

Carol M. Mueller (ed.): *The Politics of the Gender Gap. The Social Construction of Political Influence*. London: Sage, 1988, 316 pp.

In the 1980 presidential election in the USA, 8 percent fewer women than men voted for Ronald Reagan. Historically, such a difference in a national election was unprecedented. In the same election, a higher proportion of women voted than men, for the first time since winning the suffrage in 1920. The term 'the gender gap' was born in the media and public opinion. What happened? Had the dream of the suffragists and the nightmare of the political bosses come true, where American women were starting to act as a voting bloc, introducing new issues and new candidates?

These questions are raised and examined in a number of chapters edited by Carol M. Mueller, where the main theme is, as the title indicates, the social construction of political influence. Questions that are raised in this book include the identification, measurement, propagation and meaning of the gender gap. Is there a gap? How is it manifested? How is it used and reacted to by various interested parties? It seems evident that the interesting answer is not so much the attitudinal differences observed between men and women, as the analysis of how the gap took on significance as it became translated into action, action that affected the electoral process. From the combined effects of women voters, modern polling, organized feminism, the media and the major parties, arises the potential for women's collective influence.

One of the major differences between the 1920s and the 1980s is the existence of the polls, and the media as a useful tool for modern feminism. Voting differences by gender have to be analyzed, and organized efforts have to be made to bring these results to the public attention if the existence of gender differences is to become a source of political influence.

In the beginning of the 1980s, there was not one voting bloc in the polls of special interest to the feminist movement. One bloc was centered around different women's rights issues and it was composed of both women and men while the other bloc focused on differences between men and women. The National Organization of Women (NOW) chose the latter. The issue bloc analysis, with its emphasis on coalition, was bypassed and the gender gap strategy based on voting differences became the foundation of the NOW campaigns.

The way in which the media reported the polling results supported the feminists contention. During the campaign for nominating a woman for vice president, the media conveyed the message that the nomination of a woman would have a significant effect on the outcome of the election. Although the NBC News Poll and the CBS News New York Times Poll actually collected data that showed 'no effect' among the respondents who had not yet decided on a party, these data were not considered 'news'. The most newsworthy story was the one that anticipated large effects that could easily be explained and that the Gallup poll could deliver these data.

From 1980 to 1984 the existence of a woman's voting bloc was taken for granted in national press coverage. The conscious creation of the gender gap by NOW became incorporated in the standard political news coverage.

What about the scientists view on the gender gap? Henry C. Kenski does find a gap in the voting turnout, party identification, presidential evaluation, presidential elections and congressional elections. The most dramatic gaps occurred in the 1980, 1982 and 1984 elections. In presidential and congressional elections, married men were the most Republican and single women the most Democratic. Susan Carroll examines the Reagan vote in 1980 and the Reagan approval ratings in 1982 to

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determine which women were more differentiated from men. She finds that the absence of economic dependence on a husband is highly predictive, particularly for women with a more egalitarian view of women in society. Carroll argues that it is women's increasing autonomy from individual men that creates the conditions for voting and approval differences. Arthur Miller looks at the issues and the marital status differences that distinguish women's votes from men's in the 1984 presidential election. He finds that support for women's equal rights has a minor effect on women's vote compared to concerns for the economy and to issues of war and peace. Miller argues that the gender gap springs from a set of policy priorities in which women place a greater emphasis than men on humanitarian concerns.

From a Scandinavian point of view, four chapters are of special interest in this book, dealing with the question of how to define women's interests and needs. A shift seems to have appeared during the last decades where organized feminists have left equal rights demands and turned to a recognition of women's special needs in society. The link between women citizens and the welfare state is especially analyzed in these chapters. Women's increased dependence on the welfare state as recipients of transfer payments and as professional employees partly explains the gender differentiation in support for the welfare state spending that began in the mid-1970s. The important point of this book is that it could contribute to solving the misunderstanding held by some social scientists concerning the connection between influence and group homogeneity in relation to the women's voting bloc. This book indicates that establishing a political group is a complex and fluid social process – not an outcome of survey research. Group differences that may satisfy social scientists, away from their existing data, are not meaningful as social or political distinctions as long as these differences are not validated within the political system.

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Christopher Coker: *Reflections on American Foreign Policy Since 1945*. London: Pinter Publishers in association with John Spiers, 1989, 176 pp.

In the spring of 1990 the post-war world is in fundamental change. One of the two superpowers that together have dominated international politics for so long appears to be falling apart. If the Soviet Union is thus in the process of becoming a fundamentally different country, this will profoundly affect also the other superpower, the United States. A process of change in American foreign policy seems already to have begun. The appearance of the volume reviewed here can assist the interested in understanding several aspects of the history of US foreign policy, and, in so doing, it can also help better predict what may happen to future American external policies. Dr Christopher Coker is a lecturer in international relations at the London School of Economics and he brings to his subject an impressive range of readings on widely differing aspects of his topic. He defines this as '... a set of reflections about some of the key developments of the post-war period, anchored to an interpretation ... that the past continues to inform the present' (p. ix). One fundamental theme is that in American foreign policy the past, defined as the historical lessons that suit the moment, has been important to an extent that is true in no other country. Coker's essential point here is that the ways in which the past has been used have been flawed. The author brings this basic focus to bear on four