

Voting Factors in the U.S.

by Michael Curtis



Once the question might be asked, “Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” This assumes that unlike the nature of women, men might be regarded as honest, eternally noble, good natured, and kind. That question is no longer relevant in the U.S. democratic society of today. Even in a state of existing inequality, women are akin to men in society, including killers, sports champions, powerful leaders, and influential professionally, some of whose accomplishments are being recognized as in the case of Harriet Tubman, born a slave who is to be the face on the \$20 bill, replacing President Andrew Jackson. It is interesting, in view of the strong opposition in the Senate to Judge Neil Kavanaugh’s nomination to the Supreme Court that he has appointed an all-female law clerk crew: for the first time, more women than men are serving as law clerks.

Women in the Western world, Nancy Pelosi in the U.S. and British Prime Minister Theresa May, defeated by the Brexit issue, have played a significant if not dominant role in contemporary politics. Elsewhere women fervent in support of a particular political issue have insisted on their point of view. In Switzerland on June 14, 2019, thousands of women staged a strike for equal pay; gender inequality for

professional women is 20%. In contrast in that country women only gained the vote in 1971 and until 1985 needed permission from husbands to work or have a private bank account.

A recent example of exercise of power is Carrie Lam, chief executive of Hong Kong, pro-Beijing, who resisted strong pressure until she was forced to withdraw proposals for controversial legislation that provides for extradition of people accused of serious crimes to mainland China. There were large demonstrations against the legislation. Nevertheless, Lam for a few days stood her ground, arguing that foreigners had turned the dispute over fugitives into an issue about relations with mainland China, but on June 14, 2019 declared that the government was suspending the legislative amendment.

Women in the U.S. as elsewhere have their share of glory in sports. On June 11, 2019 the U.S. Women's national soccer team played and beat Thailand 13-0 in the World Cup, the biggest margin of victory in the history of World Cup finals. All rejoiced but was the jubilation excessive? Among the unwritten rules of decorum in sports games is the understanding that the winning team should not continue to humiliate the losing side. There were complaints not only about the large margin of victory, but also of the continuing celebration and virtual choreographed dances by the U.S. women as each goal was scored.

At the same time, a continuing issue is that the U.S. women's national team is paid much less than the men's team. This problem of the gender gap in most fields is universal. The old boys' club prevails in occupations such as financial advisers where women constitute only 15 to 20% of the total, and the underrepresentation of women at the top of wealth management and firms in Wall Street. Yet, to exercise political influence, women do not follow the model of Coco Chanel, with her prominence due to a string of lovers, British, French, Russian, and Nazi.

However, the women's political issue that is of most interest at present is that of the Democratic candidates for U.S. president in 2020. Of the 20 or so declared candidates, a number of women are among the most favored: Elizabeth Warren, Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand, and Amy Klobuchar. Irrespective of their present specific views or proposals, say Warren's proposals to change the U.S. economy, tax policy, higher taxes on wealthiest people and corporations, or Kamala Harris's notions for changes in the legal system, all of the women candidates, and indeed the political world in general, in the U.S. and elsewhere, should ponder the relevance of the analysis of recent voting, and figures, best discussed in the European Values Study, World Values Survey.

Some major factors can be discussed in the context of cultural and political changes that are transforming democratic societies. A caveat is that conclusions drawn from those changes should not be categorical. In the U.S. for example population changes in battleground states may be important, even more decisive than other factors mentioned: Texas has gained 4 votes and Florida has gained 2 in the Electoral College while New York has lost 2.

It is no longer axiomatic in developed societies that men are more effective political leaders than women. Voter turn-out is roughly the same for men and women. Leadership is not automatically associated with masculinity. Some general remarks, using categories of left and right or liberal and conservative, of voting support are relevant concerning age, religion, class, and education.

Younger people are more likely to vote left than older people. Most young women in recent elections vote left in many countries such as in Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, though not in Ireland, Italy, or Belgium. They are concerned with extended parental leave, phasing out nuclear energy, and pay equality.

Most older women but not younger women vote right wing. In almost all democratic countries, women born before 1955 were more likely to vote right than men in the same age group but the reverse is true of those born after 1955 who are more likely to vote for left wing parties than men of the same age group. One probable explanation for this is religion.

Women in general are more religious than men, but there has been a decline of their religiosity, except among Islamic individuals and groups, shown in three ways: in attendance of religious institutions; in importance given to religious beliefs in the lives of citizens; and in decline in the impact of religious dignitaries on citizens.

In the U.S. about $\frac{1}{4}$ of adults have no religious affiliation, and the decline is increasing. The millennium cohort, roughly those born from the early 1980s until mid 1990s, are basically nonreligious. Two facts about older women are significant: they are more religious than younger ones; and their religion is more important for voting decisions. That religiosity entails, among other things, respect for authority, obedience, marriage, disapproval of homosexuality, and lack of interest in political action. The decline in religiosity occurs with the transition of agrarian to industrial societies or areas, to societies emphasizing knowledge, and to a sense of greater security, freedom of choice, and opportunities to exercise freedom including non-violent protests. However, the question of abortion remains divisive, and women as well as men differ on it.

Older women favor redistribution and are more left on economic issues, but their religiosity may overcome this in voting decision. Younger women are also inclined to leftism and are less inclined to religiosity, less inclined to accept traditional values, living more independent lives, working, single, living on their own, less concerned with marriage.

Women, especially the poorer, older or single parent, favor

government action, and are interested in social problems, social security, health care, child care, gun sale restrictions, and marriage. They are less supportive of defense spending, police violence, and the use of military force. These liberal issues and social programs seem more salient to women in voting decisions than conservative issues such as pot or pornography.

In the 2012 presidential election, Barack Obama got a 12 point margin among women, but had a 8 point loss among men. At the U.S. 2016 presidential election, Hillary Clinton obtained 54% of women's vote, while Donald Trump got 41%. She got 41% of the men's vote to Trump's 52%.

Looking at age and education, the following figures show great differences.

In age group 18-25, Clinton got 56% to Trump's 35%; in ages 25-29, Clinton got 53% to 39%; of those 65 and older, Clinton got 45% to Trump's 53%.

Regarding education, in 2016, Trump received support, 60%, from white women with no college degrees. They and their families work in blue collar occupations, construction and transport, and have little contact with immigrants. They allegedly fear global trade, immigration, increasing prominence of non-whites in government positions, and the "dangerous" inner cities.

Of those women with only high school education, Clinton got 45% to Trump's 51%. Trump got 45% of votes of white women with college degrees to Clinton's 49%, but only 37% of post grads to Clinton's 58%. Trump did less even well with non-whites. He got 6% of the black educated women, compared with Clinton's 91%, and 28% of Hispanic educated women to Clinton's 65% those who graduated from college 49% to 45%. Those who were post grads, 58% to 37%.

No doubt all the candidates, but especially women, for the

U.S. presidency will be perusing the factors relevant to voting preferences. But one thing seems clear. If present factors remain constant, over time women are more likely to become more inclined to vote left than men, as younger cohorts of women replace older women.