Women in the 2000 Elections: Who Gets Our Vote?

by Amy Caiazzza

"The Year of the Woman," "Soccer Moms," "The Gender Gap." These terms have been popularized by media reports on women's voting power. Candidates are increasingly likely to court women's votes in elections, since they can make a crucial difference in who wins. In elections, analysts argue the "gender gap," or differences in men's and women's political attitudes, can be pivotal. In a dramatic example, while more men voted for Dole than Clinton in 1996, a large enough proportion of women voted for Clinton to re-elect him President.

This May, IWPR hosted a panel of experts to discuss the women's vote in the 2000 presidential elections. The panelists were Paulina Alvarado of MANA, a national Latina organization; Lisa Brown, counsel to Vice President Al Gore; Bob Carpenter of American Viewpoints; and Linda Williams of the University of Maryland at College Park. According to these experts, this year the gender gap is taking a slightly different shape than in previous years.

For example, recent polls indicate that more men support George W. Bush than Al Gore, but women's votes are split more or less evenly between them. As a result, Bush is leading in many polls. However, as of late spring, many more women than men remained undecided. These women's preferences could affect the elections considerably.

What might affect their votes? According to Carpenter, education issues will play a key role. While education is important to all Americans, more women than men claim that they will not vote for a candidate whose views on education differ from theirs. Social Security and Medicaid combined are the next most important issues for women. All of these issues are already sparking major debates on the campaign trail and could be pivotal to women's voting patterns.

At the same time, "the women's vote" is by no means homogeneous. Race, class, and religion all shape women's political attitudes. According to Williams, less than half of white women voted for Clinton in 1996, and women of color pushed women's overall vote for him to about 54 percent. As a result, women of color were most responsible for the "gender canyon" of 1996. This year, the vast majority of African-American women support Gore. If turnout is high among minority women, their voting patterns could prove crucial.

Lower-income women with less education are also more likely to support
This issue, my youngest daughter, Katharine Wells, who just finished her junior year at Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, DC, is sharing this space with me.

Katharine: About three months ago, two students at my school were murdered. They were shot repeatedly with a gun that was acquired far too easily by their murderer, a teenage boy. The two victims, Natasha and Andre, were high school sweethearts. They were popular kids and also good students who were eager to go to college, rise above their limited economic circumstances, and, together, be successful. In other words, they were good kids who should not have died (not than anyone should). The shooting took place at Natasha’s house after a school basketball game at which there was a fight. Natasha and Andre were unloading groceries they had bought for Natasha’s mom.

Every day there are a dozen new stories like mine. There are a dozen schools, and a dozen families, that have to go through the anguish, despair, and hurt that my school went through. In protest of that, my mother and I went to the Million Mom March on Mother’s Day.

Heidi: I’ve been to a lot of rallies and demonstrations over the years, and I confess I began to think how nice it would be to have that Sunday to hang out at home relaxing. But Katharine’s interest revved me up to go.

When we arrived, I was struck by the huge turnout, the organized presence of a few groups with matching tee shirts (such as Emily’s List, several religious congregations, child and health care centers, and various professional associations and labor unions). All ages, genders, races and ethnicities seemed to be represented. There were also hundreds of vendors.

Katharine: In many ways, it was less of a march and more of a festival. There was a lot of anti-NRA talk, and many of the speakers called on us to stop voting for people who were soft on gun control. But there were also musical performances and a moon bounce for all the children. People milled around looking at the giant TV sets showing the rally stage and the other displays instead of marching in an organized fashion or shouting political slogans.

Heidi: Volunteer marshalls were scarce, but the services—free water, first aid, and plentiful portajohns—were good.

The panel of mothers who had lost children to gun violence was heartbreaking. The Japanese mother whose son, a high school exchange student, was shot and killed several years ago when he rang the wrong door bell trick-or-treating, spoke about the foundation she has set up to give support to U.S. organizations working for stronger gun control. Natasha’s and Andre’s mothers spoke. People were visibly weeping as these mothers shared their grief.

Katharine: I think people needed to mourn before they could act. The Million Mom March was more of a threat than a plan of action. Those mothers were saying, “We’ve known grief and despair, but we’re learning to put that behind us. The next time you see us, we’ll be holding voter ballots instead of tissues.” I hope the women’s movement carries out that threat, for Andre’s and Natasha’s sakes as well as my own. I’m as much in danger of gun violence as they were. And one day, I’ll be a frightened mother too.

Amy Caiazzo is a political scientist. She directs IWPR’s Status of Women in the States and Social Indicators projects.
IWPR at the Beijing +5 UN World Conference: Evaluating Progress Toward Women’s Equality

In September 1995, the United Nations held its Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The gathering drew thousands of women from across the globe dedicated to advancing "the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of all humanity." Since that time, women from around the world have been working to implement the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by 189 governments, including the United States.

From June 5-9, the United Nations General Assembly hosted a Special Session in which women re-convened to evaluate the results of the Beijing Platform for Action and to revise the Platform accordingly. Throughout the week, the UN and non-governmental organizations sponsored panels, forums and films to discuss and draw attention to different aspects of the Platform. IWPR co-sponsored a panel on “Job Quality and Wages Among Low-Wage Workers” as a part of the Center for Policy Alternatives’ Economic Empowerment Forum. Panelists from the U.S. and Latin America discussed sweatshops, job training, welfare reform, migrant labor, and policies to improve the lives of low-wage workers.

To assess the United States’ commitment to implementing the Beijing Platform, the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), in collaboration with 17 women’s organizations, published Women’s Equality: An Unfinished Agenda. (See enclosed order form).

The report covers critical areas of concern for women in the U.S. defined by the Platform for Action, including poverty, education and training, health, the economy, power and decision-making, human rights, the media, violence against women, and the girl-child. Improvements such as increased investment in women’s health and an increase in the number of women appointed to senior positions within the President’s Cabinet and administration were cited; some failures include the disproportionately high number of women in low-wage and part-time positions; the large number of uninsured women; and the failure to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). IWPR contributed a chapter on “Women and Poverty” which provides an overview of the challenges poor women face with regard to child support, domestic violence, unemployment insurance, housing, food security, welfare reform, employment and training.

The ability of U.S. women to implement the Beijing Platform is limited by their inadequate representation in elected office and other positions of power. The Platform for Action asserts that women and men must participate equally in decision-making to provide a truly representative voice of the society. Although women comprise over 50 percent of the electorate, women comprise only 12.1 percent of the U.S. Congress, 28.5 percent of statewide elected officials, and 22.5 percent of state legislatures (Center for American Women and Politics).

While several countries have achieved more equitable gender representation through affirmative action, the U.S. has yet to adopt such a policy. The Platform describes several actions that governments and political parties might take to ensure the full participation of women in decision-making, such as “commit[ting] themselves to establishing the goal of gender balance in governmental bodies and committees. . . . setting specific targets and implementing measures to substantially increase the number of women with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men.” To ensure that these actions are undertaken by the government, women must become a significant enough voice to push for these actions. Enclosed is an IWPR flyer listing websites with information to help promote the involvement of women in politics and government, and organizations that train women in the skills needed to run for elected positions.

Social Security: Will It Be There When We Retire? Women Will Decide In November

Every politician claims that he or she will save Social Security, but make sure to take a look at these plans to see if the numbers really add up. For analysis of potential impacts of your “own” private account, download (or order) a copy of IWPR’s Why Privatizing Social Security Would Hurt Women: A Response to the Cato Institute’s Proposal for Individual Accounts from our website: www.iwpr.org. Privatizing any portion of Social Security means either big cuts in Social Security benefits or big cuts in other domestic programs—two bad choices for women. It is important that women get the facts on this crucial election issue and share them. The women’s vote is critical to ensure that the safety net for older and disabled people stays in place—for ourselves, our parents and our children’s sake! For more details, see enclosed NCWO brochure.
IWPR Staff Profile

Dr. Barbara Gault, IWPR's Associate Director of Research, is just back from New York after addressing the Economic Empowerment Forum at the United Nations Beijing +5 Conference on women in the low-wage labor market (see Beijing, p. 3).

Dr. Gault is a social psychologist with a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania and a B.A. from the University of Michigan. She came to IWPR from the Office of Children's Health at Albert Einstein Medical Center, where she worked as a research associate on a statewide initiative to improve childhood immunization coverage. At IWPR, Dr. Gault leads the research department and heads the project to provide technical assistance to state partners working on improving welfare policies for women.

Since her arrival at IWPR in 1997, she has authored a number of articles on women and welfare reform and women’s political participation, including one published in the journal Publica. She recently published an article in the psychology journal Cognition and Emotion with John Sabini entitled “The Roles of Empathy, Anger, and Gender in Predicting Attitudes Toward Punitive, Reparative, and Preemptive Public Policies,” based on her dissertation research. Dr. Gault has just completed a book chapter with IWPR Research Fellow Annisah Um'rani, “The Outcomes of Welfare Reform for Women,” for a book to be published by the Poverty and Race Research and Action Council. She is also contributing to an upcoming series of booklets on best practices for job training for low-income women and the labor force experiences of those who leave welfare.

Under Dr. Gault's leadership, the Research Department has grown considerably and now includes ten Ph.D. level and four Master’s level researchers, as well as three research fellows. During the last 18 months, she has led the Institute in developing new research projects in the areas of child care, unemployment insurance, and family leave, and she was instrumental in establishing IWPR’s new public policy listserv, the PuLSE. Dr. Gault has also focused on recruiting senior feminist researchers to join the Institute’s team in the areas of job training, welfare reform, and public policy.

Under her direction, IWPR has dramatically increased outreach and expanded partnerships with state-level advocates on all research projects. With the upcoming release of the third cycle of IWPR’s flagship report series, The Status of Women in the States, Dr. Gault is committed to making it impossible for anyone in a decision-making position not to be aware of the status of women in her or his state!

IWPR Hosts Business Leaders in New York City

On May 24, the Institute welcomed more than 75 business leaders and friends to a panel discussion on the challenges of balancing work and family held at Chez Louis in New York City. Dana Friedman of Bright Horizons Family Solutions (and co-founder of the Families and Work Institute) moderated a conversation between Linda Chavez-Thompson of the AFL-CIO, Gail Shaffer of Business and Professional Women/USA, and Heidi Hartmann, Director and President of IWPR.

The event was inspired by Board member Marcia Worthing's interest in using IWPR’s report, On Common Ground: Prominent Women Talk About Work & Family, to educate and reach out to business leaders. Participants spoke about the work/family issues that most challenged them and the tough decisions they made as they built their careers and raised their families. Flexibility in the workplace and family support were cited as being of primary importance to their success. One attendee discussed the importance of increasing the availability of high-quality child care—including raising child care workers’ wages to ensure stability in child care situations.

The event was organized with the assistance of Ms. Worthing and sponsored by Mullin & Associates/ Lincolnsire, Avon Products, Hearst Publications, Arthur Andersen and Texaco. On Common Ground: Prominent Women Talk About Work & Family is available through the IWPR web site, www.iwpr.org, or by calling IWPR at (202) 785-5100.

Status of Women in the States Reports: Gearing Up for a 2000 Release

Advisory committees in nine states are gaining momentum as the 2000 series of the Status of Women in the States reports is nearing release. With the data collection complete and all nine draft reports written, Amy Cairessa, Study Director, and Suzanne McFadden, States Issues Coordinator, recently traveled to all nine states to meet and discuss the reports with state advisory committee members.

All of the committees are currently working on dissemination plans. The Delaware advisory committee plans to use data from the 1998 series to get women's issues on the platforms of candidates participating in the upcoming state elections. Committee members in Colorado plan to create a mobile display on women's status that will travel across the state. The "States" team, including April Shaw, Research Assistant, and Beth Tipton, Intern, are working hard on the final changes. Kudos to all the committee members whose tireless efforts in organizing and raising money for the dissemination of the reports will no doubt make the 2000 series the most successful yet! The reports are scheduled for release in late November. If you would like to get involved in your state's report release, contact Suzanne McFadden at (202) 785-5100, or by e-mail at mcfadden@iwpr.org.
New Releases

New and Stronger Remedies Are Needed To Reduce Gender-Based Wage Discrimination
Congressional Testimony by Heidi Hartmann
June 2000

On the Hill

On May 11, Heidi Hartmann spoke at a Congressional briefing entitled “How Much is Enough: What Is An Adequate Family Income?” hosted by the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), to release their recent report of the same title. On May 19, IWPR Study Director Cynthia Negrey presented on non-traditional job training at a Congressional Briefing sponsored by the National Council of Women’s Organizations (NCWO). Dr. Hartmann also presented at a Congressional briefing on women and Social Security on May 23. On June 8, Dr. Hartmann testified before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions on gender-based wage discrimination.

In the News

Dr. Hartmann was interviewed on March 29 by the Dorothy Healy Show on WPFW Radio. On May 19, Vicky Lovell discussed the effects of maternal employment on children’s academic development on The Morning Show with Mark Roberts on WERC Radio in Birmingham, AL. Dr. Hartmann participated in a May 26 radio discussion on WNYC/NPR about Social Security for women.


Appearances

IWPR researchers participated in events around the country on a variety of issues, including child care, Social Security reform, gender wage gap, welfare reform, unemployment insurance, and job training.

4/5 – Heidi Hartmann, Center for Economic Policy Research panel, Washington, DC.
4/11 – Heidi Hartmann, Bread for the World, Silver Spring, MD.
4/13-15 – Barbara Gault and Amy Caienza, Women Transforming Congress conference, Norman, OK.
4/28-29 – Liz Schiller, Women’s Funding Network Conference, Los Angeles, CA.
5/5 – Amy Caienza, Institute for a Democratic Future seminar, Washington, DC.
5/6 – Heidi Hartmann, Women and the 2000 Presidential Election forum, Washington, DC.
5/6 – Barbara Gault and Stacie Golin, the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, Chicago, IL.
5/9 – Barbara Gault and Stacie Golin, Midwest Welfare Reform Network, Chicago, IL.
5/12 – Catherine Hill, National Urban League Social Security Forum, Washington, DC.
5/12 – Vicky Lovell, Equal Pay Matters state-wide videoconference, Wilmington, DE.
6/6 – Barbara Gault and Annisah Um’rani, Beijing – 5 Economic Empowerment Forum, New York, NY.
6/2 – Amy Caienza, USAID training program for women leaders in Croatia, Washington, DC.

Shopping For IWPR

Are you in the mood to do a little shopping? Sign up with iGive.com and do your online shopping through their website! A percentage of each purchase is donated directly to IWPR (with no commission or fee). They have links to your favorite retail stores like Amazon.com and jcrew.com. Just forward a copy of your order confirmation to orders@igive.com and they will do the rest. For details, see enclosed flyer. And tell your friends who love to shop that they can do it for a good cause!
for Women’s Policy Research. For more information, contact Danielle Hayot at IWPR, (202) 785-5100.

29-Aug 10 The National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics 40th Annual Conference, Scottsdale, AZ. This year’s conference, “The Dawn of the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities,” will promote the exchange of ideas on the collection, analysis, presentation and application of data in all of the services. Call (480) 991-3388 or (800) 233-1234.

August


15-17 International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) Istanbul 2000 Conference. IAFFE brings together innovative insights from various disciplines to contribute to the development of feminist approaches to economics. The conference will promote the breakdown of traditional disciplinary barriers in order to understand the economic structures and interrelations that affect the lives of men and women. For information and application, contact Prue Hyman, Women’s Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, PO Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand. Tel: +64 4 495 5285 or +64 4 472 1000 ext. 5285, Fax +64 4 495 5046, or email Prue.Hyman@vuw.ac.nz.

21 Women and Aging Conference, cosponsored by IWPR and George Washington University’s Women’s Studies Department will bring together researchers, students and community activists for an intergenerational dialogue. Speakers include Judy Norsigian from the Our Bodies, Ourselves Collective and IWPR’s Lois Shaw. For more information visit the IWPR website at www.iwpr.org.

September

15 NCWO Congressional Briefing on reproductive rights. For more information, contact Julia Ernst at the Center for Reproductive Law and Policy, (202) 530-2975.

21-24 National Coalition of Girls’ Schools will hold a conference entitled “Girls, Women and Money: Financial Empowerment for the 21st Century” in Boston, MA. Economic literacy will be a key ingredient for success in this new millennium. As keynote speaker Joan Perry puts it: “Taking financial control is the last step in our liberation as women.” Call (978) 287-4485.

October

15 - World March of Women 2000
The National Organization for Women’s March for Women’s Rights in Washington, DC. The march’s goal is to call for gender equality and for the elimination of poverty and violence against women. Don’t miss it! Call (202) 628-8669.

20 NCWO Congressional Briefing on Social Security, Washington, DC. For more information, contact Lisa Maatz at OWL, (202) 783-6686.
New Releases

A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics is a new book by Jo Freeman, published by Rowman and Littlefield. The story reveals how American women entered political life and party politics—a room at a time—and laid the foundation for the accelerated progress of the 1960s and 1970s, tracing their progress toward the elections of 2000. See enclosed flyer.

The National Women’s Studies Association 2000 Sales Catalog is now available, with publications, videos, cassettes and more on the latest in women’s studies from across the country. For more information or to get a catalog write to NWSA, 7100 Baltimore Avenue, Suite 500, College Park, MD 20740. To order by phone, call (301) 403-0525 or visit the website at www.nwsa.org/. All orders must be prepaid.

Women’s Equality: An Unfinished Agenda, a new report published by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) in collaboration with 17 other women’s organizations, including IWPR, is now available. This 61-page report assesses the United States government’s actions on implementing the Beijing Platform, 1995-2000. See enclosed flyer for ordering information.

All you need to know about Social Security and voting you can find in a new brochure published by The National Council of Women’s Organizations’ (NCWO) Women and Social Security Project Campaign 2000. The brochure outlines the reasons to vote for candidates who oppose privatization and will keep Social Security a guaranteed part of your retirement income. Enclosed.

Announcements

Make Your Voice Count! The AFL-CIO Working Women’s Department has published an Election Checklist based on their national Ask a Working Women Survey. The Checklist includes a list of women’s top legislative priorities and what they will be looking for in the 2000 Elections. If you haven’t made your list, get a good place to start. Don’t forget to vote and share this information with a friend. See enclosed flyer.

General and Project Support

The Institute is very grateful to its project and general support funders, without whom its work would not be possible.

General and institutional support is provided by an anonymous donor, the Avon Products Foundation, the Brico Fund, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ms. Foundation for Women, and the Open Society Institute.

IWPR would like to thank the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its support of current work on child care workers’ wages. The Institute has just received a grant from the Foundation for Child Development for research on child care advocacy. Funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation support IWPR’s work on unemployment insurance reform. The Ford Foundation supports The Status of Women in the States report series, the Working Group on Social Indicators of Women’s Status, and ongoing research on work and welfare. The Ford Foundation has also awarded IWPR a new grant for a project on paid family leave. Work on women and Social Security is supported by the National Council of Women’s Organizations, AARP, and the Open Society Institute. The Commonwealth Fund for Women’s Health, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees support several other projects.
Join the Institute for Women’s Policy Research and help make a difference in the lives of women and families!

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