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The Gender Gap and the Women's Vote in 2012 Setting the Record Straight

Media coverage this election season has featured some confusing mislabeling of the gender gap and women's voting patterns. To clarify:

The Gender Gap in voting is the difference between the percentages of women and men who support a given candidate, generally the leading or winning candidate. It is the gap *between* the genders, not *within* a gender. Even if women and men favor the same candidate, they may do so by different margins, resulting in a gender gap.

$$[\% \text{Women for Leading Candidate}] - [\% \text{Men for Leading Candidate}] = \text{Gender Gap}$$

The Women's Vote describes the behavior of women as a voting bloc or the divisions among women voters for or against a given candidate. It is the percentage-point advantage that one candidate has over the other among women voters – that is, the difference in support for the major party candidates among women voters.

$$[\% \text{Women for Obama}] - [\% \text{Women for Romney}] = \text{Women's Vote}$$

Gender Gap Facts:

- There has been a gender gap in every presidential election since 1980. In the 2008 election, women were 7 percentage points more likely than men to vote for Barack Obama (56% of women vs. 49% of men), according to the exit poll conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.
- In the 2012 election, a gender gap is apparent in support of Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, both nationwide and in battleground states. See CAWP's [Women's Vote Watch 2012](#) for the most up-to-date numbers.

Women's Voting Facts:

- Women vote in higher numbers than men and have done so in every election since 1964. In 2008, 9.7 million more women than men voted.
- Women have voted at higher rates than men since 1980. In 2008, 60.4% of eligible female adults went to the polls, compared to 55.7% of eligible male adults.
- More women than men register to vote. Some 78.1 million women were registered to vote in 2008, compared to 68.2 million men.
- Women are late deciders and make up a higher number of undecided and swing voters than men. Women are 55% of undecided likely voters in the latest Battleground Tracking Poll conducted by Lake Snell Perry & Associates and the Tarrance Group (October 15-18).

For a more detailed analysis, see ["What is the Gender Gap? And What Does it Mean in 2012?"](#)

About CAWP

The Center for American Women and Politics, a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is a university-based research, education and public service center. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's changing relationship to politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP is a leading authority in its field and a respected bridge between the academic and political worlds.

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