for the Conservative Party than might otherwise have done so.

The key factors in explaining the “modern gender gap” in Canada are clearly views about free enterprise, Canada’s relationship with the US and social conservatism. Women tend to be more resistant than men to arguments about the benefits of the market economy and the need for restraints on government activity. They are also more open to non-traditional life styles and more supportive of social minorities. Our finding that value orientations have an impact independent of structural and situational factors reinforces the conclusion that women tend to approach politics with somewhat different political priorities and concerns than men. If women are less individualistic than men and more collectivist, it is not because they are more reliant on the welfare state than men.

This lends weight to the notion that these value differences are rooted in gender role socialization in childhood (O’Neill 2002). At the same time, though, this begs the question of why the “modern gender gap” in vote choice did not appear until the 1990s. One possibility is that the pull of religion was sufficiently strong to offset the effect of these value differences. As women became more secular, this countervailing force began to weaken. Another possible explanation relates to the electoral breakthrough of the new right in Canada. The advent of Reform challenged the post-war consensus on the welfare state and politicized questions of traditional morality. Finally, the elimination of the federal deficit put the social safety net in jeopardy.

While we can only speculate about why the “modern gender gap” emerged when it did, it is clear that differences in women’s and men’s values and priorities have been playing out in vote choices in recent elections, pulling men to the right and pushing women to the left. Over the past several elections women have been less willing than men to vote for the right-wing parties such as Reform or the Canadian Alliance and readier than men to support the left-wing NDP. Ironically, the net beneficiary until now may well have been the more centrist Liberal party: it has benefited from women’s hesitancy to vote for the right and men’s shift away from the left.

The absence of a gender gap in Conservative voting in the 2004 election left political observers wondering whether the new party had managed to overcome the right’s weakness among women. The reappearance of the “modern gender gap” in the 2006 election suggests that any success that the Conservatives had in appealing to women was only temporary. In 2006, the Conservatives’ positions on free enterprise and ties with the United States and its traditional stance on social issues drew men to the party, but kept women away. This suggests that the Conservative party will likely face a major challenge in achieving its goal of winning a majority government. To increase its share of the popular vote it needs to enhance its appeal to female voters, but it will be difficult to do this given the policies it supports.<sup>14</sup>

The situation for the left is a little more promising. In 2004 the gender gap in NDP support shrank. The narrowing of the gender gap did not reflect any loss of support among women. In fact, women’s support increased, but men’s support increased more. In particular, male union members who had abandoned the NDP for the Reform party and the Alliance in

previous elections, returned to the NDP fold. The gender gap widened in 2006, but support for the NDP still increased slightly overall. If women's support continues to grow—and the NDP can hold on to its male voters—the NDP may be able to assume a more important role in Canadian politics than it has in the past.

The evolution of the gender gap in Canada will, of course, also depend on the nature of future election campaigns and electoral contexts. However, if the modern gender gap continues to grow, this can only hurt the centrist Liberal Party's chances of forming another majority government. As men shift to the political right and women shift to the political left the Liberals are left watching their support base haemorrhaging away and their future as Canada's "natural party of government" becoming less secure.

Table 1: Explaining the Gender Gap in Vote Choice

|   | NDP vs.<br>Conservative | NDP vs.<br>Liberal | Liberal vs.<br>Conservative |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Female only   | .39 (.13)**             | .24 (.15)          | .15 (.12)                   |
| Female + structural and situational variables                         | .35 (.15)*              | .13 (.16)          | .22 (.14)                   |
| Female + structural and situational variables +<br>values and beliefs | .10 (.16)               | .08 (.16)          | .02 (.14)                   |

N = 1,887

Note: Estimation is by multinomial logistic regression. The column entries are unstandardized coefficients for the effects of sex. The robust standard errors are shown in parentheses.

\*\*\* p<.001    \*\* p<.01    \* p<.05

Table 2: The Estimated Impact of Structural and Situational Factors on Vote Choice

|                           | Conservative |       | Liberal |       | NDP   |       |
|---------------------------|--------------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
|                           | Women        | Men   | Women   | Men   | Women | Men   |
| Catholic                  | -5.0         | +0.8  | +8.2    | +4.2  | -3.2  | -5.1  |
| Fundamentalist Protestant | +25.2        | +25.3 | -10.6   | -11.2 | -14.6 | -14.1 |
| Non-Christian             | +1.6         | -5.1  | -6.0    | +9.5  | +4.4  | -4.3  |
| No religion               | -9.3         | -4.8  | -3.3    | +0.8  | +12.5 | +4.1  |
| Under 35 years            | 0.0          | -5.7  | +2.3    | +1.0  | -2.3  | +4.6  |
| 55 and older              | -5.4         | +5.6  | +8.9    | -2.0  | -3.5  | -3.7  |
| Employed                  | +7.4         | +9.8  | +3.7    | -1.3  | -11.2 | -8.5  |
| Public sector worker      | -11.7        | -10.8 | +3.9    | +13.5 | +7.8  | -2.7  |
| Lowest income quartile    | -7.3         | -3.7  | +1.2    | -1.7  | +6.0  | +5.4  |
| Highest income quartile   | +0.4         | +0.3  | +8.7    | +2.5  | -9.0  | -2.9  |
| Renter                    | +1.0         | +3.2  | -2.2    | -0.3  | +1.2  | -2.9  |
| Mortgage                  | -6.0         | +3.9  | -7.0    | -3.8  | +12.8 | -0.1  |
| Less than high school     | +9.3         | +0.4  | -7.1    | +2.0  | -2.3  | -2.5  |
| University graduate       | -9.3         | +1.0  | +0.9    | +0.0  | +8.4  | -1.0  |
| Married/partner           | +0.1         | +7.3  | +1.8    | -3.1  | -1.9  | -4.4  |
| Parent                    | +1.8         | -1.0  | -2.4    | +2.4  | +0.5  | -1.4  |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone has a given characteristic and then assuming that nobody does, keeping the effects of other characteristics unchanged. Separate models were estimated for women and men. All estimations are based on multinomial logistic regression. The structural and situational variables were all entered as dummy variables with the named category coded '1'. Controls were also included for region, region, urban/rural, race, place of birth, language, and union membership.

Table 3: Gender Differences in Value Orientations

|                     | Women | Men  | Difference |
|---------------------|-------|------|------------|
| Free enterprise     | -.04  | +.07 | -.11***    |
| Continentalism      | +.12  | +.22 | -.10***    |
| Social conservatism | -.27  | -.22 | -.05*      |
| Religiosity         | +.28  | +.12 | +.16***    |
| Racial minorities   | +.08  | +.03 | +.05**     |

The column entries are mean scores. The value orientations are all coded on a -1 to +1 scale '1'. For details of scale construction, see the Appendix.

\*\*\* p<.001   \*\* p<.01   \* p<.05

Table 4: The Estimated Impact of Values and Beliefs on Vote Choice

|                     | Conservative |       | Liberal |       | NDP   |       |
|---------------------|--------------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
|                     | Women        | Men   | Women   | Men   | Women | Men   |
| Free enterprise     | +10.9        | +23.2 | +0.8    | -10.9 | -11.7 | -12.4 |
| Continentalism      | +20.4        | +22.6 | - 8.8   | -9.0  | -11.6 | -13.6 |
| Social conservatism | +23.1        | +16.7 | -13.0   | -8.9  | -10.2 | -7.8  |
| Religiosity         | +11.6        | -5.9  | -3.0    | +8.5  | -8.7  | -2.7  |
| Racial minorities   | -13.2        | -7.9  | +7.4    | +5.2  | +5.8  | +2.7  |

Note: The cell entries are the differences in the mean estimated probability of voting for a party, first assuming that everyone is neutral or ambivalent on a given dimension and then assuming that everybody attains the maximum score, keeping the effects of social background characteristics and other values and beliefs unchanged. Separate models were estimated for women and men. All estimations are based on multinomial logistic regression. The value orientations were all coded on a -1 to +1 scale '1'. For details of scale construction, see the Appendix.

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## Appendix A: Description of Variables

### Values and Beliefs

Variables were coded on a scale from -1 to 1, unless specified otherwise.

1. FREE ENTERPRISE is an index made up of four questions:

Here are some statements. For each one, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

- The government should leave it entirely to the private sector to create jobs.
- If people can't find work in the region where they live, they should move to where the jobs are

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?

- When businesses make a lot of money, everyone benefits, including the poor.
- People who don't get ahead should blame themselves, not the system.

The index is the sum of the six scores divided by 4 (Alpha=.48).

2. CANADA - US is an index made up of three questions:

Do you think Canada's ties with the United States should be much closer, somewhat closer, about the same as now, more distant or much more distant?

How do you feel about the United States?

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?

- Overall, free trade with the U.S. has been good for the Canadian economy.

The index is the sum of the three scores divided by 3 (Alpha =.54).

3. SOCIAL CONSERVATISM is an index made up of four questions:

How much do you think should be done for women: much more, somewhat more, about the same as now, somewhat less, or much less?

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements?

- Society would be better off if more women stayed home with their children.
- 

How do you feel about feminists? Use any number from zero to one hundred. Zero means you really dislike the group, and one hundred means you really like the group.

How do you feel about gays and lesbians? Use any number from zero to one hundred. Zero means you really dislike the group, and one hundred means you really like the group.

The index is the sum of the four scores divided by 4 (Alpha=.55).

#### 4. RELIGIOSITY

In your life would you say that religion is very important, somewhat important, not very important or not important at all?

#### 5. RACIAL MINORITIES

How much do you think should be done for racial minorities: much more, somewhat more, about the same as now, somewhat less, or much less?

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>The 2006 Canadian Election Study consists of a rolling cross-section campaign survey and a post-election survey. Interviews were conducted by telephone. The response rate was 57 per cent. 4,058 eligible voters were interviewed for the campaign survey; 3,250 were re-interviewed for the post-election survey. The field work was conducted by the Institute for Social research at York University and the study was funded by Elections Canada. We are grateful to Elections Canada and also to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for providing financial support for data analysis.

<sup>2</sup>The Reform Party only ever ran token candidates in Quebec, and despite a more concerted effort to garner support, the Alliance drew only 6.2 percent of the Quebec vote.

<sup>3</sup> The NDP has never won a seat in Quebec and attracted only 7.5 per cent of the Quebec popular vote in the 2006 election. While the Progressive Conservatives and Reform/Alliance also did very poorly in this province during the 1990s, the new Conservative party appears to have made inroads in 2006, winning almost 25 percent of the vote.

<sup>4</sup>Out of the 1,887 respondents outside Quebec who voted, 276 did not provide their household income, 131 did not indicate their ancestry, and 54 did not give their religious affiliation. Missing values were also a concern with feelings about gays and lesbians (56 cases) and dealing with Quebec (44 cases).

<sup>5</sup>A useful discussion of ICE can be found at: <http://www.ats.ucla.edu/STAT/stata/library/ice.htm>

<sup>6</sup>Other things being equal, being a Westerner increased women's probability of voting Conservative by 17 points and men's probability by 14 points.

<sup>7</sup>It might be tempting to attribute this loss of Catholic support to the Liberals' stance on same-sex marriage, but the major beneficiary was the NDP, not the Conservatives.

<sup>8</sup>According to the multinomial regression, a woman's average probability of voting NDP was 24.8 per cent. If the coefficient for no religion is set to zero (that is, if it was assumed to have had no effect) leaving all the other coefficients unchanged, the average probability decreases to 21.7 per cent. The difference in the average probabilities implies that the NDP vote might have been 3.1 points lower if having no religion had not mattered. All other estimates of the impact on female and/or male vote shares cited in the text were obtained in an analogous manner.

<sup>9</sup> The ascriptive characteristics are age, region, urban/rural, language, race and place of birth. The inclusion of these characteristics makes little or no difference to the estimated effect of gender.

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<sup>10</sup>For men, the key factor was whether their job was unionized or not. The union vote moved back to the NDP in 2004 and it stayed there in 2006. Being a union member increased men's probability of voting NDP by 19 points and decreased their probability of voting Conservative by 10 points. Being a union member also enhanced women's likelihood of voting NDP, but the effect was more modest (11 points). The implication is that the votes of male union members helped to keep the gender gaps in vote choice from being bigger.

<sup>11</sup>We do not have a good explanation for this effect. It is not an artifact of over-control: 31 per cent of women with a mortgage on their home voted NDP, compared with 20 per cent of those who did not. Conversely, even in the absence of controls, being a renter makes little or no difference to the probability of voting NDP. This is a change from 2004 when the NDP did almost as well as the Liberals and Conservatives among renters (Gidengil et al. 2006).

<sup>12</sup>Togeby (1994) has suggested that the impact of parenthood varies depending on the number of children a woman has. Her study of Danish women suggested that having a single child made for more left-wing views, but having more than one child encouraged more conservative views.

<sup>13</sup>Being a Protestant fundamentalist remains a highly significant correlate of Conservative voting even when value orientations are added to the vote model.

<sup>14</sup>For example, almost two-thirds of the women interviewed in 2006 favored a publicly funded day care system; only 30 per cent preferred the Conservative policy of paying money directly to parents to spend as they please. Only 30 per cent of women were opposed to same-sex marriage.