



## 19th amendment shapes elections 90 years later

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Ninety years after the 19th amendment guaranteed women the right to vote, their impact at the ballot box not only influences who wins elections, it shapes the debate along the way, experts say.

Not only do women outnumber men overall in the U.S. population, but they also are more likely to register to vote and to take the trouble to cast a ballot.

And, as more than 50 years of exit polls showed, women don't vote the same as men.

"Because of personal experience, they are more likely to get items on the agenda beneficial to women," said UGA political science professor Charles Bullock, pointing out that women are more likely to be single parents, for example.

The difference was obvious by the 1950s, when proportionally more women than men supported Dwight Eisenhower for president.

But beginning with the 1980 election, pollsters have seen women's vote shift more Democratic.

In 1980, 54 percent of men voters chose Ronald Reagan, but only 46 percent of women did.

In every election since, Republicans have fared better with men than women, while Democrats polled better among women.

In 2008, women's votes in key states made the difference for Barack Obama, said Susan Carroll of Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics.

Nationwide, Obama outpolled John McCain by just 1 percent among men, but by 13 percent among women.

The gap isn't strictly about party; women approach many issues differently, said Susan Scanlan, executive director of the Washington-based Women's Research and Education Institute.

"Women vote for butter instead of guns," Scanlan said. "They are more domestically focused than internationally, more environmentally conscious, and stronger supporters of education. They are not as strong on law and order and defense, as far as spending."

"Women tend to be more sensitive to policies involving women's and children's issues, health issues and equal pay," said Susan MacManus, a public administration and political science professor at the University of South Florida.

The female vote is not monolithic, and in some states, conservative Republican women are the majority, she said.

But if women couldn't vote, U.S. politics would be a lot different than what it is today, Carroll said.

"We would have probably Republican control right now, a much more conservative government and more conservative policies," Carroll said. "There's no question that women have pushed the agenda in a more family-friendly, compassionate direction."

And because women voters are a growing majority, elected officials have to pay attention to the women's vote, Carroll said.

"Politicians now have to pay attention to issues that affect women and issues that women care about," she said.

The issues that women care about usually begin with the family, said Alice Kinman, one of two women on the 10-member Athens-Clarke County Commission.

"There's been more attention paid to the things that make children's lives better," she said. "I think what that does overall is that what's good for children is good for just about everybody else."

Many studies have shown that women in elected office not only may have different priorities, but often govern in a different way than men, Bullock said.

"Male office-holders are more likely to have a zero-sum approach (where some people win and some lose). Women are more likely to come up with compromise," Bullock said.

Kinman sees that consensus-building trait in Athens Mayor Heidi Davison, who gets people of differing viewpoints together to work out solutions, she said. Gwen O'Looney, the first woman to become Athens-Clarke mayor, did the same thing, Kinman said.

"I don't know if that's a woman thing or not," Kinman said, "but I associate it with mothers and schoolteachers and people who are focused on managing a group of people, but not necessarily on getting credit for the accomplishments of the group."

But the younger generations of men may be changing their styles to become more collaborative, said Kinman.

"A lot of the younger men have grown up in a world where equality was the norm. It's hard to know," she said.

Especially in Southern states, men outnumber women in state legislatures, but women may be poised to make big gains, MacManus said.

A majority of students in American colleges now are female, law school enrollment is more than 50 percent female, and medical school enrollment also is about evenly divided.

Those are America's future leaders, she said.