

ACCEPTING A WOMAN PRESIDENT

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BACKGROUND In the spring of 1972 the National Opinion Research Center asked a probability sample of United States citizens the following question: "If your party nominated a woman for President, would you vote for her if she were qualified for the job?" The same question was researched again in 1974 and again in 1977. The same universe of noninstitutionalized English-speaking people aged 18 or older in the continental United States was used each time to generate a block quota sample of 1161 in 1972, a block quota sample of 1484 in 1974, and a full probability sample of 1530 in 1977.

Ferree (1974) used data from both the National Opinion Research Center and the American Institute of Public Opinion, and described the results of asking a similar question of the United States public six times from 1958 to 1972. She noted that 1972 marked a sharp change in attitude. She reported that in 1958, 55% would vote for a woman, and that this percentage stayed fairly constant through the 1960's, but increased considerably in 1972. This increase was particularly marked among young educated women. Similarly, education was unsystematically related to their willingness through the first five data sets, but became strongly and linearly related to it in 1972. Men had been more willing than women to vote for a woman until 1972. Ferree optimistically concluded that these recent shifts toward less prejudice toward women would continue in a linear fashion in the future. The focus of the present research is to examine data collected since Ferree's analysis to determine what has occurred in people's willingness to vote for a woman for President, and to find the relation of sex, age, education, and other demographic variables to this issue.

FINDINGS Ferree's optimism was not fully warranted by the more recent data. In 1972, 70.0% indicated that they would vote for a woman; 77.5% so indicated in 1974 but 76.9% said they would vote for a woman in 1977. To determine whether this apparent trend of increase between 1972 and 1974, with a leveling off in 1977 was significant, we used analysis of variance. We transformed the voting ratios by coding a "Yes" response as 2.00, "don't know", or no answer as 1.00, and "No" as 0.00. The pattern of responses is shown in Table 1:

TABLE 1: WOULD YOU VOTE
FOR A WOMAN FOR PRESIDENT?

	Code	1972	1974	1977
Yes	2.00	1127	1150	1177
?	1.00	80	51	46
No	0.00	404	283	307
Total		1611	1487	1530

Each response was divided by 2.00 to convert the scale to unity. On this basis, the weighted means were .72 in 1972, .79 in 1974, and .78 in 1977. These differences are statistically significant ($p=.0001$), suggesting that the willingness to vote for a woman may have peaked. Since a mean of 1.00 would represent a "Yes" response for everyone in the sample, a mean of .79 indicates a marked increase and a tremendous degree of favor toward voting for a woman.

Analysis of variance was used to determine whether difference in willingness to vote for a woman by sex, age, education, and 15 other demographic variables were significant. All differences except for social class were statistically significant ($p=.0001$). The very small number of respondents indicating social class other than "Middle class" reduced the variance by social class.

TABLE 2: WOULD VOTE FOR A WOMAN PRESIDENT BY YEAR & DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLE
(Scale: 0.0 - 1.00)

Variable	Explained Variation	1972		1974		1977	
		Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
<u>Sex</u>	0.54%						
Female		.73	806	.80	793	.76	837
Male		.73	807	.80	691	.81	692
<u>Age</u>	4.27%						
10-29		.82	400	.90	380	.89	368
30-39		.72	277	.85	286	.86	303
40-49		.72	298	.83	235	.78	255
50-59		.73	271	.73	242	.81	267
60+		.67	362	.65	335	.54	330
<u>Race</u>	0.01%						
Black		.78	261	.77	173	.78	176
White		.71	1348	.80	1304	.79	1339
<u>Politics</u>	0.77%						
Democratic		.72	762	.79	619	.78	675
Independent		.78	419	.86	457	.81	505
Republican		.69	357	.73	326	.75	333
<u>Resided at 16</u>	1.64%						
Rural		.67	487	.69	506	.72	514
Under 50,000		.73	500	.84	438	.81	524
50,000-250,000		.72	198	.85	192	.84	187
Suburb		.78	91	.87	123	.89	88
250,000+		.78	334	.84	222	.80	211
<u>Region</u>	0.26%						
New England		.79	90	.78	71	.86	62
Mid Atlantic		.78	298	.81	257	.79	239
East north central		.74	305	.81	324	.82	342
West north central		.73	141	.82	105	.71	114
South Atlantic		.67	218	.72	282	.76	313
East south central		.70	84	.75	75	.72	76
West south central		.66	197	.81	120	.80	119
Mountain		.66	56	.95	55	.89	61
Pacific		.77	224	.81	195	.77	204
<u>Marital status</u>	1.84%						
Divorced		.73	65	.85	76	.83	103
Married		.73	1160	.80	1065	.79	975
Never wed		.79	210	.85	184	.89	225
Separated		.80	39	.73	38	.73	62
<u>Children</u>	0.78%						
None		.76	373	.86	226	.85	256
One		.70	240	.80	226	.79	256
Two		.76	340	.79	319	.78	356
Three		.73	276	.81	245	.77	229
Four+		.67	376	.72	355	.72	292
<u>Work status</u>	1.45%						
Employed		.75	909	.82	789	.85	921
Retired		.65	144	.71	167	.65	152
Unemployed		.76	46	.80	54	.81	37
<u>Education</u>	2.89%						
0-8 years		.67	327	.64	254	.62	265
9th-12th		.74	821	.71	750	.78	799
1-3 yrs college		.70	269	.85	256	.87	237
4 yrs college		.85	119	.88	128	.88	128
5-8 yrs college		.86	72	.87	93	.95	91

Variable	Explained Variation	1972		1974		1977	
		Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
<u>Spouse educated</u>	1.72%						
0-8 yrs		.67	204	.67	186	.66	162
9th-12th		.75	614	.81	560	.81	512
1-3 yrs college		.74	161	.83	159	.83	142
4 yrs college		.74	92	.85	87	.86	100
5-8 yrs college		.69	46	.95	59	.90	47
<u>Mother educated</u>	1.90%						
0-8th grade		.70	603	.75	537	.72	531
9th-12th		.76	503	.86	529	.86	559
1-3 yrs college		.74	93	.86	96	.90	77
4 yrs college		.74	42	.94	48	.97	50
5-8 yrs college		.81	13	.83	17	.77	13
<u>Father educated</u>	1.38%						
0-8th grade		.70	571	.78	549	.75	559
9th-12th		.75	331	.83	369	.86	354
1-3 yrs college		.79	73	.88	80	.83	71
4 yrs college		.80	59	.85	50	.93	46
5-8 yrs college		.75	37	.80	30	.96	38
<u>Occupation</u>	1.00%						
Clerical		.75	279	.84	280	.81	260
Craftsmen		.72	189	.81	169	.75	183
Farmers		.79	53	.57	29	.82	35
Managers		.70	212	.84	187	.83	194
Operatives		.67	186	.72	184	.73	238
Professional		.79	207	.85	219	.88	219
Service		.73	204	.76	191	.80	184
Transport		.73	117	.77	92	.75	103
<u>Social class</u>	0.18%						
Lower		.68	104	.76	64	.70	67
Working		.72	760	.79	689	.79	743
Middle		.74	704	.81	676	.79	648
Upper		.65	36	.70	46	.82	59
<u>\$ Income</u>	1.30%						
Under 5000		.70	800	.76	602	.77	512
5,000-9,999		.76	376	.83	326	.81	288
10,000-19,999		.80	166	.84	211	.82	217
20,000-24,999		.72	67	.84	103	.87	173
25,000+		.74	65	.87	115	.88	208
<u>Claimed income status</u>	0.44%						
Very low		.69	58	.78	57	.70	80
Below average		.71	351	.76	307	.77	359
Average		.73	918	.80	824	.77	780
Above average		.75	254	.83	267	.87	269
Far above		.78	18	.81	18	.89	28
<u>Religion</u>	1.30%						
Catholic		.77	413	.83	376	.81	373
Jewish		.97	54	.92	44	.96	35
Non-religious		.76	83	.91	101	.87	93
Protestant		.70	1031	.76	954	.77	1004
<u>Attend church</u>	0.79%						
Never		.71	150	.81	181	.80	212
Once a year		.76	315	.82	329	.83	331
Quarterly		.78	226	.86	188	.79	189
Almost weekly		.73	250	.81	247	.82	251
Weekly+		.69	659	.74	536	.74	538

. None of the differences accounted for an appreciable amount of the variation in willingness to vote for a woman. Age accounted for 4.3% of explained variation, followed by education at 2.9%. Differences by race and sex together accounted for less than 1% of explained variation. As in the past, younger people were more willing to vote for a woman. Those with more education were somewhat more supportive of a female presidential candidate. With these minor exceptions, there were no substantive differences between means. With samples of several thousand, small differences can be statistically different, but very little variation was explained by these differences. The results were remarkably uniform. Category after category, whether male-female, black-white, rich-poor, Republican-Democrat, Eastern-Western, or married-single, all showed about a .78 level of acceptance of a woman as president, on a scale of unity, where 1.00 indicates universal acceptance.

. Tests for interaction between levels of variables such as age, education, sex, and other variables showed no interactive effects between 1972 and 1977. With rare exceptions, these effects were not significant, and the differences, for example, by sex, remained basically the same throughout the time period. Both males and females became more favorable in 1974, and males became slightly more favorable while females' acceptance dropped slightly in 1977. This pattern of increasing between 1972 to 1974, and dropping off slightly in 1977 was found repeatedly in variable after variable. A second pattern of continuous increase appeared in some categories. These categories seemed to be general indicators of higher social standing. The pattern of showing more and more willingness to vote for a woman for president from 1972 to 1977 was detected among professionals, self-rated upper class, higher income, more education, having

more educated parents, and small families. These categories of respondents had been markedly less favorable in 1972.

CONCLUSION These trend patterns showed only slight variation in willingness to vote for a woman. Research with small samples often considers only statistical significance without considering the substantive extent of the differences. The overriding conclusion here is the almost universal acceptance of the female presidential candidate. This acceptance is remarkably uniform, consistent, and stable, across 19 demographic variables. Since 1974, the acceptance seems to have leveled off, or may have regressed slightly. Categories least supportive of a female candidate were those which showed the continuously increasing trend since 1972. The categories which were least accepting of a woman as president in 1977 were those aged 60+, those living in rural areas, and those with less than 8 years of education. These categories are expected to have fewer and fewer voters in the future. Even in these categories, about 75 percent would vote for a woman as president of the United States.

REFERENCE

.Ferree Myra Marx 1974 A woman for president? Changing responses: 1958-1972. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 38 390-399