

THE OKLAHOMA VOTER 2008

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In the November 4, 2008 election the Oklahoma voter was a woman. Differences between Oklahoma men and women in party affiliation, women are more Democrat, men more Republican; and voter turnout, women have a higher probability of voting than do men; result in Oklahoma women Democrats enjoying a numerical advantage in the electorate. This suggests a paradox as Oklahoma is consistently rated at the bottom among states in women's concerns and support for Democrats.

INTRODUCTION

We seek to understand the place of women in the Oklahoma electorate, first through the literature, then the Census and finally in an analysis of voter registration data.

PUBLISHED RESEARCH

Early work on the Oklahoma voter by Oliver Benson and his co-workers was essentially geographical, seeking to examine voting and registration patterns in Oklahoma's counties, congressional districts and regions (Benson, et al. 1964; Benson, et al. 1965). The finding was that

Oklahoma politics was dominated by rural Democrats, especially in the southeast, while there was an increasing tendency to vote Republican in urban Oklahoma City and Tulsa, west of what is now Interstate 35, and north of what is now Interstate 40. This is accounted for by traditions extending back to the Civil War and subsequent migration. The nature of Benson's data prevented any analysis of the role of women in Oklahoma voting.

The Oklahoma Voter used Tom Kielhorn's extensive political polling to supplement the previous analysis of registration and voting patterns from State Election Board reports (Kirkpatrick, et al. 1977). But the book makes no reference to women voters – offering the tacit assumption that women and men, politically, are indistinguishable.

U.S. CENSUS

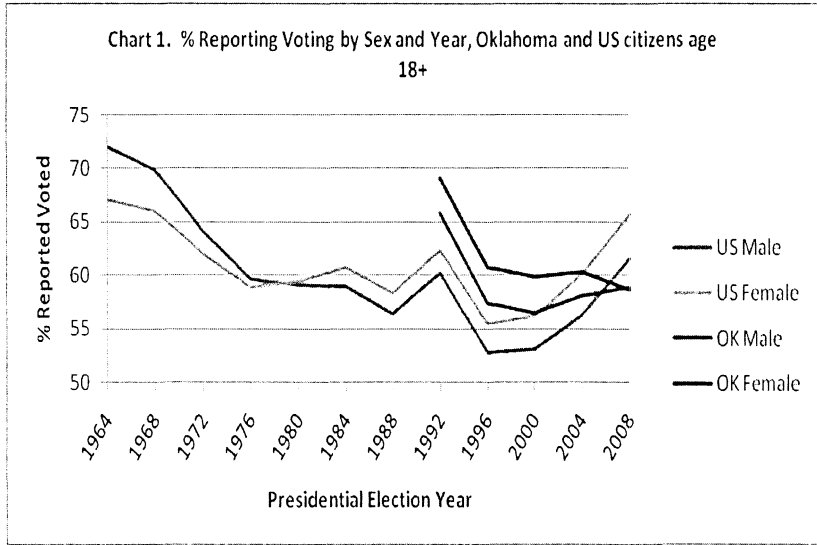
In 1918 Oklahoma tied with Michigan in being the thirteenth states to give women the vote (Darcy, 2005). Thus, 1920 was the first presidential election in which the state's women could vote. A comparison of the voting turnout before and after 1920 found women voted at half the rate of men (Darcy, 2005). The percent of women voting slowly increased. By 1980 U.S. Census estimates showed the percent of women voting nationally first exceeded that of men. Nationally since 1980, while the proportion of people casting votes has fluctuated, a greater percent of women, than men, cast votes and more women than men voted.

In 1992 the U.S. Census began reporting voting rates for Oklahoma men and women and the trend observed nationally was observed for Oklahoma. However, we can notice a sharp drop in the probability an Oklahoma woman would vote in 2008 in contrast with both Oklahoma men and national trends for both sexes. The 2008 U.S. Census estimates showed an insignificant difference between the voting rates of Oklahoma women citizens age 18+ (58.8%) and men (58.6%) (see Chart 1).

The U.S. Census reports are based on random samples of the population taken after each national election. Subjects were asked several questions, including their sex and whether or not they voted.

U.S. Census samples are subject to three limitations.

The first is sampling error. In 2008 the U.S. Census reported nationwide 61.5% of males and 65.7% of females voted – a difference of 4.2%. The margin of error for each was +/- .4% allowing us to be



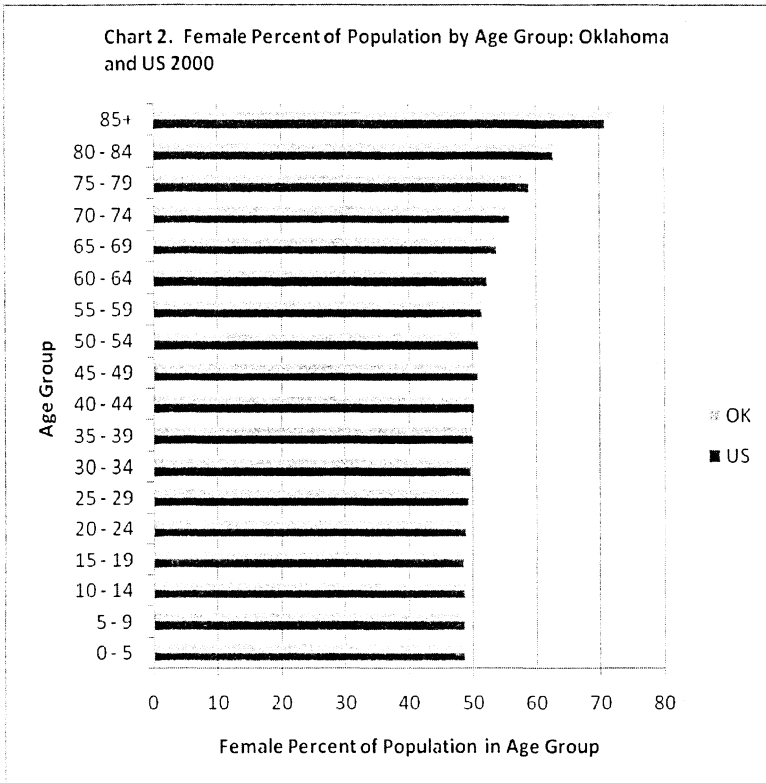
Source: Authors' calculations from U.S. Census reports:
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/char1968/tab02-03.pdf>;
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/1968/tab01.pdf>;
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/1972/tab01.pdf>;
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<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2000/tables.html>;
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2004/tables.html>;
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/socdemo/voting/publications/p20/2008/tables.html>

confident the difference was not due to sample variation. The Census also reported 58.8% of Oklahoma male citizens voted and 58.6% of women with margins of error of +/- 3.8% and +/- 3.6%, too large to be confident the sample difference was not due to sample variation. The sample for the entire United States is sufficiently large to detect voting rate differences. The sample size for Oklahoma was not.

A second problem is that the U.S. Census estimated only reported, not actual, voting. More people report voting than actually do (Campbell, et al. 1960:93-6). Further, there is no particular reason to think everyone is equally accurate in reporting their non-voting. A person that hardly ever misses an election, for example, has less opportunity to exaggerate voting than someone who hardly ever votes.

The third difficulty with the U.S. Census is it does not ask questions on partisanship or political tendency.

Why might we expect a difference in the voting rates of Oklahoma men and women? One answer is age distribution. More males are born than females but males do not survive at the same rate as females. As each cohort ages the proportion of males diminish. In Oklahoma females first exceed males in the age group 35-39 (see Chart 2).



Source: Authors' calculations from U.S. Census 2000 Summary File 1 (SF 1) 100-Percent Data Accessed using American FactFinder <http://factfinder.census.gov>

We know that the probability an individual will report voting increases with age up to approximately age 75 when voting rates decrease. This pattern was observed in US Census data for the November 4, 2008 Oklahoma general election (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Estimated percent of Registered Voting in November 4, 2008 Election by Age (percents)

Age	No	Voted November 4, 2008		
		Yes	Total	Change
All	16.18	83.82	100	
18 to 24	22.81	77.19	100	
25 to 44	20.64	79.36	100	2.17
45 to 64	13.06	86.94	100	7.57
65 to 74	10.45	89.55	100	2.62
75+	12.80	87.20	100	-2.36

Source: Author's calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008
<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2008.html>
 Internet Release date: Month xx, 2009 accessed September 25, 2009.

Because women, on average, are older than men we might expect differences in voting rates. But U.S. Census estimates show no significant differences between Oklahoma men and women age 18+ in population proportions, citizen proportions, registered citizen proportions or registered that voted proportions (see Table 2).

In summary, the U.S. Census sample is silent on political affiliation differences between Oklahoma men and women and, unexpectedly, evidences no differences between them in 2008 voting rates.

OKLAHOMA VOTER REGISTRATION RECORDS

Oklahoma maintains electronic voter registration records and makes these available at a small cost. The data lists each registered person by name, party affiliation, birth date and notes each election the person

TABLE 2
 U.S. Census estimates of male and female aged 18+ population, citizen registered and voting populations November 4, 2008.

Sex	Estimated population	% of estimated population	Citizen % of estimated population	Estimated registered % of citizens	Estimated % of registered voted	Standard error
Male	1,280,000	48.01	95.86	70.70	83.28	2.31
Female	1,386,000	51.99	96.61	69.50	84.32	2.19
z		-1.2495	-0.2356	0.3771	-0.3275	
p (two tail)		0.2115	0.8138	0.7061	0.7433	

Source: Authors' calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2008; <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting/cps2008.html> accessed September 25, 2009. For calculation of z see "2008 ACS Accuracy of the Data (US)" page 20, accessed at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/ACS/accuracy2008.pdf>. We estimated the Oklahoma Census sample to be 6,600.

voted, among other things. The sex of the voter is not recorded. We obtained the data from the State Election Board, segregated the files by county, and drew a simple random sample from each county. Individuals sampled were categorized as male or female based on their first names and other identifications (e.g. Sr., Jr., Mrs., III). Only a few individuals, about five percent, proved problematic. The number sampled was 15,309. The number sampled from a county varied from 89 to 621. As the number sampled from a county was not in proportion to the county's population, state totals were weighted to accurately reflect each county's contribution to the state total.

In addition, we were given access to the Democratic National Committee's Oklahoma Voter Activation Network (Oklahoma VAN) data. This takes the Oklahoma voter registration data and does several things. A computer algorithm categorized approximately ninety-five percent of registered persons by sex and a user interface simplifies analysis. Generally, our sample data and the Oklahoma VAN data showed the same results.

No one can vote in Oklahoma without being registered and, generally, record keeping is accurate at all levels (see Off, 2009). The state voter registration data, including party affiliation and supplemented by identifying a sample of voter's sex provides a more comprehensive and accurate view of the Oklahoma voter than does the U.S. Census. Our sample was 2.3 times that of the U.S. Census, did not rely on self-reporting of voting, and it included political affiliation data. The Oklahoma VAN data included all registered persons.

As we wish to describe the November 2008 voter there is a problem with our Election Board data. The sampled data reflects the registered voters as of early 2009 while the Oklahoma VAN data we used reflects mid 2010. Registrants were added and purged after November, 2008. We adjusted for this by looking only at individuals eligible to vote in November 2008.

EFFECT OF AGE ON PARTY AFFILIATION AND VOTING TURNOUT

The percent of Democrats increases with each older age group while the percent of independents decreases. The percent of Republicans increases between ages 18 - 47 and decreases with age after that. However, if Republican and independent are combined, there

TABLE 3
Okla homa age, party affiliation and vote (percents)

Age	Party Affiliation				Voted on November 4, 2008 if eligible				
	Democrat	Independent	Republican	Total	(n)	Yes	No	Total	(n)
18-27	41.55	19.33	39.12	100	331,264	57.65	42.35	100	323,221
28-37	42.74	16.69	40.57	100	319,003	66.50	33.50	100	313,273
38-47	44.63	11.23	44.14	100	344,125	74.46	25.54	100	339,577
48-57	49.63	8.18	42.19	100	392,681	80.14	19.86	100	389,136
58-67	54.62	6.22	39.16	100	309,370	83.22	16.78	100	307,350
68+	62.08	3.17	34.74	100	352,715	75.36	24.64	100	351,189
Total	49.31	10.66	40.03	100	2,049,158	73.12	26.88	100	2,023,746

Source: Authors' calculations from State Election Board registration data.

is a clear decrease of that group with age. The youngest age group is 58.45% Republican or independent while the oldest age group is only 37.42%.

The percent of the age group voting increases with age until the group 68 years and older where there is a 7.86% decrease in the percent voting (see Table 3).

EFFECT OF SEX ON PARTY AFFILIATION

Oklahoma women are significantly more likely to register as Democrat and significantly less likely to register as independent or Republican than are men (see Table 4). This shadows the well-documented national gender gap dating back through the early 1980s (Center for the American Woman and Politics, 2005).

Why are Oklahoma women more likely to register as Democrats than men? Oklahoma was once strongly Democratic, now Republicans are making gains (Kirkpatrick, *et al.*, 1977). One possibility is that women, on average, are older than are men and their party registration more reflects the era of Democratic Party dominance. Younger, on average, male registration reflects Oklahoma's more contemporary Republican trend. If this hypothesis is correct we expect the proportions of Republicans, Democrats and independents to be the same for males and females of the same age group.

On the other hand, if we hypothesize females, because they are females, are more attracted to the Democrats and males, because they are male, are more attracted to Republicans then we expect to observe a greater proportion of females than males in each age group to register Democrat.

For every age group women are more Democratic than are men. For every age group men are more independent or Republican than are women. For every age group men are more Republican than are women. For every age group but one, where there is but a slight difference, men are more independent than women. If we look at newly registering voters as either those registering for the first time in 2008 before the November 4 election, or as persons eligible to vote in their first Presidential election, that is age 18 – 21 prior to November 4, 2008, new women voters register Democrat in greater proportions than do new men and as independents or Republicans in smaller proportions than do men (see Table 5).

TABLE 4
Oklahoma Registered Voters: Sex by Party Affiliation (percents)

Sex	State Election Board Data June 2009					Oklahoma VAN June 2010				
	Party Affiliation			Total	(n)	Party Affiliation			Total	(n)
	Democrat	Independent	Republican			Democrat	Independent	Republican		
Female	51.86	9.34	38.80	100	8274	51.80	9.18	39.02	100	865,864
Male	45.09	13.19	41.72	100	6779	46.10	11.00	42.90	100	740,866
Unknown						51.16	14.28	34.56	100	77,335
All	48.81	11.08	40.11	100	15053	49.26	10.21	40.52	100	1,684,065
$\chi^2=$	92.67	DF=2	p=		7.54E-21					

Source: Authors' calculations from Oklahoma State Election Board and Oklahoma VAN data.

TABLE 5
Oklahoma Party Affiliation by Age and Sex, November 2008 (per cents)

Age	Democrat		Independent		Republican		Total	Female	Total	Male
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male		(n)		(n)
18-24	42.44	38.81	19.42	19.40	38.14	41.79	100	80,894	100	74,677
25-44	44.98	38.76	15.68	17.10	39.34	44.14	100	337,491	100	286,238
45-64	53.14	46.68	7.05	9.17	39.81	44.15	100	381,846	100	333,857
65-74	59.15	55.94	4.20	5.25	36.66	38.82	100	120,450	100	104,904
75+	65.53	62.76	2.00	2.86	32.47	34.38	100	123,075	100	85,956
Total	51.83	46.11	9.88	11.52	38.30	42.37	100	1,043,756	100	885,632
Persons registering between 1 January 2008 and 4 November 2008	45.11	39.80	17.04	19.19	37.85	41.01	100	98,358	100	88,342
Persons age 18-21 registered to vote prior to November 4, 2008	42.95	39.78	18.71	18.37	38.34	41.85	100	32,479	100	31,010

Source: Authors' calculations with Oklahoma VAN accessed December, 2009

Oklahoma's party affiliation gender gap is not simply due to women being older and men younger. Rather, mirroring national trends, there is a tendency drawing Oklahoma men and women in different political directions. Further, Oklahoma men are more likely to consider themselves politically independent than are women. Generally independents contribute less to political outcomes than partisans. They vote less and are less involved (Flanigan and Zingale, 1987). Our State Election Board data showed 73% of registered Democrats and 78% of registered Republicans voting November 4, 2008 but only 53% of registered independents.

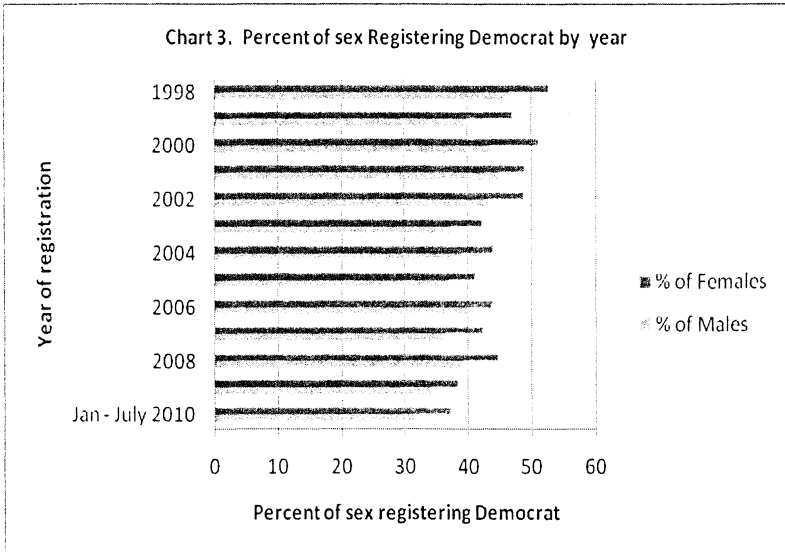
Oklahoma Republican and independent voter registration has been increasing at the expense of Democrats. We can get an insight into the dynamics producing this change by looking at new registrations over time. Chart 3 shows in 1998 50.04% of new registrants were Democrats. By 2010 this had dropped to 35.46%. But Chart 4 also shows a drop in Republican registrations from 40.67% in 1998 to 37.33% in 2010, not as large as the Democratic drop, but a drop nevertheless. It is independents that have increased, from 9.29% of new registrants in 1998 to 27.21% in 2010 (Chart 4). If new registrants are not the source of Republican gains, the source must be those being purged from the rolls. While we do not have direct evidence we can note 65.53% of those 75 and older are Democrats. For every Republican in that age group that dies, two Democrats die.

EFFECT OF SEX ON VOTER TURNOUT

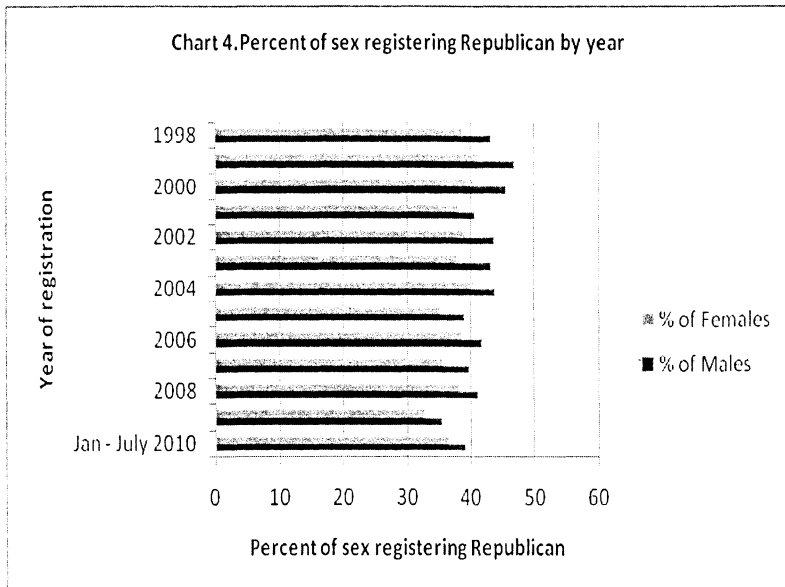
The U.S. Census reported about twelve percent more of the registered individuals voting than Oklahoma's voting records document. This is due to persons saying they voted when they did not. The U.S. Census also showed an insignificant .014 difference in Oklahoma male and female probabilities of voting (Table 2).

Our data tells a different story. Women, overall, have a 1.33% higher rate of voting than do men. But this overall difference has been dampened by the average age differences between males and females.

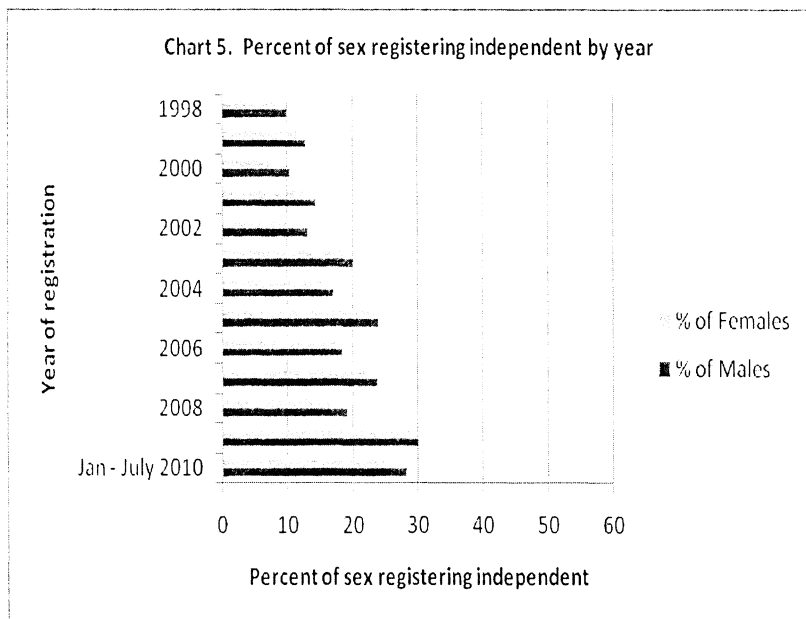
The gap between male and female voting rates in Oklahoma is largest for youngest voters (4.21%) and declines until the age group 65+, the only group in which a higher portion of registered men than women vote. Why do the oldest age group men outvote similar women? Moore, Kaitlyn Russell, Garrett Stone and Kelsey Wells, Oklahoma State



Source: Authors' calculations from Oklahoma VAN data accessed July, 2010.



Source: Authors' calculations from Oklahoma VAN data accessed July, 2010.



Source: Authors' calculations from Oklahoma VAN data accessed July, 2010.

The explanation is simple. In the group 65+ women, on average, are massively older than men. Voting rates decline greatly as persons enter their seventies. If we look only at persons under age 65, women's turnout is 2.69% higher than men's (see Table 6).

A problem with the Oklahoma VAN data presented in Table 6 is that it reflects the voter registration after non-voters were purged following the November 4, 2008 election. We cannot be confident that males and females of various ages had the same probability of being purged. We do have some additional evidence from Oklahoma's three most populous counties, however, prior to the purging (see Table 7).

Like the Oklahoma VAN data, in each age group registered women were more likely to vote than men, the only exception being the oldest age group. Again, the failure to follow the pattern for the oldest group is likely the greater age of the women than the men in that group and the fact that voting declines after age 67.

TABLE 6
November 4, 2008 vote by age and sex registered voters (percents)

Age	Voted			Did not Vote			Total			n		
	Female	Male	Unk	Female	Male	Unk	Female	Male	Unk	Female	Male	Unk
18 to 24	60.61	56.40	66.36	39.39	43.60	33.64	100	100	100	55,007	53,599	19,618
25 to 34	60.38	56.87	65.30	39.62	43.13	34.70	100	100	100	131,019	113,924	14,315
35 to 49	76.19	73.39	74.28	23.81	26.61	25.72	100	100	100	213,079	182,117	14,624
50 to 64	84.16	82.69	81.40	15.84	17.31	18.60	100	100	100	250,913	219,466	13,836
65+	80.04	83.59	76.95	19.96	16.41	23.05	100	100	100	215,190	171,197	14,821
Unknown	47.33	52.08	50.44	52.67	47.92	49.56	100	100	100	619	528	113
All	76.05	74.72	72.36	23.95	25.28	27.64	100	100	100	865,827	740,831	77,327
n	658,502	553,528	55,954	207,325	187,303	21,373	865,827	740,831	77,327			
18 to 64	74.76	72.07	71.31	25.24	27.93	28.69	100	100	100	650,018	569,106	62,393

Source: Authors' calculations from Oklahoma VAN June, 2010.

TABLE 7

Oklahoma registered voters: sex by November 4, 2008 vote by age in Cleveland, Oklahoma & Tulsa counties (percents)

Age	Voted November 4, 2008 Election				Total		Sample Size		Significance of Male-Female Difference One Tail
	No		Yes		Female	Male	Female	Male	
	Female	Male	Female	Male					
18-27	42.72	44.04	57.28	55.96	100	100	154	123	0.4130
28-37	31.15	39.13	68.85	60.87	100	100	131	122	0.0919
38-47	21.24	26.15	78.76	73.85	100	100	137	114	0.1804
48-57	14.53	22.59	85.47	77.41	100	100	166	135	0.0355
58-67	13.42	17.16	86.58	82.84	100	100	128	89	0.2241
68+	19.96	18.82	80.04	81.18	100	100	126	91	0.4169

Source: Authors' calculations from sampled Oklahoma State Election Board data.

SEX AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE OKLAHOMA ELECTORATE

While behavioral differences between Oklahoma women and men were small, their differing relative portion in the several age groups produces a massive impact on the voting electorate. Women cast the majority of votes in the November 4, 2008 election. We estimate 150,991 more women, than men, voted. The difference is significant. Likewise, women make up a strong majority of both the Democrats and the Republicans while men are a majority of the independents. Again these differences are significant for each party group (see Table 8).

In November, 2008 the registered Oklahoma voter was a woman and she was a Democrat.

DISCUSSION

We have uncovered a paradox. A large majority of Oklahoma voters are women but Oklahoma continues to have a reputation of being politically, socially and economically unfriendly to women (Averill, 2009). Oklahoma is behind only South Carolina as the state with the lowest proportion of women in its legislature (11.4%) in 2009 (Center for the American Woman in Politics, 2009). The Center for Women in Government and Civil Society at SUNY Albany ranked Oklahoma 42nd of 50 states in appointing women to policy positions – this is up from 50th in 1997 (Center for Women in Government and Civil Society, 2008). Oklahoma incarcerates a greater percent of its female population — 143% higher than the national average — than any other state (Special Task Force for Women Incarcerated in Oklahoma, 2004). The National Women’s Law Center and the Oregon Health and Science University ranked Oklahoma 47th in overall women’s health (DeNoon, 2009). Oklahoma ranks 41st in the proportion of women living above the poverty level: 85.6% (Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2004). Oklahoma ranks 49th in uninsured women of childbearing age (15-44) and 45th in uninsured children under age 19 (March of Dimes, 2006). These are a sample of such rankings.

Why is this? There is a disconnect between Oklahomans’ registration behavior and voting. Our analysis of the U.S. Census and the state’s voter registration data alone cannot bridge this. There are

TABLE 8
Estimated composition of Oklahoma registered party groups and voting electorate November 4, 2008 by sex

Sex	Voted		Party Affiliation		
	No	Yes	Democrat	Independent	Republican
Female (est.)	393,063	806,826	630,326	113,533	457,125
Male (est.)	328,368	655,835	449,047	131,314	402,747
Total	721,431	1,462,661	1,079,373	244,847	859,872
Female - Male	64,695	150,991	181,279	(17,781)	54,378
Sample n	4,141	10,774	7,348	1,667	6,038
$\chi^2=$		57.4047	207.2500	8.7919	24.1481
df=		1	1	1	1
two tail p=		8.664E-27	5.468E-47	3.026E-03	8.920E-07

Source: Authors' calculations from State Election Board sampled data and State Election Board
http://www.ok.gov/elections/documents/vr_1108.pdf

some possibilities, however. One is that Oklahoma women want things the way they are and use their voting power to ensure Oklahoma stays the way it is. However this is at variance with their consistent behavior when registering. A second possibility is that regardless of their registration, Oklahoma men are more monolithic in voting Republican and in support for fiscal and social conservative agendas while women are more divided, thereby yielding their numerical advantage. A third alternative is that Oklahoma has not offered sufficient candidates appealing to, and touching, Oklahoma's women and their interests. Women cannot vote their interests if there is nothing for them on the ballot. Evidence in favor of this last conclusion is the fact women, even newly eligible women, given a choice, continue to register as Democrats more than as Republicans while men, up to their mid-forties, are registering Republican more than Democrat. In any case, the two parties have an asymmetric appeal to Oklahoma's two sexes.

NOTES

¹ R. Darcy is Regents Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Statistics at Oklahoma State University. Cordon DeKock, Charles England, Evan Hadaway, Kyle Kassen and Phyllis McLemore were Oklahoma State University undergraduate students. Miguel Bekkevold, Jacob Carley, Katlin Gossett, Jennifer Harney, Cara Hendrix, Ross Henry, Gabrielle Tennery, Cody Turner, Michelle Houston, Chelsea Jensen, Cody Moore, Kaitlyn Russell, Garrett Stone and Kelsey Wells, Oklahoma State University students, helped gather, code and analyze the data reported here.

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