

What Do Women Want? Gender Gaps in Preferences

What are women's preferences? How can we measure them? A large literature in gender and politics focuses on the meaning and measurement of women's political interests and preferences – after all, “we need to know what women want before we can assess how well politicians represent them” (Baldez 2011). There is no consensus on which specific policies should be identified as “women's,” and scholars often use terms like “women's interests” and “women's issues” interchangeably to describe a set of policies that women ought to favor. Some question whether “women's interests” exist at all, given the vast heterogeneity within this group (Weldon 2002; Young 1997), and those that do study this concept base their definitions on a wide variety of criteria. Some scholars rely on feminist theory, defining a women's interest as one that promotes women's rights and equality, such as reproductive rights (Franceschet & Piscopo 2008; Htun, Lacalle, & Micozzi 2013). Others use women's interest group demands as a reasonable proxy for women's interests; these often overlap with feminist issues (Swers 1998; Washington 2008) but not always (e.g., see Schreiber 2002 on conservative women's groups). Finally some authors define women's interests as those that were traditionally part of the private sphere, and thus women's domain, including policies related to education, children, and families (Funk & Philips 2019; Sapiro 1981; Swers 2005).

These definitions each have important strengths. For example, as Dovi (2007) argues, feminist policies (those that promote gender equality and the elimination of gender hierarchies) are an objective good regardless of what men and women think about them. Studying support for feminist policies and the conditions under which they are adopted is thus important for furthering the quality of our democracies. However, not

all women are feminist, and feminist issues are not always supported by women any more than they are by than men. Abortion is a good example. It fits the criteria of many definitions of women's interests: it is the subject of feminist theory about women's rights and autonomy, women's interest groups often focus on it, and it is intimately linked to women's bodies. Yet, it does not fit the criteria of a gender gap in preferences.

Survey data from the United States typically shows no difference in men's and women's opinions on abortion; in some recent years men have reported being more supportive of abortion with no limits than women (Smith & Son 2013). Partisan differences, however, are large (Adams 1997). For example, Barnes and Cassese (2017) shows no gender gap on abortion among Republican voters. This means that while progressive change to liberalize abortion policy in the United States would represent the preferences of left-leaning voters, it would not necessarily represent the preferences of all women. While fewer studies address attitudes toward abortion outside of the United States (where the issue is especially politically polarizing), analysis of gender differences in support for abortion using data from the World Values Survey does not reveal significant gender gaps in Western Europe. Indeed, in the Netherlands and Spain the opposite trend is observed (men are more accepting than women) (Loll & Hall 2019).

Beckwith's (2011, 2014) theoretical distinction between women's *interests*, *issues*, and *preferences* provides a useful framework for measuring gender gaps. She defines *interests* as fundamental to women's life chances. Since identifying interests requires women's autonomy and political participation, it is a normative judgment. The absence of women in positions of political power, especially those from non-majority groups (race, class, and so on), makes identifying interests very difficult. As Beckwith (2011) describes, men's dominance in politics "constitutes a context of *political drag* on the identification of women's interests" (p. 425, emphasis in original) – that is, if women are not organizing around an issue, we cannot simply assume it is because it is not considered a "woman's interest." One example of a normative interest that unites women across subgroups and over time is being free from violence. *Issues* are strategic choices that emphasize components of interest as points of mobilization, such as legislation that criminalizes domestic violence. Finally, *preferences* are discrete and limited alternatives that actors choose from. For example, these could include preference alternatives over the role of the state in criminalizing domestic violence, the consequences that should incur, and so forth.

In this book, I am primarily concerned with women's *preferences*. I advocate an inductive approach to defining women's (rather than feminist) preferences based on gender gaps in survey data. This approach addresses recent concerns that women's interests are context dependent, rather than defined a priori and stable over time (Celis 2008; Smooth 2011). It gives women agency, and takes conservative claims to represent women seriously. As Childs and Celis (2018) explain, existing theories of women's substantive representation often conflate this notion with *feminist* substantive representation. Combining these concepts limits our understanding of representation because, as the previous discussion of preferences on reproductive rights illustrates, women on the right often do not identify with feminist claims. An inductive approach allows me to measure not only whether the issue is characterized by a gender gap in preferences, but whether this gender gap cuts across parties. This is a critical component of my theory, because I argue that gender quotas have the unique advantage of increasing the number of women legislators across parties. I thus expect quotas to influence policies that women prefer, conditional on these policy preferences existing among women as a group within both left- and right-leaning parties.

In this chapter I map gender gaps in preferences across a variety of issues, which provides evidence of women's strong and orthogonal preferences for maternal employment. I then connect the findings from survey data to the literature on the determinants of work–family policies, which suggests that descriptive representation is a more important determinant of work–family policy change than party ideology. Together, the findings build empirical support for the expectation that gender quotas ought to matter, particularly for work–family policies that encourage maternal employment.

3.1 WOMEN'S SHIFT TO THE LEFT

While women are not a monolithic group, there is substantial evidence that women and men have different preferences on at least a subset of issues in rich OECD democracies. Some of the earliest studies from the 1920s to 1950s found that women tended to vote along with their husbands or in some cases more conservatively (Corder & Wolbrecht 2016; Duverger 1955; Lipset 1960). Women now support left-wing parties in greater numbers (Abendschön & Steinmetz 2014; Edlund & Pande 2002; Emmenegger & Manow 2014; Giger 2009; Inglehart & Norris 2000; Norris 2003; Studlar, McAllister, & Hayes 1998) – particularly young cohorts of women (Shorrocks 2018). One recent study (using 2008 survey

data) finds that the only countries in Western Europe that are *not* characterized by the modern gender gap (women further to the left than men) are Ireland and Portugal (Abendschön & Steinmetz 2014).

Related to the gender gap in voting, a large and consistent literature shows that women prefer more social spending and redistribution than men in high-income OECD democracies (Alesina & Giuliano 2011; Dallinger 2010; Eger & Breznau 2017; Iversen & Soskice 2001; Svallfors 1997). There are even gender gaps on welfare and social spending within right-wing voters (e.g., Barnes & Cassese 2017). These gender gaps are thought to be very much related to the shift from an industrial to postindustrial society. The modern gender gap might reflect the decline of marriage, the rise in the divorce rate, and corresponding higher poverty rates for women in recent years, or women's increasing labor force participation and associated need for affordable care services (Edlund & Pande 2002; Iversen & Rosenbluth 2010). Both theories suggest that, due to historical discrimination and the structure of markets in rich OECD democracies, women benefit more than men from government spending.

There is no similar consensus on gender gaps in preferences outside of rich OECD democracies, where the issue has received less attention and the political context is often very different. Survey data from Latin America reveals the persistence of "traditional" gender gaps in voting (women voting to the right of men) and women identifying themselves as more ideologically conservative than men (Morgan 2015). Many formerly communist countries also still exhibit the traditional gender gap in voting, like Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland (Abendschön & Steinmetz 2014). Where state capacity to provide large-scale welfare programs is low, and political parties are not necessarily organized around redistribution as the main left-right cleavage, it is unlikely the same gender gaps in preferences would emerge. In these contexts, studies have focused on gender gaps in preferences for local level goods and services. For example, in Pakistan and India men and women tend to prioritize goods and services that benefit them more; women prioritize drinking water, while men are more likely to prioritize roads (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004; Kahn 2021; Prillaman 2021). In African countries, also, women are more likely to prioritize drinking water and poverty alleviation than men (Gottlieb, Grossman, & Robinson 2016). More work is needed to unpack gender gaps around the world, but I focus on high-income OECD democracies here because the well-established gender gaps provide a good context for testing my theory.

While the gender gap over redistribution in rich OECD democracies is well known, less attention has been paid to the gender gap in specific policy preferences, especially in comparative perspective. That is, studies tend to examine one policy area at a time rather than compare the gender gap across policies.¹ For example, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) provide evidence of a large gender gap in support for public employment (women are more supportive than men) that is conditioned by a country's skill system and divorce rates. While gender is not their main focus, Busemeyer and Neimanns (2017) show that women prefer greater government responsibility for public child care services. Women are also more likely than men to perceive gender inequalities (e.g., to believe that equality between the sexes has not gone far enough), and tend to be more supportive of the women's movement (Campbell, Childs, & Lovenduski 2010; Hayes, McAllister, & Studlar 2000; Simon & Landis 1989).

3.2 MAPPING GENDER GAPS

In order to identify the policy areas with the largest gender gaps in preferences, I analyze survey data from four waves of the International Social Survey Programme's (ISSP) Role of Government survey (1985, 1990, 1996, and 2006) and four waves of the ISSP's Family and Changing Gender Roles survey (1988, 1994, 2002, and 2012). The ISSP offers perhaps the best comparable data on attitudes toward specific social policies. The Role of Government survey covers attitudes toward government spending in different areas, as well as attitudes toward the government's broader role in society. The Family and Changing Gender Roles survey covers attitudes toward the employment of women and mothers. Across both surveys, my sample includes over 140,000 respondents from nineteen countries. Both survey modules are designed to be nationally representative, gathering stratified random samples of adult respondents from each country.² Appendix Table A3.1 lists which countries and years are included in each survey wave.

¹ Exceptions include Barnes and Cassese (2017), who compare gender gaps on a wide range of issues within the United States, and Gottlieb, Grossman, and Robinson (2016), who analyze gender gaps in policy prioritization in African countries.

² Sampling procedures differ for the individual countries and over time, with partly simple, partly multistage stratified random samples of respondents typically aged eighteen years old and older. Data collection methods include face-to-face interviews, mail surveys, telephone interviews, self-completed questionnaires, and web surveys. For further information, please see www.gesis.org/en/issp

Survey respondents are asked about their level of support for different policies and statements, and are typically given a Likert scale to respond. For example, in the Role of Government survey respondents are asked whether they would like to see more or less government spending in different areas, and can respond on a 5-point scale from “Much more” to “Much less” or “Can’t choose.” I coded each question as a binary variable, where support for a policy (e.g., “much more” and “more” spending on a policy) equals 1, and 0 otherwise. While this removes information about the intensity of preferences, it has the advantage of providing a simple measure of support for a policy that can be compared across genders. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the survey items and question wording.

To describe and compare average (pooled) gender gaps in preferences, I estimate ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions with country and survey round fixed effects separately for each survey item. Survey weights are included. Following previous work, I deliberately do not control for other covariates such as labor market participation, marital status, or education (Gottlieb, Grossman, & Robinson 2016). As Sen and Wasow (2016) note, these covariates would all be considered “post-treatment” because they occur after gender identity has been “assigned” (typically at birth). Gender gaps in preferences likely reflect women’s differential wealth, labor force participation, and other factors. Controlling for these other variables is thus likely to dilute the “effects” (differences in preferences) that gender identity is associated with.

Figure 3.1 presents the estimated “effects” of gender on the likelihood of supporting various policies. In line with previous findings, the figure confirms that women prefer greater attention to and spending on many social policies compared to men, including whether the government should provide a job, reduce inequality, and spend more on health care (gender gaps in the range of 4 to 6 percentage points). However, the largest gender differences in preferences by far are found on the issue of maternal employment, which features an 8 to 9 percentage point gap between women and men. For example, on average 39 percent of women disagree with the statement that “a preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works,” compared to 30 percent of men. Similarly, 45 percent of women disagree that “a job is alright, but what women really want is home and children,” compared to 37 percent of men. By contrast, there are very small or insignificant gender gaps on spending on education, defense, and the environment – even though these issues are also often considered to be gendered.

TABLE 3.1 *Survey items included in the analysis*

Survey: ISSP Role of Government	Question Wording
Cut spending	<p>Here are some things the government might do for the economy. Please show which actions you are in favor of and which you are against.</p> <p>Cuts in government spending.</p>
Spend more: culture Spend more: defense Spend more: education Spend more: environment Spend more: health Spend more: law enforcement Spend more: retirement Spend more: unemployment	<p>Listed below are various areas of government spending. Please show whether you would like to see more or less government spending in each area. Remember that if you say “much more,” it might require a tax increase to pay for it.</p> <p>Culture and the arts The military and defense Education The environment Health The police and law enforcement Old age pensions Unemployment benefits</p>
Control prices Provide a job Reduce inequality	<p>On the whole, do you think it should be or should not be the government’s responsibility to:</p> <p>Keep prices under control Provide a job for everyone who wants one Reduce income differences between the rich and poor</p>
Survey: ISSP Family and Changing Gender Roles	Question Wording
Man’s job money, woman’s job house (disagree) PreK child suffers (disagree) Women prefer home (disagree) Working mother warm	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree ...?</p> <p>A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family</p> <p>A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works</p> <p>A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children</p> <p>A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work</p>

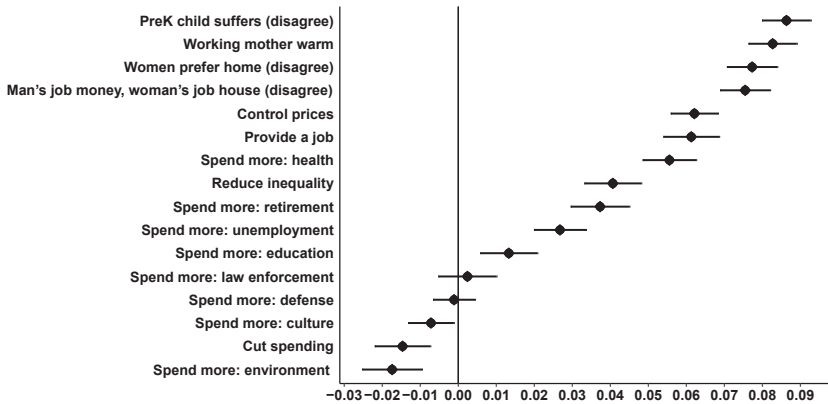


FIGURE 3.1 Impact of gender (woman) on likelihood of policy support
 Notes: OLS analysis with country and year fixed effects, 95% confidence intervals (CIs).
 Data from ISSP Role of Government, Family and Changing Gender Roles surveys
 (1985–2012). Survey weights are included.

Figure 3.2 summarizes the gender gap in preferences toward maternal employment by country, using the survey question about whether a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works. The average share of women who disagree with the statement is included in parentheses following the country name. To map differences across countries, I compiled the average gender gap for this question by country using seven different cross-national surveys from 1988 to 2012. Because not all countries of interest are included in the four waves of the ISSP Family and Changing Gender Roles survey, I supplement the data with three waves of the European Values Study (EVS) (1990, 1999, and 2008).³ For each country in each survey-year, I calculate the mean level of support for maternal employment for men and women as well as the gender gap (women support minus men support). Survey weights are employed. I then average all available data (mean levels of support and gender gaps) for each country.

Looking at between-country variation, there are large gender gaps in Scandinavia and many “liberal” welfare states such as Australia and the United States. Continental Europe, including Germany, France, and the Netherlands, has more moderate gaps. Southern Europe exhibits smaller

³ The European Values Study consists of a core questionnaire repeated over time surveyed on representative samples of the resident adult population in each country. The ISSP and EVS both ask whether respondents agree or disagree with the statement: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works” (the wording is identical).

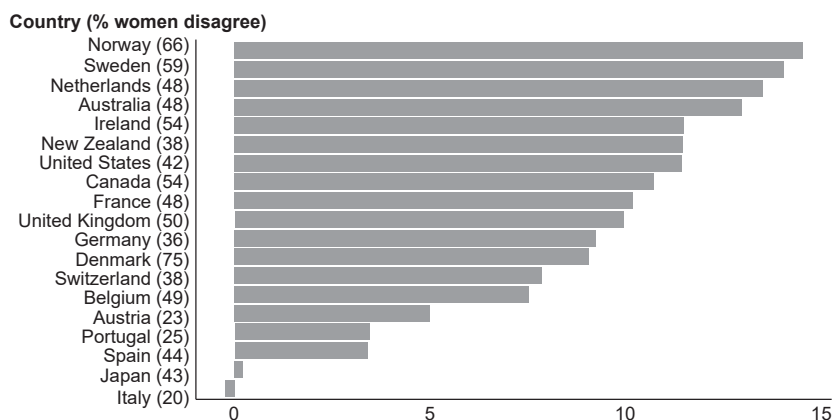


FIGURE 3.2 Country-level gender gaps in preferences toward maternal employment

Notes: Values indicate the average share of women who disagree minus the share of men who disagree with the following statement: “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.” The figure in parentheses after the country name on the left is the average share of women who disagree with the statement. Data come from the ISSP Changing Gender Roles surveys in 1988, 1994, 2002, and 2012 and the European Values Study rounds from 1990, 1999, and 2008. Survey weights are employed. All available data are averaged for each country.

gender gaps, but they have increased over time – a trend that applies to many countries in the sample. For example, in Portugal the gender gap in preferences for maternal employment increased from 2 to 6.5 percent from 1990 to 1999 (EVS data). Analysis of the impact of gender on support for maternal employment within each ISSP survey wave (retaining country fixed effects) finds that the gender gap has slowly increased over time. While both men and women are becoming more progressive on the issue (they are more likely to disagree over time), women are becoming more progressive more quickly, which generates a widening gender gap. In 1988, 21 percent of men and 28.5 percent of women disagreed with the statement that a preschool child would suffer if his or her mother works (7.5-point gap). By 2002, these figures reached 32 percent for men and 42 percent for women (10-point gap). In 2012, the gap narrowed slightly to 37 percent of men and 46 percent of women (9-point gap).

The gap in preferences also increases with education level. Gender gaps in support for maternal employment increase from 8 percent among those with up to secondary-level education to 14 percent among those with some postsecondary education and above (ISSP data, all survey rounds included). Overall levels of support are also higher among those with

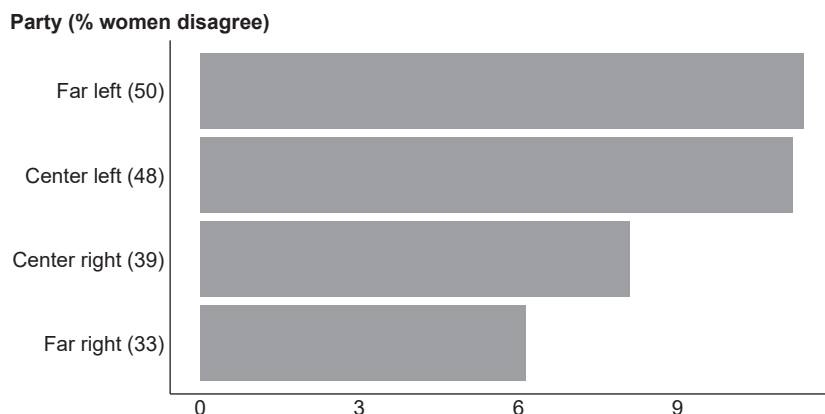


FIGURE 3.3 Gender gaps for maternal employment by party affiliation
 Notes: Gender gaps by country-specific party affiliation. Data come from the ISSP Changing Gender Roles survey rounds in 1988, 1994, 2002, and 2012. Survey weights are included. The figures illustrate the share of women minus the share of men who disagree with the statement “A pre-school child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works.”

higher levels of education, with the highest levels of support from highly educated women. A majority of highly educated women (59 percent) disagree that a preschool child will suffer if his or her mother works, compared to only 45 percent of highly educated men. Because women in political power are likely to be well educated, this is all the more reason to believe that they will be likely to prioritize these issues in office.

Distinct differences between men and women persist across political party lines. Figure 3.3 illustrates the gender gap in preferences for maternal employment by party affiliation (ISSP data, all survey rounds included). Respondents were asked which party they voted for in the last parliamentary election, and the ISSP codes the country-specific party responses into categories of far left, mainstream left, far right, and mainstream right for cross-national comparison. Figure 3.3 shows that the gender gap in support for maternal employment cuts across parties. The average gap within both far and mainstream left parties is 11 percent, compared to 8 percent among those voting for mainstream right parties and 6 percent among far-right voters.

As one might expect, overall levels of support for maternal employment are highest among far-left voters and they decline systematically moving from left to right. Still, significant gender gaps persist on this issue even among those furthest to the right. The gender gap in support for maternal employment among far-right voters increases significantly

from 6 points overall to 13 points in the highly educated subsample ($n = 172$ respondents, about 10 percent of the total voting far right in the ISSP data): 53 percent of women versus 40 percent of men in this subsample disagree that a preschool child will suffer. Further country-level analysis using 2002 ISSP data confirms that while the relative size of gender gaps within parties varies across countries, the gaps persist across left and right. In many countries (e.g., Sweden) no party differences are visible at all. In others, such as Spain, Ireland, and Denmark, gender gaps are larger among those voting for mainstream right parties compared to the left. And in some countries – the United Kingdom, Australia, and Norway – the opposite is seen, with larger gender gaps on the left. Overall, the gender gap in support for maternal employment is persistent and strong regardless of party identification.

Finally, another way of looking at gender gaps is to consider the policy priorities of men and women. The analysis so far has established gender gaps in *preferences*, but not in the prioritization of political issues. To investigate gender gaps in policy priorities, I use data from the third round of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey (2006–2011). The CSES consists of nationally representative surveys conducted shortly before or after national elections, and round 3 includes the question, “What has been the most important issue to you personally in this election?” This is usually an open-ended question, and the CSES country teams code the responses into different categories. I analyze data from nine countries that include some kind of work–family issue in their category coding of the most important issue question: Canada, Denmark, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.⁴ Because the question asks about the

⁴ I include the following codes for each country in the binary variable for work–family policies: (1) Canada – code 62, “Family benefits, childcare funding & programs”; (2) Denmark – code 132, “Families with children/ child care”; (3) Japan – code 22, “Birth dearth”; (4) the Netherlands – code 104, “Family policy/childcare”; (5) Norway – codes 31, “Kindergartens,” 32, “Cash benefit for families with small children,” 35, “(Other) child and family issues”; (6) Portugal – code 18, “Support for the elderly, children and other groups”; (7) Spain – code 16, “Family policy”; (8) Sweden – codes 43, “Care,” 85, “Family policy/child care,” 86, “Child-care allowance,” 89, “Parents’ insurance,” 92, “Daycare centre”; (9) and Switzerland – code 46, “Family policy.” The following countries are not included in the analysis because they either offer a closed list of policy categories to respondents that does not include work–family issues or they code responses into categories that do not include a specific work–family policy issue (but might include a broader category like social policies): Australia, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, United States. I drop responses listed as: other problem (not specifiable), no problem, refused, don’t know, and missing.

“most important” issue (a relative measure), this is a hard test for work–family policy priorities. The top categories listed typically include the economy, health, education, taxes, and employment. Undoubtedly, issues like personal health, economic well-being, and security likely take priority over issues related to combining work and family life, even if work–family issues are still considered important. Still, the data offer some useful leverage over the question of the extent to which the prioritization of work–family issues is gendered.

Overall, out of the nearly 18,000 respondents in these nine countries, 2.4 percent (436, 305 of whom were women) reported that work–family issues are the most important to them, rising to 3.9 percent (718, 487 women) if we also consider responses to the second-most important issue question (all frequencies employ survey weights). While the share of respondents who cite work–family issues as their most important concern in the election is small, there are large gender gaps in the likelihood of indicating that a work–family policy is the most important.

Of respondents who mention work–family issues as their most important concern in the election, 70 percent are women. Of those who mention work–family issues as the most or second-most important, 67 percent are women. Thus, women are 2.3 times more likely than men to say that a work–family issue is the most important – a large gender gap. Among women, 5.2 percent list a work–family issue as their most important or second-most important issue, compared to 2.6 percent of men. This data confirms that gender gaps in preferences also extend to the prioritization of work–family issues. In the next section, I conduct empirical tests to confirm that preferences regarding maternal employment are a unique underlying dimension that is uncorrelated with the traditional left–right dimension.

3.3 TESTS OF MATERNAL EMPLOYMENT AS A CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE

So far, the survey data demonstrate that women and men have different preferences on a range of social policies: women prefer more spending/government support than men, and the gender gap is largest for the issue of maternal employment. Women are also more likely to prioritize work–family policies than men. The fact that gaps persist across party lines suggests that this issue does not align with the main left–right dimension in politics. I confirm this interpretation in two ways. First, factor analysis tests for the existence of a latent “maternal employment” dimension, distinct from typical left–right issues in politics. Second,

regression models assess the relationship between gender, partisanship, and policy preferences, all else equal. These tests allow me to confirm whether gender gaps in attitudes toward maternal employment persist within parties even after controlling for other factors, which I would expect if my argument about the orthogonality of this issue holds.

Factor analysis is a method that reduces a large amount of data into a smaller number of dimensions, or “factors,” based on the patterns observed in the data. It shows how variables in the data are related to one another, highlighting the underlying structure of the data. In this case, factor analysis can provide evidence about whether attitudes toward government intervention (left–right politics) and attitudes toward maternal employment are part of the same underlying response pattern, or whether they form separate and distinct issue dimensions, as I argue.

To test whether attitudes toward maternal employment are orthogonal to the traditional left–right dimension in politics, we need a dataset with items that tap into both of these issue areas. The EVS is a good fit for this purpose, as it is one of the only surveys that asks about both issues. Unfortunately, none of the ISSP waves include questions related to both the traditional left–right dimension and maternal employment in the same survey; however, I return to the ISSP data in subsequent regression models. The EVS data includes nineteen countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United States) over three survey waves: 1990, 1999, and 2008. The data includes three items typically identified with the traditional left–right dimension in politics, and three related to maternal employment.⁵ Table 3.2 lists these items. A benefit of this data is that these questions are comparable to each other: the items included to measure the left–right dimension and maternal employment all capture attitudes toward social phenomenon, rather than specific policy preferences (which are not available over time for maternal employment). For ease of interpretation, items are coded such that higher scores indicate stronger preferences.

Following best practice for identifying a latent dimension in preexisting survey data, I divide the survey sample in half and run separate analyses

⁵ The same three “left–right” variables have been used to measure attitudes toward government intervention in other studies (e.g., Pitlik & Kouba 2015). Variables related to working women were not included if they did not refer to motherhood or children specifically, for example, “Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person.”

TABLE 3.2 *Preference dimensions in the EVS, 1990–2008: exploratory factor analysis*

Variable	Survey item	Factor 1: Maternal employment	Factor 2: Left–right
<u>Expected to load on Factor 1:</u>			
PreK child suffers	A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works	0.77	−0.31
Working mom relationship	A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work	0.69	−0.24
Women: job versus home	A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children	0.64	−0.28
<u>Expected to load on Factor 2:</u>			
State responsibility	People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves versus the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for	0.26	0.67
Government ownership	Private ownership of business should be increased versus government ownership of business should be increased	0.36	0.65
Competition	Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas versus competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people	0.27	0.68
	Eigenvalue	1.75	1.58
	Proportion of shared variance explained	29.1	26.3
N = 23,813 (sample 1)			

Note: Cell entries are factor loadings obtained from a principal component analysis; those greater than 0.5 are highlighted in bold. The first three items are preceded by the text, “People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each. Please use the responses on this card” (range from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly). The last three items are preceded by the text, “Now I’d like you to tell me your views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? 1 means you agree completely with the statement on the left; 10 means you agree completely with the statement on the right; and if your views fall somewhere in between, you can choose any number in between.”

on each subsample. I first perform an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on one-half of the data to test the plausibility of a two-factor solution by letting survey items freely load on any latent factors (1, 2, or more) in the data. I then perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the second half of the data. The CFA returns a more reliable estimate of correlations between latent dimensions (Cavaillé & Trump 2015; Matsunaga 2015; Osborne & Costello 2009).

I perform the EFA using a principal-components extraction method that identifies two main dimensions: (1) the first three variables have high factor loadings and (2) only the last variable items have high, and about equally large, factor loadings.⁶ These two factors explain 55 percent of the shared variance. As Table 3.2 shows, the factor loadings conform to expectations. Items that load on Factor 1, which I call “Maternal Employment,” emphasize working mothers, while those that load onto Factor 2, “Left–Right,” emphasize government intervention. The results of the initial EFA are thus consistent with the interpretation that preferences regarding maternal employment are orthogonal to the standard left–right dimension in politics.

Since all of the variables load highly on only one component (above 0.6), it makes sense to keep them all in the subsequent CFA analysis. Unlike the EFA, the CFA imposes a preconceived structure on the data. It is used to confirm the underlying factor structure identified in the EFA. I conduct the CFA analysis on the second half of the survey sample, and the results match the two-factor pattern found in the EFA. Table 3.3 reports the factor loadings as well as a set of indicators of the “goodness of fit” of the overall model. All of the factor loadings were significant by conventional standards and load to expected factors. The model returns a factor correlation of 0.06, which supports the expectation that the dimensions are mostly orthogonal. The fit indicators suggest the model does a good job of explaining the covariance among the observed variables.

As a robustness check, I also ran separate CFA analyses to determine whether the two-dimensional hypothesis holds for each survey wave in the data, and for each individual country. The model holds for each survey wave with no significant variation in factor loadings. The covariance between factors has decreased over time, from 0.11 in 1990 to –0.05 in

⁶ Other extraction methods, for example, maximum likelihood, yield very similar results. The results are also robust to using a polychoric correlation matrix, adapted to ordinal variables. The diagnostic scree test shows that after two components, Eigenvalues of subsequent factors drop significantly, providing additional support for retaining two dimensions (Osborne & Costello 2009).

TABLE 3.3 *Preference dimensions in the EVS, 1990–2008: confirmatory factor analysis*

Variable	Survey item	Factor 1: Maternal employment	Factor 2: Left–right
PreK child suffers	A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works	0.86	
Working mom relationship	A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work	0.50	
Women: job versus home	A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children	0.44	
State responsibility	People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves versus the government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for		0.52
Government ownership	Private ownership of business should be increased versus government ownership of business should be increased		0.62
Competition	Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas versus competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people		0.53
	Correlation coefficient between factors	0.06	
	RMSEA	0.02	
	CFI	0.99	
	TLI	0.99	
N = 23,813 (sample 2)			

Note: Cell entries are factor loadings from CFA; loadings greater than 0.5 highlighted in bold. The recommended cutoffs are as follows: RMSEA (0.06), TLI (0.95), and CFI (0.95; Hu & Bentler 1999).

2008. The model also holds for every country in the analysis, although factor loadings and covariance between factors differ slightly by country. Overall, the factor analyses show that the data does not support a unidimensional view of attitudes toward government intervention and maternal employment. Instead, preferences toward maternal employment form a distinct issue dimension.

Another way of investigating this question is to consider the significance of gender identity as a determinant of preferences among supporters of the same political party bloc (left or right), controlling for other factors. I argue that after a quota law is implemented, we should expect changes on issues that are characterized by a gender gap, especially if these issues cut across partisan identities. If women's preferences for maternal employment are orthogonal to the left–right dimension, then gender ought to be a significant determinant of preferences even among those who support the same type of political party.

I estimate probit models of policy preferences based on gender and a set of controls, using data from the ISSP's 2002 Family and Changing Gender Roles Survey. All models are estimated twice – once using the subset of respondents who say they support left-wing parties, and once with the subset of respondents who support right-wing parties. The dependent variable is a binary measure that takes a value of 1 if the respondent agrees (or disagrees when stated) with the question, and 0 otherwise. The notes under Figure 3.4 contain details on the survey questions. *Woman* is a binary variable that equals 1 if the respondent is a woman, and 0 for man. Party affiliation is measured using a question that asks respondents to place themselves on a left–right political spectrum. *Left* includes those responding that they place themselves on the far left, left, or center left, and *Right* includes those who place themselves in the categories of far right or right, conservative. The analysis includes a battery of individual-level controls that have been shown to influence policy preferences: age, education, social class (self-reported), supervisory position, self-employment, unemployment, part-time employment, public sector employment, not in the labor force, retirement status, and rural residence (Cusack, Iversen, & Rehm 2006; Svallfors 1997). Survey weights are employed.⁷

⁷ The countries included in the analysis are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

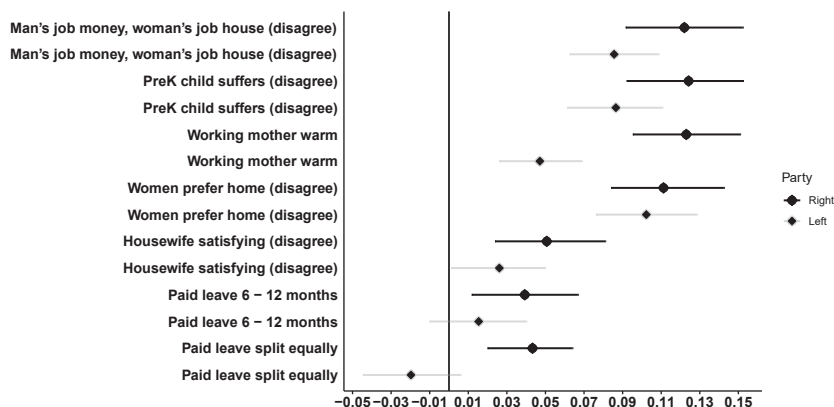


FIGURE 3.4 Marginal effects of gender (woman) on preferences within parties
 Plots show marginal effects with 95% CIs, calculated from probit models of policy preferences based on gender and a set of controls, using data from the ISSP's 2002 Family and Changing Gender Roles Survey, and the 2012 Family and Changing Gender Roles Survey (paid leave items only). Analysis carried out using the *Zelig* package for R v 4.0.3. (Imai, King, & Lau 2009).

Survey questions (from top to bottom):

- (1) A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family (disagree).
- (2) A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works (disagree).
- (3) A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.
- (4) A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children (disagree).
- (5) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay (disagree).
- (6) Consider a couple who both work full time and now have a newborn child. One of them stops working for some time to care for their child. Do you think there should be paid leave available and, if so, for how long? (six to twelve months).
- (7) Still thinking about the same couple, if both are in a similar work situation and are eligible for paid leave, how should this paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father? (Mother and father half).

Because the coefficients of probit models have little substantive meaning on their own, I present the marginal effects in Figure 3.4. The plots show the estimated marginal effect (with 95% CIs) on the probability that a respondent will express support given a one-unit increase in the value of the predictor variable (e.g., going from man to woman), holding all other variables at their sample mean. The dark (light) bars indicate marginal effects within right- (left-)wing parties.

The results reveal empirical patterns consistent with the argument that gender preferences for maternal employment are orthogonal to the main left-right dimension in politics. As expected, women are associated with

large and significant increases in support for maternal employment, even within parties and controlling for other variables correlated with gender. The figure shows significant gender gaps within respondents who identify with both left- and right-wing parties. Gender gaps are often larger among respondents on the right. For example, there is a 12 percentage point gender gap among right-wing respondents on the question of mutually exclusive gender roles (disagreement with the statement “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”), compared to an 8.5-point gap among those on the left. Similarly, the gender gap on the question of whether a working mother can have just as warm a relationship with her children is characterized by a larger gender gap within the right (12 points) than the left (5 points), controlling for other factors. For both of these questions, mean levels of support are higher on the left, but women are more progressive within each party bloc and have moved further from their men peers on the right.

One potential concern is that attitudes toward maternal employment are not a specific policy preference. To address this concern, I include two survey questions related to paid leave from the 2012 ISSP survey: “Do you think paid parental leave should be available, and if so for how long?” and “How should the paid leave period be divided between the mother and the father?” These questions are not perfect, since they do not specify, for example, how well leave should be compensated, or whether it should be gender-neutral parental leave versus specific maternity or paternity leave, but they represent a policy nonetheless. Responses to the first question are coded 1 if the respondent says that paid leave should be available for between six and twelve months (since it is generally agreed that relatively short, well-paid leave of less than one year is best for encouraging maternal employment), and 0 otherwise. Responses to the second question are coded 1 if the respondent says that paid leave periods should be divided equally between the mother and the father (given that both are eligible).

Figure 3.4 shows that within both party blocs, women are more likely to support paid leave, even controlling for other covariates. Women are associated with a 4 percent increase in support (compared to men) for paid leave among right-wing respondents, and a 1.5 percent increase among respondents who support left-wing parties (the gap among left-wing respondents is not significant). The gender gap is smaller for paid leave support compared to some other questions related to maternal employment, but again the question is relatively vague and does not ask about components that women are likely to favor like pay and incentives for fathers. Right-wing women are also more likely than right-wing men

to believe that paid leave should be split equally by the mother and father. The gender gap among right-wing respondents is 4.3 points, while the gender gap among left-wing respondents is negative, but not significant.

Across the majority of models shown in Figure 3.4, gender is a consistent, positive determinant of support for maternal employment within political parties. While we lack time series, cross-national data on specific policies like gender-neutral and well-paid parental leave, the questions that we do have on paid leave from the 2012 ISSP data confirm similar gender gaps within right-wing parties especially on specific policies to the ones we see on attitudes toward maternal employment. Data from individual country cases often demonstrates similar gender patterns on specific policies related to work–family reconciliation. For example, in 2020 a representative survey of Swiss voters found that support for a proposed reform to institute ten days of paid paternity leave was higher among women (67 percent) than men (60 percent).⁸ An important pattern across these models is that women on the right, in particular, are often further apart from the men in their parties with regard to views on maternal employment compared to those within left-wing parties. This will be relevant later in the story, as quota laws increase the number of women legislators, especially in parties on the right.

In summary, women are more supportive of maternal employment than men; they prioritize it more, and this preference does not coincide with attitudes toward left–right (government intervention) issues in politics. Connecting women’s preferences on this orthogonal issue back to policy change, the empirical evidence to date finds a strong relationship between women’s descriptive representation and policies like child care and paid leave (which promote maternal employment), but little evidence that left party power matters (Bratton & Ray 2002; Htun & Weldon 2018; Kittilson 2008; Lambert 2008; but see Bonoli & Reber 2010). By contrast, evidence on whether women’s descriptive representation increases overall social spending is mixed; some find increases in overall levels of spending (Bolzendahl 2009; Bolzendahl & Brooks 2007; Holman 2014), while others do not (Clayton & Zetterberg 2018; Ferreira & Gyourko 2011; Funk & Gathmann 2008; Rehavi 2007). Reassuringly, the data presented here showing women’s strong,

⁸ The survey was carried out on behalf of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR) by the research institute gfs.bern. www.srf.ch/news/abstimmung-27-september-2020/vaterschaftsurlaub/abstimmungsumfrage-viel-zustimmung-fuer-zwei-wochen-papi-urlaub

cross-party preference for supporting working mothers reinforces the existing empirical evidence that highlights the role of gender over party.

3.4 CONCLUSION

Defining women's preferences is a crucial first step toward analyzing women's substantive representation in politics. Getting the definition wrong risks missing or understating women's impact once in office and the role of quotas (among other factors) in shifting policies for women. It means that we might be overlooking appropriate and relevant dependent variables. Many studies of women's substantive representation define policy demands *not* by gaps in public preferences but based on other criteria, such as feminist theory about women's rights and equality. Nor do most previous studies consider where women's policy demands fall on the main left–right dimension in politics. These approaches fail to seriously consider women's views, which are context dependent, and political parties' important role in mediating the representation of these views. The contribution of this chapter is to define and operationalize an inductive approach to determining women's preferences in politics, defined by gender gaps and where they fall in the left–right political space.

This chapter provides empirical tests of the theoretical expectation that maternal employment, and associated work–family policies, is likely to be a particularly important issue to women as a group. Using survey data, I show that women and men have different preferences on a range of social policy issues, including health, unemployment, and inequality. However, one of the largest gender gaps in rich OECD democracies exists over the issue of maternal employment, and this gender gap cuts across partisan identities. It constitutes a separate underlying attitude dimension from the main left–right, economic dimension. Quotas ought to matter most for these cross-cutting issues, because politicians – who are biased based on their own gendered lived experiences – can push parties to address issues they would rather ignore. Prior research on leave and child care policies confirms the importance of women's descriptive representation over party power.

It is important to note that maternal employment is only one potential “uncrystallized” issue, and I focus on it here because we happen to have good, comparative data on it. Many other issues that could feature significant gaps in preferences go unarticulated on questionnaires – a further symptom of their lack of crystallization in mainstream politics. For example, sexual harassment and violence against women was not

on political agendas until relatively recently, and the issue arguably cuts across class and social dimensions due to gender-based differences in preferences (Mansbridge 1999). A Eurobarometer survey from 2010 shows that 73 percent of women believe that tougher laws to combat violence against women would be “very useful,” compared to 65 percent of men (8-point gap). Further, while 86 percent of women believe that domestic violence against women should always be punishable, only 79 percent of men agree (7-point gap).⁹ Another issue I expect to generate large, cross-cutting gender gaps is gender quotas themselves – which are often supported by women across parties. While cross-national data on support for political quota laws is not available, a 2011 Eurobarometer survey on corporate board quotas finds that 52 percent of women support fifty-fifty quotas for corporate boards, compared to 38 percent of men (14-point gap).¹⁰ I return to the topic of how political gender quotas might facilitate the expansion of quotas to other sectors in the concluding chapter.

To summarize, this chapter suggests that gender quotas will have a greater impact on policies related to maternal employment (helping mothers return to work) than overall social spending, health, unemployment, or other policies clearly on the left–right spectrum in politics. My analysis of public opinion data in wealthy OECD democracies suggests that the biggest gap between men’s and women’s views is on the issue of whether mothers should work: women, on average, are 9 points more supportive than men. Moreover, this gender gap cuts across parties: it thus meets a key criterion of my argument about when quotas ought to matter. If my argument about the impact of quotas is correct, then we would expect them to lead to stronger policies that incentivize mothers to return to work – like shared parental leave and use-it-or-lose-it paternity leave – and decreases in policies that discourage maternal employment – like extended maternity-only leaves and family allowances. In the next chapters I evaluate this argument using both time-series cross-sectional data and matched-pair case studies. I first turn to the question of whether (and how) quotas shift agenda setting within parties.

⁹ Eurobarometer 73.2: Humanitarian Aid, Domestic Violence against Women, and Mental Well-Being, February–March 2010.

¹⁰ Eurobarometer 76.1: Financial and Economic Crisis, Financial Services, Corruption, Development Aid, and Gender Equality, September 2011.