


BOOK REVIEW

**Women, Men, and Elections: Policy Supply and Gendered Voting Behaviour in Western Democracies. By Rosalind Shorrocks. New York: Routledge, 2022. 258 pp. \$48.95 (paperback), \$136.00 (hardcover). ISBN: 9780367353605.**

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What are the main policy issues that divide men and women in Western democracies, and how do these affect voting decisions? Despite a large and well-developed literature on gender gaps in voting, questions about the specific policy preferences of men and women and how they play into political party support are understudied. This matters because we know little about the relative importance of the policy issues in driving modern gender gaps and because not all policy issues align well with the main left-right (economic) dimension typically used to describe gender gaps in voting. In *Women, Men, and Elections: Policy Supply and Gendered Voting Behavior in Western Democracies*, Shorrocks greatly advances the field by offering the most comprehensive study of gender differences in policy preferences and how party positions on these issues affect gender gaps in voting to date.

Methodologically, *Women, Men, and Elections* takes a two-stage approach. First, Shorrocks provides descriptive evidence on gender differences in attitudes, marshalling various cross-national social surveys, including the European Values Study, World Values Study, European Social Survey, and International Social Survey Programme, to provide the most complete picture possible for each policy area studied. A major strength of this analysis is the careful attention to subgroups of men and women, which helps address important questions about the intersectionality of gender and, for example, age, class, and religiosity. Second, Shorrocks operationalizes party positions on specific issues by using the Comparative Manifesto Project's detailed coding of party manifestos and merges this with individual-level data on party voting from the Comparative Study of Election Systems, the best data source available for post-election voting information across this set of countries. This second analysis thus directly tests how party positions, as set out by political parties in their manifestos, affect

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whether an individual voted for a party. Shorrocks applies this two-stage analysis to five main policy areas: social spending, moral traditionalism, the environment, immigration, and foreign policy.

Shorrocks uses this detailed data on party positions, which has until now been largely missing in studies of gender voting gaps, to make a key theoretical argument: Political context matters for gendered voting behavior. Within each chapter, Shorrocks outlines how party positions on the relevant issue are expected to relate to gender differences in voting, in the aggregate, and among subgroups of men and women. The five policy areas are selected because gender gaps have already been established on these or similar issues; thus, aggregate gender gaps within most of these areas are theorized (the exception is moral traditionalism). Moving beyond the monolithic categories of men and women, the book expects and finds that important heterogeneity exists within these groups.

The findings offer a wealth of evidence about how and when (for which policy positions? for which groups of women and men?) gender identity is relevant to partisan voting. Importantly, the book shows that the gender gap in party voting is impacted not only by women's economic positions but also by party positions on morality, the environment, nationalism and immigration, and foreign policy. The implication of these results is that parties need to think beyond the economic dimension alone if their goal is to attract women voters. In many cases, party positions are shown to matter not just for women's support for single parties (which might "own" the issue) but across party families. In line with expectations, pro-environment positions increase party support from women even when Green parties are left out of the analysis; however, this is not true of moral traditionalism, where Christian Democratic parties drive findings. This is one area that the book perhaps could have expanded on even more and offers much room for future studies. Should we expect policy positions to matter in the same way across all party families, keeping in mind that, in a Downsian worldview, parties are constrained by their past positions to appear credible to voters? Can conservative parties, for example, gain women voters by shifting positions on social spending, or is this bump limited to parties on the (economic) left or without highly crystallized positions on this class-based dimension?

Shorrocks' analysis also demonstrates decisively the importance of the question, "which women?" For example, especially women with lower levels of education and who are not employed support parties that promote moral traditionalism. Women who are employed and highly educated reward parties that support environmentalism and punish anti-immigration positions. Yet, some preferences seem to unite most women, which is also very interesting. One of the largest gender gaps in policy preferences emerges over the question of whether "homosexual parents are as good parents as other couples," where women are 18 percentage points more likely to agree than men. This gender gap is remarkably stable across subgroups of women, even those who, for example, go to church often. The book is a treasure trove of fascinating descriptive findings like this one, which will undoubtedly motivate a plethora of new research.

*Women, Men, and Elections* is the authoritative text on gender gaps in policy preferences and how party positions affect gendered voting patterns in Western democracies. The book is a must-read for scholars of political behavior and gender and politics. It offers an elegant methodological framework that takes advantage of existing cross-national individual- and party-level data and could also be applied to other groups beyond gender, such as class, ethnicity, or age. And, at a time when illiberal backlash is on the rise, and it is, thus, normatively, all the more important to understand how party positions mobilize men and women, Shorrocks' findings highlight the importance of both political context and intersectionality in driving gendered voting decisions.

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