

Looking Inside the ballot box: Gender Gaps in Presidential Elections. Insights from the Argentine Experience

José J. Bercoff
Universidad Nacional de Tucumán
jbercoff@face.unt.edu.ar

Oswaldo Meloni¹
Universidad Nacional de Tucumán and RedNIE
omeloni@herrera.unt.edu.ar

Abstract.

Since women were given the right to vote in the first half of the 20th century several studies verify the existence of noticeable differences in women and men voting conduct. Theories explaining such behavior rely mainly on stereotypes, differences in values as well as disparities in self perceptions of men and women. This paper, using a unique and unusual gender-segregated voting booths that was in use in Argentina until 2007, suggests that incentives play a key role explaining the electoral gender gap. Our estimations, that come out from a panel data of five presidential elections at district level, show that the voting gender gap reduces as women acquire the head of household status. That is, as women face analogous incentives to men, their evaluation of the incumbent performance and their policies tend to be similar to males leading to a reduction in the gender gap.

Key words: Gender gap; Economic voting; Elections; Sociotropic voting; Argentina.

¹ Corresponding author. E-mail: omeloni@herrera.unt.edu.ar . Postal address: Universidad Nacional de Tucumán. Avenida Independencia 1900. San Miguel de Tucumán, Argentina (4000)

1. Introduction

Since women were given the right to vote in the first half of the 20th century, the political races in the western hemisphere changed for good. The new constituency, that represented roughly half of the voting population, forced politicians to shift their electoral supply to meet the demand of the female electorate, focusing their platforms and public policies in issues that either ranked lower or were absent in their original agenda.

The initial conjecture about the existence of a gender gap in electoral decisions was supported by several studies that found noticeable differences in women and men voting behavior and in their political party predilections (Kaufmann, 2006) as well as in the temporal conduct with women tending to change their voting preferences more often than men's (Lott and Kenny, 1999)². The explanation of the gender gap started a debate, with some authors suggesting, on the one hand, that men cast their vote following a self-interest set of preferences, or what it is known as *egocentric behavior*, while social issues play a more important role in women's electoral choices, known as *sociotropic behavior* (Welch and Hibbing, 1992; Clarke et al., 2005). Other scholars, remarkably Eisenberg and Ketcham (2004), sustain the opposite, while Kam (2009) asserts that both genders vote similarly regarding the performance of the economy. The arguments that have been given to rationalize that women use egocentric economic judgments less frequently than men were mainly based on the view that there exists differences in values, as well as disparities in self perceptions of men and women, with men more likely to perceive themselves and other males as autonomous and independent and women considering themselves as more interrelated with people and things (Deaux, 1985).

The common factor of this controversy is that the empirical evidence rests exclusively on survey's data gathered before or after the election that are subject to various criticism about data quality that are not easy to circumvent. On one hand, respondents may give socially desirable answers or the answer that they believe are likely to please the poll's sponsor rather than showing their true preference. On the other hand, sample sizes are not usually large enough to reliably estimate the incidence of bogus respondents that do not belong to the district that the survey is inquiring or simply do not vote. The researcher's dependence on

² As stated by Conover (1988) the idea behind the concept of 'gender gap' denotes several connotations from mass participation, differences in voting selections and in political party sympathy as well as in political and ideological matters.

surveys is attributable to the lack of actual voting records because countries rarely assign different polling stations to each gender like has historically occurred in Argentina until 2007. This paper analyzes the determinants of the electoral gender gap using a unique and unusual data set of gender-segregated voting booths, which help getting better insights on electoral decisions. We conjecture that the gender gap is not driven by differences in values or self-perceptions of men and women, as has been conventional in the literature, but by incentives. In the same line of research of Montgomery and Stuart (1999), Eisenberg and Ketcham (2004) and Strom (2014) that point at earnings derived from employment as one of the key factors influencing political preferences in the ballot box, we propose that the head of household status, associated with independent thinking and thus with autonomous electoral behavior, are important determinants of the electoral gender gap. To preview our results that come out from a panel data of five presidential elections at district level, our estimations suggest that the voting gender gap reduces as women move from member of the household to head of household status. That is, as females face similar conditions and stimulus, their evaluation of the incumbent's performance tend to be the same as men.

The paper is organized as follows. Section II summarizes the literature on gender gap. Section III describes the gender gap in Argentine presidential elections. Section IV presents the data and outlines the empirical specification. Section V discusses the empirical results and finally, Section VI summarizes our main contributions to the literature.

2. Related Literature

Research on voting gender gap has tended to focus largely on women electoral behavior. The literature stresses that women follow their own distinctive initiatives when casting their vote which have compelled politicians to update their political platforms and design policies to fulfill the expectations of the new electorate. A common factor in the discussion on the electoral impact of female constituency has been the emphasis on women's preferences rather on incentives.

Some papers suggest that women have different preferences from men on issues such as redistributive policies (Abrams and Settle, 1999; Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005; Giger, 2009; Clots- Figueras, 2010), religion (Blaydes, 2011; Blaydes and Linzer, 2014), trade policies (de Bromhead, 2018) and education (Carrutheres and Wanamaker, 2015). Likewise, Funk and Gathmann (2006) find that relative to males, female voters oppose to defense expenditures

raises and support environmental plans. The controversy on the role of female enfranchising on fiscal expansion also hinges on female preferences. According to Aidt et al. (2006) and Aidt and Dallal (2008), social spending in Western Europe at the beginning of the 20th century experimented an increase because of the female enfranchisement. On the other hand, Krogstrup and Wälti (2011), working with a panel of Swiss cantons, find that female suffrage reduced deficits by a statistically significant amount, and Bravo-Ortega et al. (2018) conclude, from the analysis of 46 countries, that the introduction of female electoral rights did not increase, on average, the social and total government expenditure. Likewise, Funk and Gathmann (2006) find larger gender differences regarding the scope than the size of government. Nevertheless, independently of the sign of the relationship in all these studies there is a consensus among these scholars that economic policies changed because of the inclusion in the electorate of a large number of individuals (in fact, half of a given country's population) with different preferences.

Some other studies have contributed characterizing each gender's preferences. For example, the distinction between *Sociotropic* and *Pocketbook* reasons as the main drivers for the economic vote has been a fertile ground for gender discussion (Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000). The general hypothesis of this argument is that males tend to use self-interest reasons (*egotropic* motives) when casting their vote compared with the more social motivations followed by women (*sociotropic* causes). Following this classification of the voters sorted by gender, several researchers suggest that women apparently tend to be more risk adverse than men, which affects their voting decisions and consequently would explain, at least partially, their *sociotropic* electoral behavior (Jianakoplos and Bernasek, 1998; Sunden and Surette, 1998; Stark and Zawojka, 2015). Nevertheless, it is not clear which is the mechanism that links risk aversion and the likelihood to engage in sociotropic voting sorted by gender. Thus, there is neither conclusive nor convincing arguments in the literature endorsing preferences as the main engine of the gender voting behavior.

In fact, these conventional views attributing *sociotropic* and *egotropic* electoral behavior to women and men, respectively could be perceived as a way to stereotype the behavior of the voters which has been challenged by several authors. For instance, Kam (2009) finds no evidence suggesting that women vote more sociotropically than men. Her study of the U.S. presidential elections for the period 1980-2004 shows more similarity than difference in women and men's economic voting. Although the author also examines whether time-varying characteristics, such as gender role orientations, level of education, or labor force

participation and occupational status, have any influence on gender voting, none of such hypothesis are supported. Conversely, Eisenberg and Ketcham (2004) suggest that the electoral gap is caused by the income disparities between genders. They conclude, working with U.S presidential elections at county-level for the period 1992-2000, that females are even more concern than males about self-interest issues sustaining that this type of electoral behavior is linked to differences in income gaps. The authors speculate that this result is driven by the high proportion of women heads of the families of single parent households. Likewise, Storm (2014) also points out to the income as a key determinant of female voters. Her evidence, from two British cohorts, born in 1958 and 1970, containing detailed information on political voting behavior and household and individual incomes over the life cycle, shows that the importance of individual earnings on voting behavior is contingent on employment. She finds out that women vote according to their husband's income if she earn less than their spouse, but if the wife is the maximum earner of the household or works fulltime, she votes more according to her own earnings.

It is interesting to note that even some authors that support the idea of different gender motivations toward the vote allow us for a reinterpretation of their arguments. This is the case of Clots- Figueras (2010) who alerts that in India, female legislators in seats reserved for lower castes and disadvantaged tribes favor "women-friendly" laws and distributive policies, such as land reforms. In contrast, female legislators from higher castes do not have any impact on "women-friendly" laws, oppose land reforms and reduce social expenditure. In turn, in the case of Europe, Giger (2009) warns that Women tended to vote more for conservative parties in the 1970s, while in the new millennium they have given higher support to left parties (fostering distributive policies). Both studies contribute to open up the debate regarding the possibility of finding an argument supporting the incentives' argument as the actual motivation behind the female constituency and not an intrinsic set of features that differentiate genders.

The underneath discussion on whether it is reasonable to consider different voters as agents sorted only by their gender without taking into consideration other personal characteristics brings into attention a crucial inquiry, highlighted by our study, as why should be any difference between male and female preferences when voting if they were confronted to similar motivations. Our argument is that the gender gap is rooted in the incentives that the voter face rather than idiosyncratic features of the gender. And these incentives strongly

depend, among other possible characteristics, on how men and women interact in the labor market and on the role each of them plays within the household.

Survey data and actual voting records

As stated before, most of the empirical studies that investigate difference in gender voting based their conclusions on surveys. There are a few exceptions worth mentioning. Panzer and Paredes (1991) study the 1989 general election in Chile taking advantage, as in our paper, of gender-segregated voting booths. Their cross-section study finds that women care more about long-run unemployment than men and that males are more prone to respond to recent changes in economic indicators compared with females. The authors conjecture that women shape their political preferences motivated by issues such as family, security and stability rather than recent economic changes. Likewise, Lewis (2004) uses actual voting records from the city of Santiago de Chile to show that the gender gap narrows as the socioeconomic status increases, and that female voters tend to be greater supporters, compared with men, to more conservative candidates. Importantly, Lewis also calls the attention on the influence of the gender gap in tight electoral races.

Koppl-Turyna (2020) is another of the few studies that use actual voting records to conclude about the gender voting differences. Her investigation exploits a data set from the city of Vienna that recorded female and male ballots separately from 1954 to 1991. The empirical evidence from a panel of 23 Vienna districts over eighth elections shows the existence of a voting gender gap that changed dramatically through the decades, with males shifting from left-wing positions in the 50s and 60s, to right-wing platform since the 70s. Additionally, the author finds no large systematic differences in turnout.

For the Argentine case, the exception to the survey-based gender gap studies is Lewis (1971) who uses data from 1958 to 1965 sorted by districts to study the influence of gender differences on the voting behavior. Although the author only makes a descriptive statistical analysis of partial data, it was an important improvement considering the lack of empirical studies. He concludes that women cast their vote in a more conservative manner than men, contrary to the idea that female vote in a more liberal way. However, there is no explanation of the reasons underneath that behavior. He also acknowledges that female's turnout was greater than men's participation, contrary to the general belief of the time that pointed to a more active political involvement from men compared to women's.

3. Women at the polls in Argentina

Argentina is organized as a federal republic constituted by 23 provinces and one autonomous city, the national capital, Buenos Aires. The Executive Branch headed by a President is elected by universal suffrage. The National Constitution, enacted in 1853, appointed the president for a six-year term and prohibited the immediate reelection. The amendment of 1994 allowed the President to hold two consecutive mandates but shortened it to four years and established a two-round election system (*ballotage*).

During the 20th century democracy was interrupted 6 times by *coup d'etat* (1930, 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976) which complicates long-term analysis of economic voting. Democracy returned in 1983, and since then Argentina has held 8 consecutive presidential elections. From 1983 to 2007 women and men voted in different polling places and the records were kept separately which opens up the door to analyzing gender gap in voting behavior³. This mechanism changed from the presidential election held in 2011, when the electoral rolls were mixed interrupting the availability of electoral data sorted by gender. Voting is mandatory in Argentina for citizen from 18 to 70 years old, so all citizens are automatically registered to vote but they must cast their ballot in the district where they have established their residence. During the period under study changing the district of residency implied a cumbersome bureaucratic procedure which resulted in significant quantity of citizens that permanently lived outside their declared district of residence. Since absentee and early voting are not allowed in Argentina, turnout is mostly affected by citizens that, at the election date, were outside their district of residence.⁴

As expected, in most districts women are more numerous than men. Table 1 shows the ratio of women to men for registration, total votes and positive votes in presidential elections at country level from 1983 to 2007⁵. On average women outnumbered men by 3.9% in registration rolls and by 6.5 % and 6.7% in total and positive votes, respectively showing the potential importance of women in defining close elections.

³ From the very first election that women participate in 1951, there were different polling places for men and women (Bercoff, 2019).

⁴ The obligation to vote is waived for those citizens that are 500 kilometers outside their legal residence. The amount of the fines to those citizens that fail to cast their vote are very low as well as the probability of being fined at all.

⁵ Positive Votes are obtained by subtracting blank and spoiled ballots from Total Votes.

Table 1. *Registration, Total Votes and Positive Votes: ratio of Women to Men: Presidential elections 1983-2007*

Category	1983	1989	1995	1999	2003	2007	Average
Registration	1.032	1.036	1.036	1.044	1.049	1.039	1.039
Total Votes	1.069	1.060	1.057	1.061	1.068	1.078	1.065
Positive Votes	1.073	1.059	1.059	1.066	1.059	1.084	1.067

Source: own calculations based on data from *Dirección Nacional Electoral*

Note: Due to missing data, the ratios for Total and Positive Votes were computed using 24 districts for 1983; 20 districts for 1989 and 1995; 18 districts for 2003, 17 districts for 1999 and 20 districts for 2007.

To stimulate the interest of the reader, Table 2 presents the observed extreme values of the gender gap for the votes received by the incumbent in presidential elections across jurisdictions.

Table 2. *Gender Gap in Argentina: extreme values in Presidential elections: 1983-2007*

Election Year	Incumbent Party	Incumbent President	Largest Gender Gap (Men vote to incumbent - Women vote to incumbent)	
			District	Gap (%)
1983	-	Bignone (Military)	Santa Cruz	-9.2*
1989	UCR	Alfonsín	CABA	-7.3
1995	PJ	Menem	Río Negro	-6.3
1999	PJ	Menem	Tierra del Fuego	3.9
2003	PJ	Duhalde	Santiago del Estero	-5.1
2007	FPV	Kirchner	La Rioja	4.7

Source: own calculations based on data from *Dirección Nacional Electoral*.

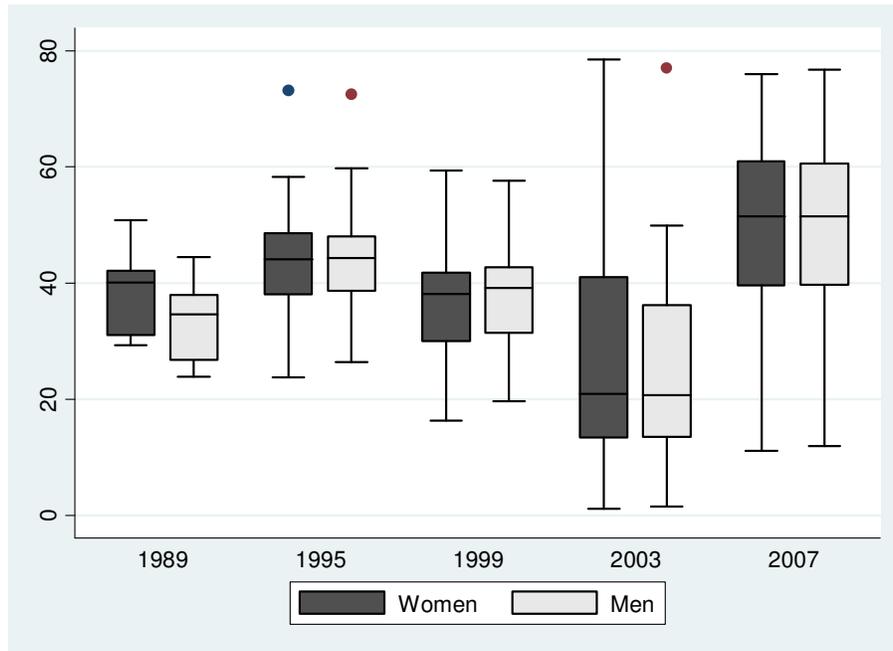
Notes: Gender Gap is computed from total votes to the incumbent.

PJ= Partido Justicialista; UCR= Unión Cívica Radical; CABA= Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires.

* Since there was no party allied with the military, we compute the gender gap of the votes received by UCR party, the winner of the 1983 election.

Figure 1 exhibits additional descriptive evidence on the importance of the gender gap. The *Box Plot* for each presidential election at province level shows noteworthy differences between men and women voting to the incumbent in the 1989 and 2003 elections, some disparities in the two elections carried out in the decade of 1990, and minor discrepancies in 2007 election.

Figure 1. *Percentage of Women and Men Votes obtained by the incumbent in Presidential elections.*



Source: own calculations based on data from *Dirección Nacional Electoral*

Notes: vertical axe is expressed in percentages and horizontal axe is Presidential Election year. Due to missing data, boxes were computed using 24 districts for 1983; 20 districts for 1989 and 1995; 18 districts for 2003 and 17 districts for 1999 and 20 for 2007.

4. Data Description and Empirical Specification

To explore the determinants of the Gender Gap we estimate the following equation:

$$\mathbf{GenderGap}_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 H_{it}^W + \alpha_2 H_{it}^M + \alpha_3 Controls_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (\mathbf{I})$$

Gender Gap is defined as the difference between the percentage of votes obtained by the political party of the incumbent president in men's ballot boxes, V_{it}^M , and the percentage of votes obtained by the political party of the incumbent president in women's ballot boxes, V_{it}^W , in the presidential election held on date t in district i . That is,

$$\mathbf{GenderGap}_{it} = V_{it}^M - V_{it}^W$$

Since we are interested in determining the variables that increase or decrease the gap, regardless the incumbent was punished or benefited by a particular gender, we compute the absolute value of Gender Gap as our dependent variable.

Main variables of interest

We focus our attention on two variables describing the labor market. *Household^M* and *Household^W*, defined by the Argentine Bureau of Statistics (known by the acronym INDEC in Spanish) as the percentage of men (M) and women (W), ages 14 and over, respectively, that are Head of Household. That is, they have the responsibility of providing goods and services for the household⁶. The percentage of women head of household grew, on average, 104.7% during the period under study, going from 8.6% in the presidential period 1984-1989 to 17.6% in 2004-2007. We speculate that females and males facing comparable incentives are likely to have similar evaluations of the incumbent performance and, as a result, their behavior toward the vote should not diverge. Hence, as the percentage of women head of household increase, we expect the absolute value of gender gap to decline. Table 3 shows the performance of our main variables of interest classified by gender in each presidential period.

Table 3. *Percentage of individuals that are Head of households classified by gender in each presidential period.*

Presidential Period	Head of Household			
	Men		Women	
	Avg	Std dev	Avg	Std dev
1984-1989	36.3	6.30	8.6	2.19
1990-1994	36.3	5.41	9.5	2.23
1995-1999	41.1	4.75	13.0	2.68
2000-2003	40.4	5.08	15.2	2.65
2004-2007	39.2	5.46	17.6	2.91

Note: averages over the presidential period

Control variables

In addition to evaluating the role of heads of household on the electoral gender gap, we include a series of socioeconomic and political control variables which have been found in the extant literature to be relevant for incumbent party electoral success (Lewis -Beck, and Paldam, 2000; Jones et al. 2012).

The set of socioeconomic variables contains the average over the presidential period of the rate of Unemployment for men and women (coded *Unemployment^M* and *Unemployment^W*, respectively), the real Gross Regional Product per capita (*GRP*), the Property Crime Rate per

⁶ According INDEC), the status of Head of Household is granted by the rest of the persons living in the house, and there is only one head per household.

100,000 inhabitants (*Crime*), the Homicide Rate per 100,000 inhabitants (*Homicide*) and the Infant Mortality rate (*Mortality*).

Four variables are employed to control for political factors. Two of them are dummy variables that measures the impact of female candidates on the voting gender gap. The variable coded *Opposition* takes the value 1 in the home districts of women running for president of opposition parties at election t, and 0 otherwise. Similarly, the variable called *Incumbent* takes the value 1 in the home districts of women running for president of incumbent parties at election t, and 0 otherwise. We expect *Opposition* and *Incumbent* to be negatively and positively correlated to Gender gap, respectively. We speculate that a female candidate usually gets the support of female constituency but no the rejection of male constituency. The other political controls are the “normal” share of men and female votes for the incumbent party in each province (coded *Party^M* and *Party^W*), reflecting the incumbent party’s baseline level of electoral support (the result of party identification, ideological affinity, and clientelistic networks). These party vote variables are operationalized as the share of the valid vote won by the party in men’s and women’s polling places in the biennial Chamber of Deputies election held two years prior to the year of the respective presidential election⁷.

Table 4 presents some descriptive statistics of the variables used in the empirical analysis for the full sample period, 1989-2007. During this lapse, Argentina went through several economic and political turbulences that are reflected in high dispersion of socioeconomic variables, both through time and across units of observation. The dependent variable also shows significant variability across time and districts, although lower than socioeconomic variables. The largest difference in our sample corresponds to the City of Buenos Aires in 1989 where the incumbent party obtained 7.3% less votes in men polling booths than in women’s.

Our study covers five presidential elections from 1989 to 2007. We excluded the 1983 election because there was no party allied with the military regime, so we could not treat any party as incumbent in that election. We obtained electoral data classified by gender for 23 out

⁷ Members of the Chamber of Deputies are elected on closed party lists from multi-member electoral districts (the provinces) using proportional representation, with the entire Chamber renewing by halves (one-half of the province’s legislative delegation) every two years.

of 24 districts. The province of Río Negro was excluded from our sample because there is missing data in more than two presidential elections⁸.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Gender Gap (%)	104	-0.40	2.76	-7.33	4.66
Gender Gap (Absolute value) (%)	104	2.02	1.91	0.01	7.33
Main variables of interest					
Head Household- Men (%)	115	38.6	5.8	28.2	55.6
Head Household- Women (%)	114	13.0	4.3	5.4	25.9
Socioeconomic Control variables					
Unemployment rate (men) (%)	115	9.7	4.2	1.7	19.7
Unemployment rate (women) (%)	115	10.6	4.8	1.3	21.7
GRP per capita (pesos of 2004)	115	394.3	287.7	94.6	1765.0
Property Crime Rate (Offenses per 100,000 inhabitants)	115	1871.9	946.5	540.0	4795.5
Homicides (Offenses per 100,000 inhabitants)	115	7.9	7.2	0.0	39.7
Infant Mortality Rate (‰)	115	20.1	6.8	8.2	38.4
Political Control variables					
Party support – Men (%)	101	36.1	11.7	8.7	67.7
Party support – Women (%)	101	36.6	12.2	7.8	69.6
Incumbent (dummy)	115	0.009	0.932	0	1
Opposition (dummy)	115	0.035	0.184	0	1

5. Discussion of results

We estimate equations (I) by Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) with robust standard errors. We include province-fixed-effects to pick up time-invariant heterogeneity between the provinces and time-fixed-effects to control for common unobserved time effects in voting behavior.

Results for our basic specification are reported in Table 5. Model (I) incorporates all explanatory variables whereas model (II) includes only socioeconomics and model (III) only political controls.

In the three regressions presented, the estimated coefficient for one of our focal variables, the percentage of women that are head of household (*Household^W*) is always in the hypothesized direction and significant. This provides clear support for our premise that the voting gender gap diminish as the percentage of women head of household goes up. That is, we claim that

⁸ Río Negro accounts for 1.4% of the total register voters. We also have missing data in two elections for the province of San Luis and in one election for the provinces of Chubut, Formosa, Salta and Tierra del Fuego.

similar economic incentives induce to comparable electoral behavior: as women change their role from being just a family member to become head of the household, they face analogous incentives to men (that have maintained a high proportion of head of households in the period under study), and their evaluation of the incumbent performance and their policies tend to be similar to males leading to a reduction in the gender gap.

Table 5. *Determinants of Gender Gap in Presidential Elections*

Dependent variable: Ln of Absolute value of Gender Gap

Observations: 115

Districts: 23

Regressions include time effects

Variable	Full model (I)	Only socioeconomic controls (II)	Only political controls (III)
Household ^W	-0.2910** (0.1288)	-0.2559* (0.1281)	-0.2386* (0.1371)
Household ^M	-0.0115 (0.0644)	-0.0108 (0.0546)	-0.0143 (0.0591)
Unemployment ^W	-0.1193 (0.0831)	-0.0804 (0.0670)	
Unemployment ^M	0.0865 (0.0872)	0.0627 (0.0936)	
GRP	0.0024* (0.0014)	0.0025* (0.0012)	
Crime	-0.0004 (0.0004)	-0.0002 (0.0003)	
Homicide	0.0307* (0.0173)	0.0249 (0.0179)	
Mortality	-0.1242* (0.0650)	-0.1581** (0.0647)	
Party ^W	-0.0845 (0.0835)		-0.0600 (0.0784)
Party ^M	0.0711 (0.0872)		0.0478 (0.0823)
Incumbent	1.3236** (0.5577)		1.0841* (0.6189)
Opposition	-0.2813 (0.4870)		-0.0597 (0.5326)
Constant	8.1690*** (2.7530)	6.8762*** (2.1534)	5.1124* (2.5639)
R -Sq within	0.5752	0.5252	0.5151
R - Sq between	0.1433	0.2398	0.0643
R - Sq overall	0.3071	0.3151	0.2681

Note: *** significant at the 1% level; ** significant at the 5% level; * significant at the 10% level. Standard Errors in parentheses, below coefficients.

Put it differently, our results show that it is hard to sustain the argument that intrinsic differences between men and women spurs their unequal electoral behavior. Their conduct may differ with respect to different issues but the underneath reasons of such dissimilarities, and their voting responsiveness, are the uneven incentives they face. Once those incentive converge, so does the electoral behavior. In this respect, the role played by an individual within the household is crucial to understand how those agents respond to the incumbent's policies regardless the gender. Our results support the previous studies by Eisenberg and Ketcham (2004) and Strom (2014) that focus on income derived from employment as a key determinant of the electoral gender gap.

Conversely, *Household^M* shows the expected sign but is not significant. This is rather a expected result given the low variation (relatively to women) of the percentage of men heads of household both through time and across districts. Socioeconomic control variables show some interesting results. The positive sign of the rate of homicides suggests that there are different evaluations of men and women on safety issues. On the contrary, the negative estimated coefficient for the infant mortality rate implies that policies tending to reduce this indicator closes the gap. The only political control variable that is statistically significant in Models (I) and (III), *Incumbent*, shows positive estimated coefficients indicating that a female candidate for the incumbent party widens the electoral gender gap in her home province.

6. Final Remarks

In most of western democracies women constitute the majority of the voters. Understanding their relative response to key socioeconomic issues is crucial to characterize the complex process of voting. If women and men voted the same way, or if there were no significant difference between their voting behavior, the study of gender voting would not be relevant. But if gender differences towards voting arise, the topic becomes germane.

This paper is a contribution to this research line. Relying on a unique data set obtained from actual voting records from Argentine presidential elections for the period 1983-2007, we find that the voting gender gap reduces as more women acquire the role of head of household. That is, as females tend to attain similar labor status as men, which is usually highly correlated with the relative gender income, their evaluation of the incumbent's performance tend to be similar to men. In other words, it is not intrinsic differences between men and

women what triggers their unequal electoral behavior but the uneven incentives they face. Our paper departs considerable from the predominant literature on gender gap that rely mostly on surveys and stresses differences in values, as well as disparities in self perceptions of men and women, to explain the electoral gender gap. Moreover, some researchers have approached the topic using egocentric-sociotropic framework that implies a stereotyped view of genders and provides mixed and sometimes confusing results. As in Montgomery and Stuart (1999), Eisenberg and Ketcham (2004) and Strom (2014), our paper emphasizes the importance of the labor market, in particular, the percentage of women that are head of household, to explain the electoral gender gap.

Acknowledgments

We thank Julio Elias and participants of the Regional Science Association International Meeting (SAER) and Argentine Economic Association Meeting (AAEP) for comments and suggestions to earlier version of this paper and to Laia Kaliman, Franco Domínguez Paredes and Agustina Zulli for their research assistance. All remaining errors are ours. We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Secretaría de Ciencia, Arte e Innovación Tecnológica de la Universidad Nacional de Tucumán (CIUNT) Grant PIUNT 26/F 612. The usual disclaimer applies.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Aidt, T. and Dallal, B. 2008. “Female voting power: the contribution of women’s suffrage to the growth of social spending in Western Europe (1869–1960)”. *Public Choice* 134: 391-417.
- Aidt, T; Dutta, Jayasri and Loukoianova, E. 2006. “Democracy Comes to Europe: Franchise Extension and Fiscal Outcomes 1830-1938”. *European Economic Review* 50: 249-283.
- Alesina, A. and La Ferrara, E. 2005. “Preferences for redistribution in the land of opportunities”. *Journal of Public Economics* 89: 897-931.
- Bercoff, J. 2019. “Who Voted for Perón? Essays on the Argentine mid-20th century Presidential Elections”. PhD Thesis. Universidad Carlos III.

- Blaydes, L. 2011. "Elections and Distributive Politics in Mubarak's Egypt". Cambridge University Press.
- Blaydes, L. and Linzer, D. 2014. "The Political Economy of Women's Support for Fundamentalist Islam". *World Politics* 60 (4).
- Bravo-Ortega, C., Eterovic, N. and Paredes, V. 2018. "What do women want? Female suffrage and the size of government". *Economic Systems* 42(1): 132-150
- Carruthers, C. and Wanamaker, M. 2015. "Municipal Housekeeping: The impact of women's suffrage on public education". NBER Working Paper #20864.
- Conover, P. 1988. "Feminists and the Gender Gap". *Journal of Politics*, 50 (4): 985-1010.
- Clarke, H., Stewart, M., Ault, M., Elliott, E. 2005. "Men, women, and the dynamics of presidential approval". *British Journal of Political Science* 35 (1): 31-51.
- Clots-Figueras, I. 2010. "Women in politics. Evidence from the Indian States". *Journal of Public Economics* 95: 664-690.
- Deaux, Kay. 1985. "Sex and Gender." *Annual Review of Psychology* 36:49-81.
- de Bromhead, A. 2018. "Women Voters and Trade Protectionism in the Interwar Years". *Oxford Economic Papers* 70(1): 22-46.
- Eisenberg, D. and Ketcham, J. 2004. "Economic voting in U.S. presidential elections: who blames whom for what". *Topics in Economic Analysis & Policy*. Volume 4(1). Article 19.
- Funk, P. and Gathmann, C. 2006. "What women want: suffrage, female voter preferences and the scope of government". Stanford University Center for International Development. WP 285.
- Giger, N. 2009. "Towards a modern gender gap in Europe? A comparative analysis of voting behavior in 12 countries". *The Social Science Journal* 46: 474-492.
- Jianakoplos, N., Bernasek, A. 1998. "Are women more risk averse?" *Economic Inquiry* 36: 620-630.
- Jones, M., Meloni, O. and Tommasi, M. 2012. "Voters as Fiscal Liberals. Incentives and Accountability in Federal Systems". *Economics and Politics* 24(2): 135-156.
- Kam, C. 2009. "Gender and economic voting, revisited". *Electoral Studies* 28: 615-624.
- Kaufmann, K. 2006. "The gender gap. Political Science & Politics". PSOnline www.apsanet.org.
- Köppl-Turyna, M. 2020. "Gender Gap in Voting: Evidence from Actual Ballots". Agenda Austria Working Paper 18.
- Krogstrup, S. and Wälti, S. 2011. "Women and Budget Deficits". *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 113(3): 712-728
- Lewis, P. 1971. "The Female Vote in Argentina 1958-1965". *Comparative Political Studies* 3: 425-41.
- Lewis, P. 2004. "The Gender Gap in Chile". *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 36 (4): 719-742.
- Lewis-Beck, M. and Paldam, M. 2000. "Economic voting: an introduction". *Electoral Studies*, 19, 113-121.

- Lott, J. and Kenny, L. 1999. "Did Women's Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government?" *Journal of Political Economy* 107(6): 1163-1198.
- Montgomery, R. and Stuart, C. 1999. "Sex and fiscal desire". Department of Economics, UCSB Working Paper.
- Panzer, J. y Paredes, R. 1991. "The role of economic issues in elections. The case of the 1988 chilean presidential referendum". *Public Choice* 71: 51-59.
- Stark, O. and Zawojkska, E. 2015. "Gender differentiation in risk-taking behavior: On the relative risk aversion of single men and single women". *Economics Letters* 137: 83-87
- Strom, M. 2014. "How husbands and wives vote". *Electoral Studies* 35:215-229
- Sunden, A. and Surette, B. 1998. "Gender differences in the allocation of assets in retirement savings plans". *American Economic Review* 88 (2):207-211.
- Welch, S. and Hibbing, J. 1992. "Financial conditions, gender and voting in American national elections". *Journal of Politics* 54: 197-213.