

**The More Things Change the More they Stay the Same:
Examining Differences in Political Communication by Men
and Women, 1952 through 2000**

BY

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Abstract

We examine the differences in attitude expression between men and women over the past fifty years. Using the National Election Study (NES) we examine both the number of open end comments expressing like and dislikes of candidates and parties and the percentage of times women say “don’t know” to specific closed-ended questions relating to policies, candidates and groups. We find that women are less likely to express as many likes and dislikes toward the parties and candidates and are more likely to say “don’t know” than men. Interestingly, this difference has showed little change over the past 50 years. Using models that tap traditional reasons for differences between men and women including political and psychological resources we find that a political resource model diminishes the gender effect but it does not vanish. The continued and unabated differences between men and women in their willingness to openly express political attitudes suggests that political socialization differences between men and women have not disappeared, despite female increases in resources and other forms of political activity such as voting. We show that this failure to express attitudes in the survey situation helps explain the lack of decline over the past 50 years in gender differences for forms of political activity other than voting.

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Over the past several decades women's role in the public sphere has increased dramatically. Although women still face sexual discrimination in the public sphere, their increasing numbers among mayors, governors and legislators at both the state and national level has changed the political landscape of America. But, what changes in women's political attitudes and behavior have accompanied these increases in female office holders? The most noted change has been the increase in size and change in direction of the "gender gap." Prior to 1964 females were actually more likely than males to vote Republican, but since 1980, there has been a consistent tendency for females to vote more Democratically than males, reaching its high point in the 2000 election.

In the policy arena, women are consistently more liberal than men, with the exception of civil liberties issues (Baxter and Lansing 1980; Clark and Clark 1996; Poole and Zeigler 1985; Rapoport, Stone and Abramowitz 1990; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986). In addition, we also see changes in gender differences in participation, particularly those related to turnout. Since 1980, a higher percentage of females than of males have turned out to vote. Female turnout which trailed that of males by 4.9% in 1964, surpassed it by 3.1% in 2000 (Jamieson, Shin and Day 2002). In addition, women now equal males in protest involvement (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995), and although males still attend political rallies, wear buttons, work in campaigns, and canvass slightly more than females, these differences disappear when we control for political resources (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

However, it is important to note that many campaign activities are demanding and, as a result, attract small percentages of either gender. It is therefore possible that engagement at these more elite levels of activity will generally depend more on idiosyncratic characteristics and taste than on mobilization efforts by parties or candidates or individual characteristics like gender or political resources. On the other hand, gender differences continue to exist in a

number of more accessible areas, despite structural and situational changes in women's lifestyles. Women contact a public official less than men (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993), women discuss politics with friends and relatives less than men (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995) and women try to influence another's vote less frequently than men (Hansen 1997; Hansen, Franz and Netemeyer-Mays 1976; Rapoport 1981).¹

These differences in political engagement are not trivial either in size or in importance. Activities like discussing politics or trying to influence others are particularly important because they contribute to political life and public policy through the development of political preferences in the community. Therefore, when women are engaged in political discussion and persuasion less than men, their political policy preferences become less important in shaping and informing the public debate, potentially depriving them of equal representation in government (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). To the degree that females have different candidate and issue preferences from males, they also delegitimize these preferences by failing to publicize the level of support these positions command (Noelle-Neumann 1993).

But political discussion and persuasion both presume that attitudes are held and can be expressed to others. Yet, it is at this very basic level of attitude holding and expression that females have also traditionally shown large deficits (Shapiro and Mahajan 1986; Krosnick 1990). The purpose of the current research is to examine differences between men and women in attitude expression over the past 50 years. Using the National Election Studies (NES) we examine gender differences in the number of open-ended comments expressing likes and dislikes of candidates and parties and in the percentage of times respondents give "don't know" responses to specific closed-ended questions relating to policy, candidates or groups.

Our interest is in determining how women's political engagement levels, reflected in the willingness to express political attitudes, have changed compared to men's over the past five decades. Although Shapiro and Mahajan report on gender differences in "don't know" responses over the 1964 through 1983 period, it is important to extend the time series begun by Shapiro and Mahajan beyond the early 80's. It is only in the 1980's and after that female turnout

significantly surpasses that of males (Conway, Steuernagel and Ahern 1997), and that the number of women in the Senate and House of Representatives increases substantially. More importantly, however, no one has focused on responses to open ended questions, which are even more important in exhibiting the skills required for political discourse. Focusing on these in tandem with the “don’t know” responses will give us stronger purchase on the issue of gender differences in attitude expression over the past 50 years. In doing so, we test three theories of engagement involving political resources, psychological resources and political socialization to see if controls for these factors diminish or eliminate the gender differences that we find.

The Importance of the Political Communication

Women have clearly mastered the skills related to voting. Voting, although a central means of linking citizens to their government, is an isolated activity done alone in the privacy of a voting booth. Because citizens do not have to defend, or even reveal, their vote, the act of voting can be completed with relatively low amounts of information. In addition, voting is a very distinct form of political activity by virtue of the fact that it is valued so highly within a democratic regime. Citizens often participate out of a sense of responsibility or duty for the political system and therefore may not have the kind of skills or attitudes necessary to participate in other forms of political engagement. Voting is, therefore, only one way, and perhaps not the best way, to communicate preferences to government (Verba and Nie 1972).

Although elections set very broad parameters for the direction of politics, perhaps even more important to the formation of public policy is the role of political expression and discussion. It is in the forum of public discourse where public policy is formed in open debates as different groups pursue their conception of the public good. To participate in this discourse and have influence over the outcomes of such debates, the citizen must have the skills and abilities to interact with the political world. In particular, the individual must have the capability to communicate her messages to others. She must be able to express what she likes and dislikes about the players in the game, the candidates and the parties, as well as her opinions on public

policy issues. It is through this type of communication that the citizen influences candidates and the kinds of policies they pursue in office.

But the same skills are important in influencing less elite audiences. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995:189) conclude that, "the political preferences of citizens have important consequences for the vote choices of other citizens who look to them as political discussants." However, they also find that males look to females far less frequently than the reverse leading to an enhanced influence of males over females in terms of political attitude formation. The result is that "men are not likely to see, and accept as valid, female political agendas or perspectives. Consequently, the male orientation toward politics is perpetuated" (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995:204). Therefore, if women consistently show differences with men in political expression then we need be concerned about understanding why.

Explaining Gender Differences

In general, many Americans choose not to participate in political dialogue. According to data from the NES about one-quarter of the US public indicate they never discuss politics. For many Americans social norms limit political discussion to avoid unnecessary conflict between friends and family. Alternatively, those citizens with low levels of political resources such as political knowledge or interest may have little cognitive ability or skill to enter such discussions.

Women may have problems with political communication on both counts. On the one hand, conflict may be particularly problematic for women who are often more interdependent socially and thus less inclined to engage in activities that might rock-the-boat. This might explain why men are more frequently found adding their two cents to controversial political topics than women (Noelle-Neumann 1993). This argument suggests socialization as the reason for women's lower levels of political engagement.

On the other hand, women also appear to have fewer political resources that facilitate political participation than men (Schlozman, Burns, Verba 1994). The political resource argument is the most common theory used in understanding differences in levels of political participation (Verba and Nie, 1972; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Welch 1977). Political

resources include both situational and structural factors that differ between men and women including: education, income, age, race, marital status and whether or not one is employed outside the home. The political resource theory suggests it is not something about being female, like socialization, that makes women less likely to communicate their political preferences, but it is their lack of resources compared to men that is causing the effect.² In addition, we know that psychological resources also play an important role in explaining and understanding political behavior. Psychological factors, including political self-esteem and political awareness, are important because politics is demanding and costly and they help to reduce the costs associated with political participation, and enhance the rewards (See Hansen and Rosenstone 1993; Campbell et al 1960; Zaller 1995; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996).

Despite prominent social and political gains, most women may still be trapped by a culture that sees politics as a man's world and keeps women's political self-esteem low. Recall that it is only a matter of a generation since women have begun to openly step out of the private sphere and take prominent roles in the public sphere. And although many women are employed today, most of these jobs are still in sexually segregated working environments that may not contribute to an increased sense of worth in the political system. As a result socialization factors and resources may still be key in understanding on-going differences between men and women's willingness or ability to communicate political preferences even when asked.

Gender and Political Communication: The Data

The concept of political communication is operationalized using two separate measures that appear in NES from 1952 through 2000, providing a picture of political communication during a time of changing attitudes toward women and women's role in the public sphere. We have combined the candidates and parties open-ended likes and dislikes question to create an overall comment variable ranging from a possible low of zero comments to a high of 40 comments (see Appendix A for question wording). We have also created a count of the percentage of "don't know" responses to closed ended questions about candidates, the parties,

groups, political players, issues, and trust measures.³ Both variables have different strengths providing good measures of both straightforward and typical forms of political communication.

The comment variable, first, is open-ended, offering the opportunity for the citizen to explain his reasons for voting for or against a particular candidate and for liking or disliking the political parties. The open-ended nature of this question provides unbounded opportunities for discussion including issues, trait characteristics, the nature of the times, campaign themes, political heroes and villains, partisanship or ideology. Second, these questions allow the respondent to discuss politics in a way that would be consistent with actual discussions one might have with friends or family regarding the presidential candidates and the political parties. It can easily be imagined that arguments or rationalizations expressed here would be used in discussions in home or work environments. Third, to interact with the political system, government or elected officials and candidates, citizens must be able and willing to express themselves spontaneously. Commenting on current political conditions is a direct measure of engagement with and willingness to communicate thoughts about the political system to others. Furthermore, it is not a subjective measure of political communication and engagement since it represents an actual count of political comments.

Even though comments in response to open-ended questions reflect the skills of political communication in which we are most interested, we must recognize that they are a demanding form of response. Individuals must bring a variety of sometimes disparate political considerations to mind in response to a broad request. Those with many attitudes, but not as well integrated (particularly around the current presidential campaign), might be expected to have more difficulty coming up with as many comments.

Therefore, we also consider the measure of percentage of “don’t know” responses given to closed-ended questions about the current political environment including issues, public policy, attitudes toward government, candidates, key political figures and interest groups. Questions which try to cover the current political environment necessarily focus on a larger political framework than just the presidential contenders and the parties. This larger political framework

might be more accessible to a wider range of citizens. Second, assessing attitudes on a series of closed-ended questions is a common way for government bureaucracies, candidates, and interest groups to learn about the policy preferences of their citizens. Third, this is not a subjective measure of engagement, but an actual measure of a citizen's ability to answer questions about the issues of the day.

Figure 1a and 2a present graphs of the mean number of expressed comments toward the candidates and parties and the average "don't know" response rate respectively for men and women by year. First, notice that different election years offer different levels of engagement by the public. Clearly some years offer more political stimulation to voters than others. More importantly, there is a significant difference between men and women with women always expressing fewer likes and dislikes than men and more frequently saying "don't know." Remarkably, the level of difference between men and women, as shown in Figure 1b and 2b, has remained roughly the same, averaging a difference of 1.6 ($p < .000$) comments and 3% "don't know" responses ($p < .000$) over the last 50 years. The consistency of these findings over a period of increasing public sphere activity for women begs a closer examination into these differences.

(Figures 1 and 2 about here)

Independent Variables

Political resources include education, income, married, homemaker, race (black) and age.⁴ We operationalize psychological resources with the variables campaign interest, internal efficacy, external efficacy and partisan intensity. All of these are subjective measures of engagement in politics and provide a rigorous test of gender differences since both interest and internal efficacy show significant differences between men and women (Bennett 1986). Men are more interested and more internally efficacious than women, providing males with greater psychological resources to engage and participate in public life.⁵ Thus, these powerful differences in psychological orientation or resources toward politics may help to explain why women communicate their political preferences less than men.⁶ The scales are set up so that a

higher number means one is more interested, more internally efficacious or more externally efficacious. Thus, we expect there to be a positive and significant relationship with the comment variable and a negative and significant relationship with percent "don't know."

We have also included a measure of partisan intensity to capture political attachment. Those who identify more strongly with one of the political parties are more likely to consider the political world through political lenses and therefore are more likely to find things to both like and dislike about the parties and the candidates and are more likely, therefore, to have opinions about matters of the day. The scale we use places independents at zero, partisan leaners at one, weak partisans at two and strong partisans at three. Thus, stronger partisans will be more likely to comment about the political parties and candidates and less likely to say "don't know."

Results

Table 1 presents the results from three models for both dependent variables. The first model is the simplest, representing only gender effects. The second adds political resources to the model, and the third model adds psychological resources. Controls for election year were also included in each model and can be found in the Appendix B.

The general hypothesis is that as resources increase so will political communication. Our results support this hypothesis. Political resources affect political communication in the expected ways. As income and education increase there is an increase in political comments toward the candidates and parties and a decrease in percent "don't know." Age also is consistent with the resource model. Not being employed outside the home increases the number of "don't know" responses while being married has the reverse effect. Being black also appears to have a consistent significant and negative effect on political communication. Given these strong effects, it is not surprising that the direct gender effect is reduced. However, the total reduction is only by about a quarter of the original gender effect for political comments (from a 1.5 comment difference to a 1.1 comment difference) and a little more than a third on percent "don't know" (from a 2.6 to 1.6 percent "don't know" difference).

(Table 1 about here)

When we add in psychological resources, they too, affect political communication in expected ways. Internal efficacy, interest, and partisan intensity are also strong and consistent predictors. Only external efficacy fails to impact comments, while still impacting percent “don’t know” in the expected direction. Even with the addition of psychological resource variables (which are at least partly a function of gender), there is still a large impact of being female on these behaviors. As Table 1 shows, women are less likely to comment on the political parties and candidates by .85 comments ($p < .001$) and are more likely to say “don’t know” by 1.4%. This suggests that although these psychological factors explain part of the difference between men and women's ability to communicate their political preferences it has not eliminated the initial bivariate finding of a gap between men and women.

Even though gender remains a significant determinant of number of comments in response to open-ended questions and percent “don’t know” for the entire period (1952-2000), has the effect of gender declined since the 1950s in important ways? To assess this, we grouped the sixteen elections (1952 through 2000) into their respective decades, and reran our model for each decade.⁷ As with the analysis on the full Cumulative NES, we show the effects of gender first with only election year controls, and then with full controls for political and psychological resources.

Reflecting our results in Figure 1, we see no clear decline in the propensity of males to give more responses to open ended questions or closed ended questions across the decades, either with or without controls for political and psychological resources. In fact, the gender effect for comments without controls for resources is greater in the 1990s than in either the 1950s or 1960s. When we take resources into account, the 1990s gender effect is greater than that for any decade save the 1980s. Likewise, the gender effect on percent “don’t know” with controls is higher in the 1990s than the percent “don’t know” in the 1960s or 1970s. Clearly the effects of gender on political communication seems, if anything, to be growing rather than declining. The hopes of some scholars that gender effects in these areas might be declining (Rapoport 1982; Shapiro and Mahajan 1986) are far from realized.

(Table 2 about here)

Clearly, then, the gender differences that we do find are consistent and are seen in the more demanding political comment open-ended structure as well as the easier closed-ended responses. Thus our finding is consistent across question mode and year of administration strengthening our claim that political communication remains an area of continued gender differences --- one that may have important political consequences.⁸

Socialization as a Clue

Thus far we have focused on the persistence of gender differences over the past 50 years, with political and psychological resources taken into effect and implicitly assuming that these resources impact each gender in similar ways. Although this is broadly the case, socialization factors might be expected to have differential effects on males and females. Much of the research on female office holders, for example, has emphasized the role of important female role models in their youth (Kirkpatrick 1974). Rapoport (1985) found that females were influenced disproportionately by mothers, and sons by fathers, in their patterns of attitude expression. We might expect to find similar relationships here if we had the appropriate data.

Of course the NES do not have parent-child pairs. Neither do we have respondents reporting on parental attitude expression behavior. Instead we have to rely on reports of parental political interest (and this for only four elections -- 1964 through 1976). Although biased recall is a clear problem, we will try to take it into account by including all of our controls, including respondent political interest. Our expectations are that mother's political interest will affect female political comment and "don't know" response levels to a greater extent than will father's political interest; and that the reverse should be the case for men. We include interaction terms for mother's political interest and gender of respondent and for father's political interest and gender of respondent because of our expectation of asymmetric parental effects.

As Table 3 shows, for both communication variables females are significantly influenced by mother's political interest, even taking their own political interest (and other controls) into account; however, they are not significantly influenced by father's political interest. On the other

hand, the number of male comments or percentage of “don’t know” responses are not significantly influenced by either mother or father’s political interest. This indicates that the gender difference in our political communication variables is at least partly dependent on mother's political interest.

Keeping in mind that mothers who “didn’t pay much interest to politics” are coded as 0, and those who were “very much interested” are coded as 2, the difference between a female with a very interested mother and one with a mother who is not interested in politics is .760 comments (i. e., $2*(.309 + .071)$). This is more than half of the gender gap that exists at the zero order level. Similarly, a female respondent with a very interested mother gives about 1.3% fewer “don’t know” responses (i. e., $2*(-.651 - .157)$) than a female with a mother who was not interested in politics. In both cases, these are conservative estimates, since they hold other psychological factors constant, even though these factors are also determined by mother's reported political interest, and by controlling for these effects we take away any indirect effects of parental socialization.

These results have important implications for gender differences as Table 4 shows. Based on regression results from Table 3, for male and female respondents with mothers who were very interested in politics, fathers who were low in political interest and females identical with males on all other variables, females give only .132 fewer comments about candidates and parties than do males.⁹ Likewise, among respondents with highly interested mothers (and uninterested fathers), the “don’t know” response rates are actually slightly lower for females than for males (by 0.136%). On the other hand, as Table 4 shows, for those with highly interested fathers and uninterested mothers, the gap in both “don’t know” rates and comments remains strong.

Although the results may appear encouraging where mothers are highly interested, it should be kept in mind that only a relatively small minority of the sample over the period we are examining remembered their mothers as politically interested.¹⁰ In fact, in the four elections for which the question was asked (1964-1976), the percentage of respondents reporting “very

interested” mothers never surpasses one in five. To the degree that socialization is an important determinant of the gender differences we have found, the continued political activity deficits for mothers vis a vis fathers does not bode well for the elimination of gender-based political activity differences.

(Tables 3 and 4 about here)

Linking Political Comments with Behavior

Thus far, our focus on open and closed-ended survey responses has primarily emphasized how gender differences in level of survey responses to open and closed-end questions impacts aggregate public opinion. To the degree that survey responses are used by decision-makers as part of their political calculus, the greater or lesser propensity of one gender to express views does matter where there are significant differences in their preferences.

However, responses in a face-to-face interview are also behaviors in a small group setting. As many observers of the survey interview have pointed out, the face-to-face survey is a social interaction between the respondent and the interviewer, and interviewer effects based on race, social class, and gender, all bear witness to the social interaction involved (Finkel et al 1991; Tourangeau and Rasinski 1974; Tourangeau, Rasinski and Rips 2000; Sudman, Bradburn and Schwarz 1998). In the social interaction which is the interview, the voluntary expression of political views and the rationale for those views bears a clear similarity to other forms of political activity and discussion which are important elements of democratic politics.

Following this line of reasoning, we can expect that explaining one’s views about candidates and parties spontaneously to an interviewer (i. e., the comments expressed about parties and candidates) can be viewed as a political activity, even if a low level one. As such it may be a precursor of other more demanding forms of political activity. In particular giving reasons for liking or disliking the Democratic or Republican candidate for President should be directly related to attempts to persuade others to support a favored candidate during a campaign (Rapoport 1981). If we find this link from responses to the open-ended section of the survey to more overt and demanding political activities, then the persistence of gender differences in open-

ended responses over the past 50 years would have more significant implications for gender differences in political participation.¹¹

Very few in the NES sample fail to respond to the open-ended questions. It is an activity that is even more widespread than voting. In the NES fully three-quarters report voting, but almost 94% express something they like or dislike about a candidate or party. And unlike the dichotomous nature of voting, there is wide variance in the number of comments and the percentage of level of responses to closed-ended questions. As a result, it is our contention that responses to the open-ended survey questions represent a proactive and socially interactive approach to politics that that will manifest itself beyond the interview environment. In fact, because it is more overt and proactive than the largely passive and solitary activity of voting, we would expect it to be a stronger determinants of other political activities than is voting. Voting is a unique activity that translates uneasily into other forms of more communal and public activity, while open-ended survey responses may be far more robust in this regard. If this is correct, it helps us to understand why females' relative increase in voting over the past 50 years has not manifest itself in a wider range of other campaign based activities. We hypothesize, therefore, that responses to open-ended survey questions should be particularly important in understanding other, more demanding forms of political engagement, even more important than voting. Furthermore we expect that this response effect will be greater among females than among males. Politics continues to be dominated by males at the political leadership and inter-personal political discussion level (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Responses to open-ended question reflect greater accessibility of attitudes (Aldrich, Sullivan and Borgida 1989) and greater recency of access, both of which implies that the respondent has thought about (i. e. rehearsed) these views more frequently. Such cognitive rehearsal behavior might be particularly necessary to overcome structural and situational deficits from which females suffer. If so, we should find such indications of attitude rehearsal and accessibility to be more strongly related to political activity for females than is the case for males.

To examine this linkage, the behavior we focus on is whether respondents tried to persuade others how to vote.¹² Persuasion is a medium level activity (falling between voting and candidate campaigning) and based on the NES Cumulative File, females are about 10% less likely to try to persuade someone to vote for their candidate than are males (38% vs. 28%; $p < .001$). In addition, persuasion attempts seem to be directly tied theoretically to the ability and willingness to respond to the open-ended NES questions. The argument that attitude expression precedes persuasive activity is a straightforward one, since persuasion requires the ability and willingness to express publicly political beliefs favoring a particular candidate or party, and it is these abilities that are tapped through open-ended survey questions, albeit in a generally less demanding or conflictual environment.

As before, we present multiple models in Table 5, showing first the simple effects of commenting on persuasion (Model 1) and then the gender effects on persuasion (Model 2) along with controls for election year dummies. The third column (Model 3) presents the model for both gender and comments. The fourth column (Model 4) contains the full model with both political and psychological resources and controls for political commenting and turnout. Finally, Model 5, includes the full model as well as the interactions with gender for both comments and voting. Our expectations are fourfold: first we expect that the number of open-ended comments will have a significant effect on political persuasion; second, we expect that this effect will outstrip that of the vote turnout measure; third we expect a much diminished effect of gender once we control for comments and particularly in our full model; and fourth we expect that the impact of open-ended comments on political participation and persuasion will be stronger for females than for males, while voting will not have the same interactive effect.

Utilizing a model with only comments and year of survey included, the effects of the open-ended comments variable is very strong. Those one standard deviation above the mean in number of comments are two and a half times as likely to try to persuade someone how to vote as those one standard deviation below the mean (49.7% vs. 20.0%). But obviously those making more comments are better educated, higher in income, efficacy, and interest, so

persuasion cannot be attributed entirely to response to survey questions. Using the logistic regression in column 4 of Table 5 with controls for political and psychological resources, we can look at the effect of varying levels of open-ended question comments, setting all other variables at their means. Doing so, we find that the probability of trying to persuade someone jumps from 24.4% for those one standard deviation below the mean to 41.7% for someone one standard deviation about the mean, a difference of 17.3% ($p < .001$). On the other hand setting everything else at the mean and comparing voters and non-voters, shows only a 9.5% effect of voting on persuasion activity ($p < .001$) -- only about half the effect we found for open-ended responses.

(Table 5 about here)

Controls for number of open ended comments also causes the effects of gender to decline precipitously (i. e., comparing estimates derived from columns 2, 3 and 4 of Table 5). Controlling just for number of comments (and setting them at the mean), the gender effect declines by about a third -- from 10.7% when persuasion is regressed only on gender and year of survey), to 7.2% when comments is included in the equation as well, and to 5.5% when the full model is estimated.¹³ Although gender continues to have a statistically significant direct effect, it is a small one, less than one-third as great as the 17.3% that we found for the open-ended response variable.¹⁴ Finally the coefficients for gender and the interaction of comments with gender (see column 5, Table 5) indicates that women get an extra boost from their ability and willingness to comment ($p < .01$) while turnout has no significant interaction with gender ($p > .45$). This emphasizes the distinctness of voting and political communication and their role in expanded political involvement for females.

Utilizing the full model with interactions from Table 5 (column 5), we report the probability of persuasive activity in Figure 3 for male and female respondents at varying levels of open-ended comment responses and for voters and non-voters (but who are set at the mean on all other variables). We note first that the for all four groups, responses to open-ended questions have strong effects on the likelihood of persuasion attempts. The increase in likelihood of persuasion attempts, as open-ended comments increase, ranges from 13.5% for male non-voters

(34.9% vs. 21.4%) to 19.5% for female voters (42.9% vs. 23.2%). These effects are consistently greater than those related to voting. The difference in likelihood of persuasion attempt between voters and non-voters at each level of open-ended comments reaches a maximum of 11.8% (for males at high levels of open-ended responses).

More importantly, Figure 3 shows that females at low levels of political communication trail males in persuasion attempts (21.4% vs. 16.6% among non-voters and 30.7% vs. 23.2% among voters). On the other hand, females do close the gender gap in political persuasion among those rating high in comments on open-ended questions, among both voters (where 46.7% of males and 42.9% of females try to persuade) and among non-voters (where 34.9% of males and 33.1% of females try to persuade). In essence the gender gap among non-voters declines by almost two-thirds from 4.8% to 1.8%, and among voters by half (from 7.5% to 3.8%), as comments to open-ended questions increase. These results bolster our argument about the role of political communications in surveys as a precursor for political persuasion activity for all respondents, but particularly for females.

(Figure 3 about here)

Conclusion

We began our analysis by asking questions about multi-decade differences between men and women in terms of political communication. We found surprisingly, that despite increases in personal resources of women citizens over the past five decades that women's lower political communication compared to men has largely remained unchanged. Women comment less on their likes and dislikes of the candidates and political parties less than men and say "don't know" more often than men in closed-ended questions about candidates, policies and groups.

Although some might ascribe concerns about differential attitude expression in surveys to methodological esoterica, attitudes expressed in surveys are important in two ways. First they impact political decision makers and office holders by representing "public opinion." For office holders, in particular, such public opinion represents threats to reelection, and a cue worth attending to. Second, they represent a low level political activity which is important for

involvement in political discussion and political agenda setting. Those who express their attitudes most easily are those who will have disproportionate effects on undecided and swing voters and on those in the perceived minority (Noelle-Neuman, 1983).

Because the level of attitude expression in surveys is relevant and varies by gender, it is important to investigate its causes and results. We find that the causes behind these differences are based in part on political and psychological resources, but even controlling for these known predictors the impact of gender on communication is still positive and significant. This suggested a possible socialization explanation, which we examined using parental political interest. We found that greater levels of mother's political interest directly and significantly influenced daughter's political communication while neither father nor mother's political interest effected sons. This speaks to the importance of female role models in helping other females overcome societal stereotypes of female political indifference and inactivity. In fact researchers have suggested the important role female candidates may play to female political engagement (Hansen 1997; Burns, Sclozman and Verba 2001, Atkeson forthcoming). Such contextual variation, though not tested here, may also play a role in understanding the proclivity of female political communication.

We conclude by focusing on how survey responses relate to more intense political involvement in the form of political persuasion. We argue that expressing attitudes, particularly in response to open ended questions, to an interviewer is itself a form of political activity and an indicator of important cognitive skills and confidence which should manifest themselves in other forms of political activity. The lagging behind of females on these attributes is important in understanding the continued lag by females in other forms of political engagement. We find particularly strong effects among females. In fact, we find that survey responses are more directly tied to political persuasion activity than vote participation. We raise the possibility that voting turnout (and the eclipse of gender differences here) has been overrated as an indicator of an expected decline in gender differences in political activity and engagement.

Our results raise important questions for issues of representation, and for future expectations regarding gender differences. The fact that these differences between men and women have persisted so long and show no sign of abatement suggests that women are under represented in politics outside the voting booth. In particular, when women engage in political expression less than men their force in shaping the political debates are also lessened, depriving them of equal representation. Prospectively they suggest that socialization might be serving as a brake on female political involvement and expression, helping to explain the lack of decline in gender differences in expressing political views. If so, it might take much longer than many have optimistically believed in order to achieve full female political equality.

¹ Women score lower on political knowledge tests (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997) and pay less attention to national level politics than men (Verba, Burns and Schlozman 1997).

² Although it is important to note that over the last 50 years women have increased their political resources, such is the case for men as well, and there are no significant declines in gender differences on income or education between the 1950's and the 1990's, although workforce participation has increased significantly. In fact, grouping presidential year NES surveys by decade, the correlation between gender and education has become slightly more favorable to males. For the 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's correlations are -.01, -.00, -.08, -.07 and -.09 respectively. Similarly income differences between the genders have grown slightly over the five decades (correlations of -.12, -.13, -.13, -.16, and -.16 respectively).

³ Those questions that they were not asked or refused to answer are eliminated from both numerator and denominator.

⁴ Because we want to use the entire NES data set we are limited in the number of resources available to us.

⁵ Based on the Cumulative NES data, for example, while 37% of men indicated they were very interested in the campaign only 30% of women feel the same way ($p < .000$). And while almost a quarter (24%) of female citizens felt internally efficacious nearly two in five (38%) men do ($p < .000$)

⁶ If this is true this still leaves open the question about why women have fewer psychological resources.

⁷ The 2000 election is included in the 1990's decade, giving us two elections for 1950s and 1970s and three elections each for the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s.

⁸ One of the reviewers raised the interesting prospect that gender of interviewer might be responsible for some of our results. The reviewer suggested that males might be particularly unwilling to admit not knowing when the interviewer is a female, and since 90% of interviewers are female, this could bias our results. Unfortunately the Cumulative file only codes gender of interviewer beginning in 1988. However, we reran the analysis on "don't know" percentage, including both gender of interviewer and the interaction of gender of interviewer with gender of respondent. Doing so did not change the gender effect in magnitude or significance. The results showed that male interviewers actually received fewer, *not more*, DK responses than female interviewers ($p < .01$) regardless of the sex of the respondent ($p > .4$).

⁹ The female advantage (.618-.750=-.132) is derived by taking the interaction effect coefficient of mother's interest with female respondent (.309) and multiplying it by 2, and then adding it to the dummy variable for female (-.750).

¹⁰ Although the question about parents' interest in politics ends in 1976, there is little evidence to suggest that more mothers would be reported to be particularly interested had the question continued to be asked. There is, for example, no trend at all in the NES in the gender difference in the percentage of respondents indicating they follow politics "most of the time." In fact 2000 represents the second lowest percentage of women saying they follow politics "most of the time" since 1960, with only 12% in that category.

(http://www.umich.edu/~nes/nesguide/2ndtable/t6d_5_4.htm)

¹¹ Because it is more closely linked conceptually (i. e., it indicates a more active participation), we report only on the "comments" variable rather than the "don't know" variable. However, "don't know" responses is also related to participation and to persuasive activity (data not shown).

¹² We also looked at a count of how many of four activities the respondent participated in – persuasion, wearing a button, working for a party and attending a political meeting with results similar to what we present for persuasion. Specifically, as we found with political persuasion, the number of open-ended comments has a strong effect on political activity ($p < .001$), and its inclusion diminishes gender effects by about half (a decline in unstandardized b's from .131 to .075; $p < .01$). In addition, when we interact open-ended comments and gender we find significant effects, indicating that open-ended comments have a significantly stronger effect on participation for females than for males ($b=.004$; $p < .05$), while vote has significantly stronger effects on males than on females ($b=-.060$; $p < .05$).

¹³ These are derived from logistic regressions not shown, but available from authors.

¹⁴ The resource variables have significant effects in the expected direction. The exceptions, race, marital status and education, all have coefficients at least in the correct direction.

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Table 1. Regression of Political Comments on the Likes and Dislikes of the Parties and the Candidates Controlling for Political Resources, Psychological Resources, Political Cues, and Election Years, Presidential Years 1952-2000

	Comments			Percent Don't Know		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Political Resources						
Gender (Female)	-1.53**** (.084)	-1.114**** (.091)	-.847**** (.085)	2.602**** (.146)	1.618**** (.164)	1.405**** (.163)
Education		1.221**** (.027)	.862**** (.027)		-1.106**** (.049)	-.779**** (.051)
Income		.542**** (.042)	.361**** (.039)		-.985**** (.076)	-.817**** (.076)
Married		.120 (.096)	.027 (.090)		-.567*** (.174)	-.485*** (.171)
Homemaker		-.168 (.114)	-.185* (.106)		1.078**** (.206)	1.093**** (.203)
Race (Black)		-.517**** (.131)	-.972**** (.122)		.927**** (.236)	1.313**** (.233)
Age		.046**** (.002)	.020**** (.002)		.023**** (.004)	.046**** (.004)
Psychological Resources						
Internal Efficacy			.547**** (.042)			-.323**** (.082)
External Efficacy			.048 (.040)			-.190** (.077)
Political Interest			2.150**** (.053)			-2.028**** (.101)
Partisan Intensity			.644**** (.038)			-.526**** (.073)
Constant	11.49**** (.213)	-1.600**** (.395)	-2.775**** (.294)	4.790**** (.380)	13.096**** (.551)	19.961**** (.573)
F	41.689****	216.323****	329.949****	1414.957****	1131.829****	991.976****
R ² a	.029	.186	.297	.483	.522	.536
N	17,918	17,918	17,918	19,708	19,708	19,708

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File
Note: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$, **** $p < .001$

Table 2. Gender Coefficients, by Decade, Taken from Regression of Political Comments relating to the Likes and Dislikes of the Parties and the Candidates Controlling for Political Resources and Psychological Resources

	Coefficient for Gender with Only Election Year Controls	Coefficient for Gender with All Controls	N
Comments			
1950's	-1.199**** (.194)	-.602*** (.243)	2837
1960's	-1.016**** (.150)	-.298* (.166)	4394
1970's	-1.639**** (.195)	-.773**** (.197)	3107
1980's	-2.146**** (.187)	-1.296**** (.173)	4170
1990's	-1.614**** (.220)	-.841**** (.198)	3410
Percent Don't Know			
1950's	2.809**** (.539)	2.814**** (.794)	2837
1960's	2.254**** (.320)	1.186*** (.401)	4394
1970's	3.001**** (.307)	.916*** (.325)	4285
1980's	2.884**** (.286)	1.411**** (.135)	4170
1990's	2.124**** (.220)	1.332**** (.214)	4022

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File

Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Table 3. Regression of Political Comments on the Likes and Dislikes of the Parties and the Candidates Controlling for Political Resources, Psychological Resources, Political Cues, Election Years, Parental Interest 1968-1980

Political Resources	Comments	Percent Don't Know
Gender	-.750**	1.186***
(Female)	(.246)	(.382)
Education	.797****	-.751****
	(.047)	(.072)
Income	.255****	-.739****
	(.070)	(.107)
Married	.147	-.640***
	(.159)	(.246)
Homemaker	-.426**	1.342****
	(.178)	(.276)
Race	-.322	.622*
(Black)	(.240)	(.369)
Age	.028****	.046****
	(.004)	(.007)
Psychological Resources		
Internal Efficacy	.479****	-.405****
	(.076)	(.120)
External Efficacy	.102	-.227**
	(.069)	(.107)
Political Interest	1.997****	-2.478****
	(.094)	(.146)
Partisan Intensity	.455****	-.463****
	(.071)	(.109)
Parental Interest		
Mother's Interest	.071	-.157
	(.143)	(.224)
Mother's Interest * Female	.309*	-.651**
	(.188)	(.293)
Father's Interest	.157	.082
	(.135)	(.211)
Father's Interest * Female	-.075	.250
	(.180)	(.282)
Constant	-2.496****	20.489****
	(.428)	(.668)
F	112.620****	106.674***
R ² a	.281	.236
N	5,131	6,171

Source: American National Election Studies, Cumulative File

Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Table 4: Gender Differences and Parental Political Interest

Father's Political Interest	Mother's Political Interest	
	Highest	Lowest
Highest		
Gender Difference in Comments	.282	.900
Gender Difference in DK%	0.384%	1.686%
Lowest		
Gender Difference in Comments	.132	.750
Gender Difference in DK%	-0.136%	1.186%

Table 5. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Persuasion Attempt

	Predictors included in Model				
	Comments Only (Model 1)	Gender Only (Model 2)	Gender and Comments (Model 3)	Full Model (Model 4)	Full Model with Interactions (Model 5)
Political Resources					
Gender (Female)		-.465**** (.033)	-.321**** (.034)	-.225**** (.042)	-.379**** (.102)
Education				.023* (.013)	.020* (.013)
Income				.049** (.020)	.050** (.0198)
Married				-.006 (.045)	.007 (.045)
Homemaker				-.214**** (.054)	-.193**** (.055)
Race (Black)				-.125** (.063)	-.124* (.064)
Age				-.013**** (.001)	-.014**** (.001)
Psychological Resources					
Internal Efficacy				.069**** (.020)	.064** (.020)
External Efficacy				.063**** (.020)	.060** (.020)
Political Interest				.660**** (.029)	0.658**** (.029)
Partisan Intensity				.156**** (.020)	0.158**** (.020)
Political Communication					
Comments	.120**** (.003)		.117**** (.003)	.068**** (.004)	.060**** (.005)
Comments * Female					.021*** (.007)
Voted				.456**** (.051)	.488**** (.071)
Voted * Female					-.068 (.096)
Constant	-1.758**** (.075)	-.353**** (.066)	1.562**** (.077)	-3.360**** (.128)	-3.113**** (.1257)
-2 Log Likelihood	21069.315	21601.785	20082.211	18944.085	18910.24
Chi Square	1736.88****	304.41****	1823.98****	2622.11****	2995.96****
N	17,167	17,167	17,167	17,167	17,167

Source: American National Election Studies, Cumulative File

Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Table 6. Probability of Trying to Persuade Someone How to Vote and Saying Don't Know, Controlling for Psychological and Political Variables (Set at Mean)

Level of Political Communication	Female			Male		
	Non-Voters	Voters	Voting Effect (Voters-Non-Voters)	Non-Voters	Voters	Voting Effect (Voters-Non-Voters)
Number of Comments One Std Deviation Above Mean	.331	.429	.098	.349	.467	.118
Mean Number of Comments	.239	.323	.084	.277	.383	.106
Number of Comments One Std Deviation Below Mean	.166	.232	.066	.214	.307	.093
Open-Ended Comment Effect—difference between +1 Std and -1 Std	.165	.197		.135	.160	

Source: American National Election Studies Cumulative File

Appendix A. Variables Used in Analysis, taken from ANES Cumulative File 1948-2000

	Variable
Internal Efficacy: “Sometimes politics and government seems so complicated that a person like me can’t understand what’s going on.” [agree-disagree]	vcf0614
Convince: During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates? During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?	vcf0717
External: “I don't think public officials care much what people like me think.” [agree-disagree]	vcf0609
Education	vcf0140
Gender	vcf0104
Marital Status	vcf0147
Homemaker	vcf0118
Strength of Partisanship	vcf0305
Income	vcf0114
Black	vcf0105
Age	vcf0101
Interest: Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you, would you say that you have been/were very much interested, somewhat interested, or not much interested in following the political campaigns (so far) this year?	vcf0310
Father’s Interest: Do you remember when you were growing up whether your father was very much interested in politics, somewhat interested, or didn't he pay much attention to it?	vcf0308
Mother’s Interest: Now how about your mother? When you were growing up was she very much interested in politics, somewhat interested, or didn't she pay much attention to it?	vcf0309
Voter Turnout	vcf0702
Persuade: During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates? During the campaign, did you talk to any people and try to show them why they should vote for or against one of the parties or candidates?	vcf0717
Comments on the Parties and Candidates: Is there anything in particular that you like about the [Democratic/Republican] party? What is that? Anything else? Is there anything in particular that you don't like about the [Democratic/Republican] party? What is that? Anything else? Now I'd like to ask you about the good and bad points of the two candidates for President. Is there anything in particular about the [Democratic/Republican] presidential candidate that might make you want to vote for him? What is that? Anything else? Is there anything in particular about the [Democratic/Republican] presidential candidate that might make you want to vote against him? What is that? Anything else?	vcf0323
Percent Don’t Know: Includes questions on issues, candidates, and parties vcf0201 to vcf0226, vcf0424 to vcf0427 vcf0432 to vcf0446, vcf9003 to vcf9007, vcf0326 to vcf0333, vcf0338 to vcf0345, vcf0350 to vcf0357, vcf0362 to vcf0369, vcf0824, vcf9046 to vcf9050, vcf0604 to vcf0608, vcf0613, vcf0616, vcf0622, vcf0624, vcf0803, vcf0805, vcf0806, vcf0811, vcf0814 to vcf0817, vcf0819, vcf0823, vcf0825, vcf0827 to vcf0830, vcf0832, vcf0834, vcf0837 to vcf0839, vcf0841, vcf0843, vcf0808, vcf0826, vcf9051	

Appendix B.1 Election Year Dummies for Full Model Table 1

	Comments			Percent Don't Know		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
1952	.344 (.232)	2.896**** (.225)	2.001**** (.211)	21.667**** (.420)	19.794**** (.426)	20.703**** (.424)
1956	-.671*** (.221)	1.651**** (.211)	1.076**** (.199)	22.201**** (.400)	20.299**** (.399)	20.906**** (.398)
1960	-.975**** (.216)	1.013**** (.204)	.178 (.193)	21.570**** (.390)	19.908**** (.387)	20.754**** (.387)
1964	-.683*** (.227)	1.270**** (.213)	.508** (.200)	2.047**** (.410)	.365 (.405)	-1.138*** (.402)
1968	.334 (.233)	2.036**** (.218)	1.354**** (.204)	-3.709**** (.423)	-5.209**** (.414)	-4.500**** (.410)
1972	-1.53**** (.235)	.147 (.219)	-.029 (.204)	-2.258**** (.371)	-3.605**** (.365)	-3.311**** (.360)
1976	-.779**** (.212)	.432** (.197)	.019 (.184)	.943** (.385)	.072 (.375)	.514 (.370)
1980	-.996**** (.242)	-.027 (.223)	-.137 (.207)	-.820* (.438)	-1.444**** (.424)	-1.295*** (.417)
1984	-.168 (.217)	.707**** (.200)	.602*** (.186)	-1.060**** (.393)	-1.558**** (.380)	-1.383**** (.376)
1988	-.402* (.226)	.471** (.208)	.407** (.194)	-.587 (.410)	-1.161*** (.396)	-1.053*** (.391)
1992	.296 (.216)	1.028**** (.199)	.609**** (.185)	-1.299**** (.392)	1.778**** (.378)	-1.350**** (.373)
1996	.843*** (.289)	1.150**** (.264)	1.199**** (.246)	-3.041**** (.426)	-3.307**** (.410)	-3.365**** (.404)

Source: American National Election Studies, Cumulative File
 Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Appendix B.2 Election Year Dummies for Full Model Table 2 by Decade

Decade & Year	Comment	Percent Don't Know
1950s		
1952	.875**** (.174)	.056 (.568)
1960s		
1960	-1.316**** (.164)	25.264**** (.397)
1964	-.938**** (.169)	5.637**** (.409)
1970s		
1972	-.021 (.172)	-4.063**** (.275)
1980s		
1980	-.569*** (.206)	-.174 (.321)
1984	.176 (.183)	-.213 (.284)
1990s		
1992	.764**** (.216)	-1.441**** (.252)
1996	1.326**** (.278)	-3.323**** (.267)

Source: American National Election Studies, Cumulative File

Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Appendix B.3 Election Year Dummies for Table 3.

Year	Comment	Percent Don't Know
1968	.841**** (.189)	-5.494**** (.322)
1972	-.642**** (.192)	-4.499**** (.282)
1976	-.486*** (.176)	-1.013**** (.299)

Source: American National Election Studies, Cumulative File

Note: * p < .10, ** p < .05, ***p < .01, **** p < .001

Appendix B.4 Election Year Dummies for Full Model Table 5

<u>Year</u>	<u>Persuade</u>
1976	.362**** (.060)
1980	.400**** (.077)
1984	.164** (.067)
1988	-.007 (.073)
1992	.284**** (.064)
1996	-.051 (.105)
2000	.217*** (.079)

Figure 1a. Mean Number of Expressed Likes and Dislikes Toward the Parties and the Presidential Candidates for Men and Women by Year

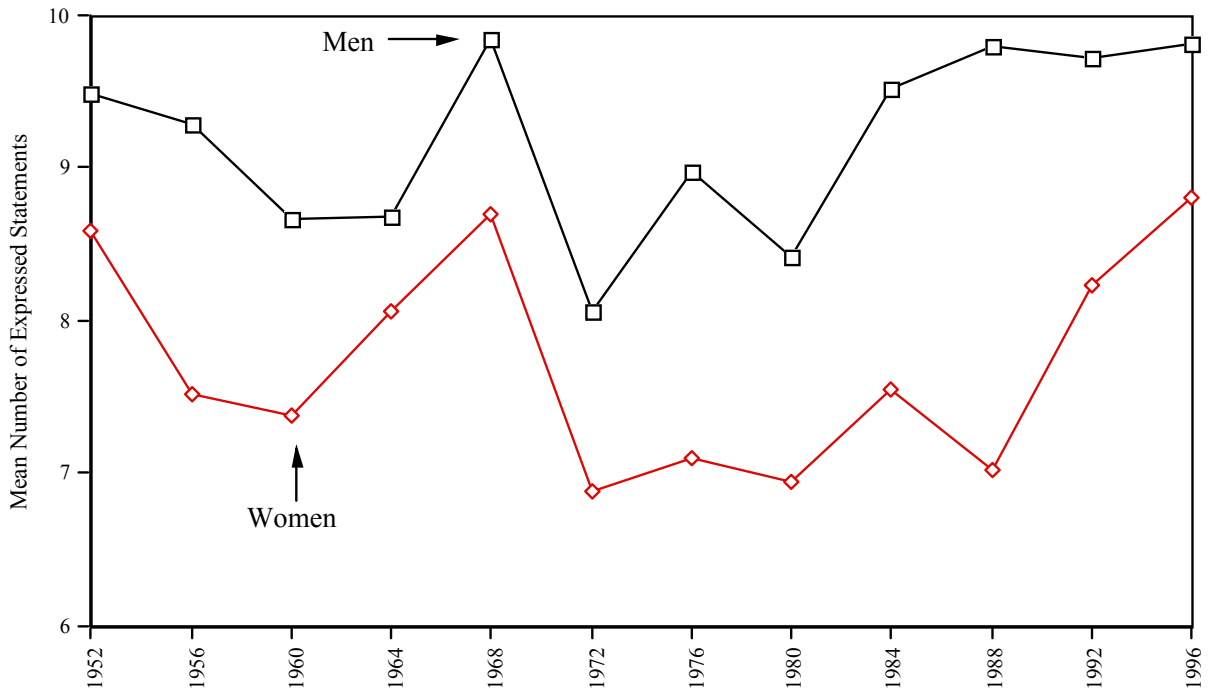


Figure 1b. Difference between Mean Number of Expressed Likes and Dislikes Toward the Parties and The candidates for Men and Women by Year

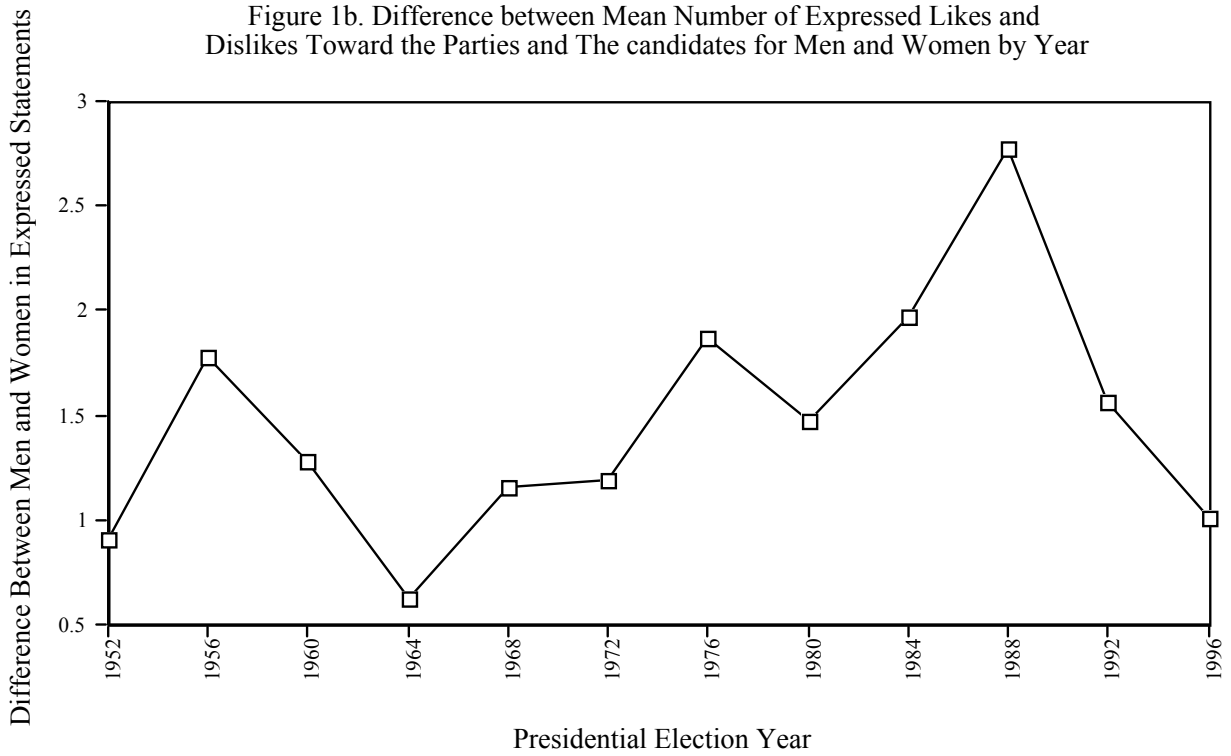


Figure 2a. Average Percent Don't Know 1952-200

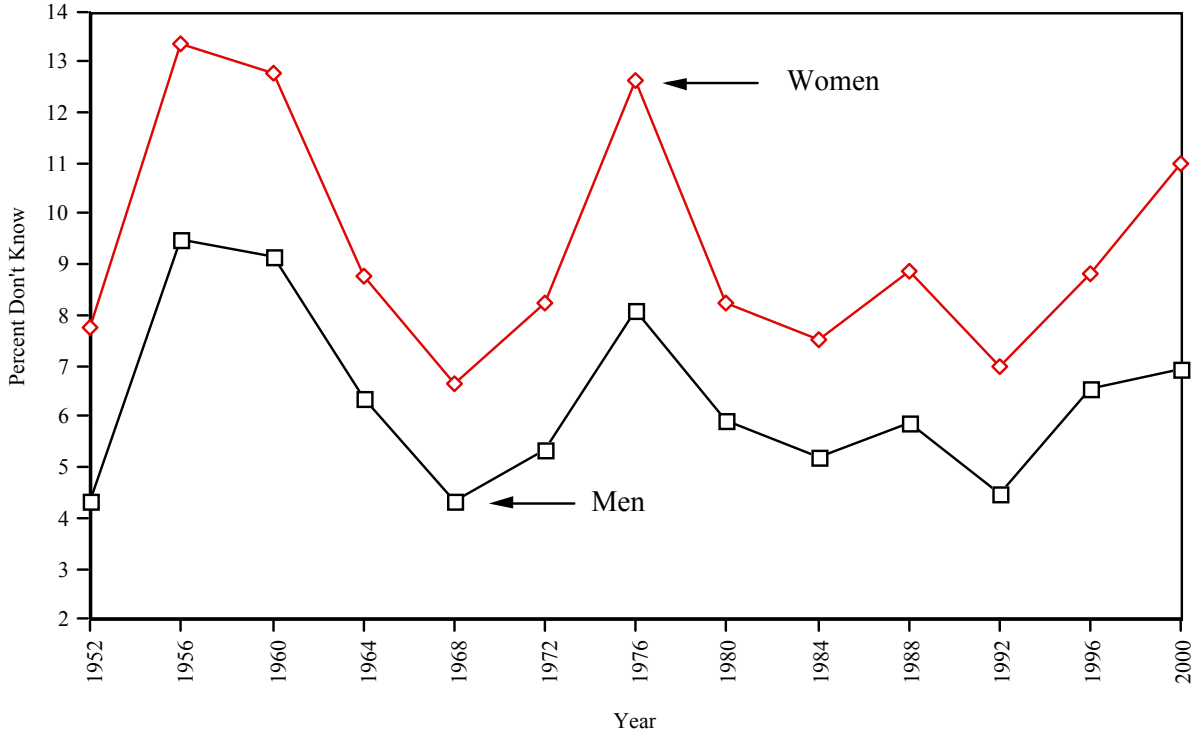


Figure 2b. Difference Between Men and Women's Average Don't Knows

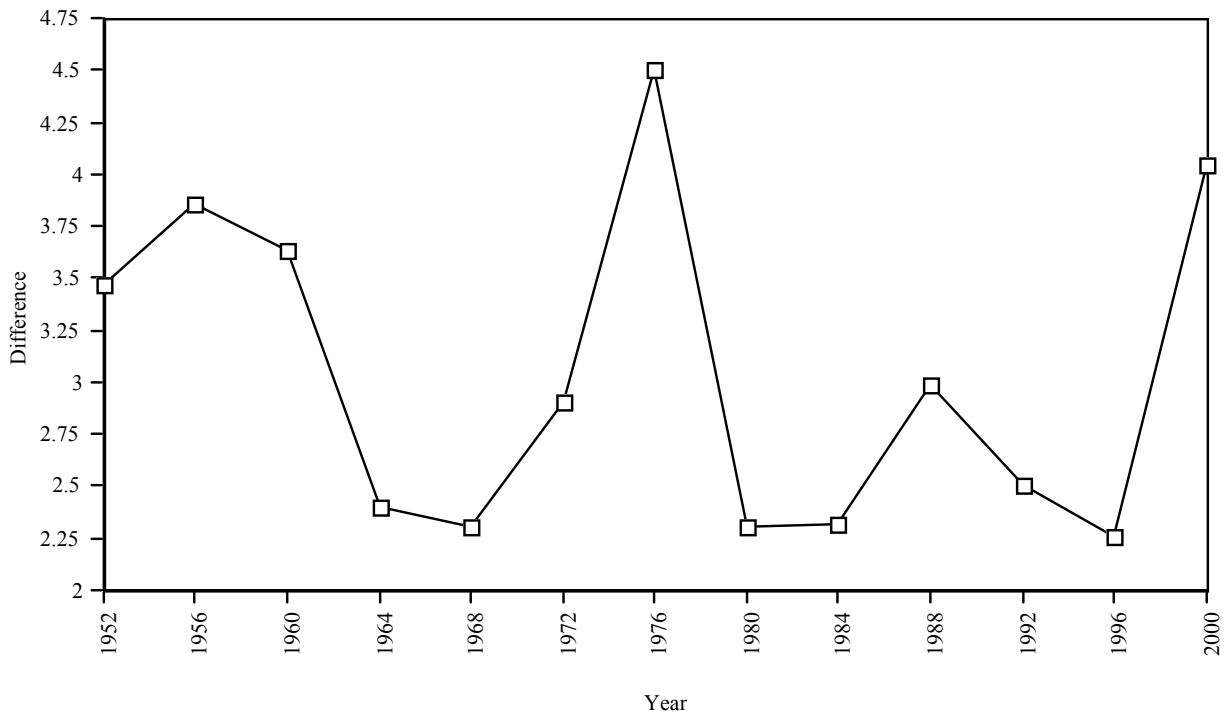


Figure 3
Likelihood of Persuasion Attempt by Level of Open-Ended Comments

