Gender, Feminism, and Partisanship among Women’s PAC Contributors*

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Objective. We examine the political attitudes and priorities of contributors to two prominent women’s PACs for evidence of a gender gap. Methods. A survey of contributors to EMILY’s List and to WISH List shows that contributors to both organizations are overwhelmingly women. However, because EMILY’s List is so large, there is a sufficient number of men to compare to the two groups of women using percentages and difference-of-means tests. Results. Partisanship is the overriding influence on political priorities and attitudes toward economic and social welfare policy. However, partisanship and gender interact to influence political attitudes in at least two areas. First, EMILY’s List men are more supportive of militarism and use of force than are EMILY’s List women, but they are less supportive than WISH List women. Second, the women of EMILY’s List are more staunchly feminist than either EMILY’s List men or WISH List women. Conclusions. We conclude that the source of each group’s financial commitment to women’s political equality and reproductive rights is different: for EMILY’s List women, it is liberal feminism; for WISH List women, it is libertarianism; and for EMILY’s List men, it is general egalitarianism.

American women remain underrepresented among elected officials and major political contributors even as the gender gap in voter turnout has closed. Less than 14 percent of the U.S. Congress, for example, is female, and in 1996 only 23 percent of individuals who contributed more than $200 to congressional candidates were women (Green et al., 1999). At the same time, women’s representation in government has expanded, in no small part because of the fundraising efforts of women’s political action committees (PACs) (Burrell, 1994; Carroll, 1994; Dabelko and Herrnson, 1997; Fox, 1997; Schroedel and Mazumdar, 1998). And the overwhelming

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majority of major contributors to at least two of those PACs are women, according to our survey of donors to EMILY’s List and WISH List.

EMILY’s List, an acronym for Early Money Is Like Yeast ("it makes the dough rise"), funnels money to Democratic prochoice women candidates. WISH List, or “Women in the Senate and House,” supports Republican prochoice women. Both have been active and successful fundraising organizations for several years. In the 1995–1996 election cycle, EMILY’s List raised over $12 million, making it the largest single PAC in terms of both receipts and disbursements. WISH List also ranked among the largest PACs in 1995–1996, contributing over $1 million to its candidates (Marshall, 1997; Kalb, 1996; Rozell, 1999; Thomas, 1998).

In this article we study similarities and differences in political attitudes and priorities between the women and men who contribute to these two women’s PACs. Women are the minority in most studies of political elites and activists to date. Men, in contrast, are a small minority in our population of women’s PAC contributors. Who are these men, and what are their policy priorities and motivations in contributing to women’s PACs? Are they as strongly feminist in orientation as their female counterparts—or even more so, given the absence of group or self-interest in supporting candidates of the opposite sex? Are the typical gender differences in political attitudes found in previous studies absent among this female-dominated population of contributors who are committed to reproductive rights and gender equality in politics? The answers to these questions are important not only for gender-based research, but also for learning more about who finances, and who ultimately influences, the candidates elected to office.

We find the commitment to social, political, and economic equality to be equally strong among EMILY’s List women and men and weaker among WISH List women, demonstrating the power of partisanship over gender in explaining attitudes. However, we find EMILY’s men to be more conservative than EMILY’s women on use of force issues, reflecting a gender difference reported widely in gender gap studies. We also find EMILY’s women to be more supportive of feminist principles than either EMILY’s men or WISH women, reflecting the interaction of partisan and gender influences.

Previous Findings about Gender and Attitudes among Political Activists

Research based on surveys of the general public demonstrates that women tend to take a more liberal stance than men on a wide variety of issues (e.g., Conover, 1988; Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Cook and Wilcox, 1991; Deitch, 1988; Howell and Day, 2000; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986). Similar gender differences have been found in the attitudes and political priorities of government officials and party elites (e.g., Day and Hadley, 1997; Mandel and Dodson, 1992; Thomas, 1994). However, results of such elite studies have varied somewhat across populations and across time.
Earlier studies often found no gender gap in political attitudes among party elites and elected officials (Kirkpatrick, 1974, 1976; Mezey, 1978; Jennings and Farah, 1981). By the late 1980s, however, women politicians and activists were found quite consistently more liberal than their male counterparts on a wide variety of issues ranging from social welfare and government regulation to defense, crime and punishment, and women's rights. Often the gender gap among elites was wider than that among the general public, especially on women's rights and reproductive issues (Mandel and Dodson, 1992; Poole and Zeigler, 1985; Welch, 1985). Women elites increasingly distinguished themselves from their male peers as their numbers grew to a critical mass, at which point they could form effective women's caucuses and develop a sense of solidarity around women's rights and priorities (Reingold, 1992; Tamerius, 1995; Thomas, 1994; Thomas and Welch, 1991). At the same time, as women in politics are recruited from a broader base, their solidarity and distinctiveness may decline (Kelly, Saint-Germain, and Horn, 1991; Welch, 1985).

Although women activists and politicians are somewhat more likely to be drawn from the Democratic party, their relative liberalism compared to men elites is not fully explained by their partisanship. Women elites tend to be more liberal than their male counterparts on many issues within each political party (Day and Hadley, 1997; Kelley, Hulbary, and Bowman, 1989; Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz, 1990). Another study of political contributors found Democratic women to be more liberal in their policy preferences than Democratic men, but Republican women were more conservative than Republican men. However, once religious variables were controlled, Republican women were more liberal than the men in their party (Wilcox, Brown, and Powell, 1993).

What are the sources of these gender differences in ideology and policy preferences? One explanation suggests that the differences in personal values between men and women are related to differences in their biology and/or gender socialization and social roles. Female morality tends to be more cooperative, caring, and nurturing, whereas male morality tends to be concerned with justice, fairness, impersonal rules, and individual rights (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). The nurturant argument suggests that men and women have different political beliefs and behaviors because of women's roles as caretakers, mothers, and nurturers. Women also are more likely than men to be employed in redistributive occupations, such as social work, child care, elder care, and nursing (Howell and Day, 2000). All of these differences in life experiences may contribute to women's greater support for government efforts in social welfare, promotion of equality, and regulation of environmental and consumer safety. Even more pervasive over time and after controlling for other factors is women's greater opposition to the use of force, both in military involvement abroad and on such domestic issues as gun control and capital punishment (Conover and Sapiro, 1993; Howell and Day, 2000; Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986; Smith, 1984).
Women’s relatively lower socioeconomic status and their higher poverty rate may also contribute to their more liberal views. Socioeconomic controls, however, generally fail to make gender differences in attitudes disappear, especially for political activists, who tend to be relatively high in income and formal education (Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz, 1990; Wilcox, Brown, and Powell, 1993). Variation in socioeconomic status is especially low among the major contributors surveyed for this study; more than 80 percent have annual incomes over $80,000, nearly all have college degrees, and most have postgraduate degrees.

Feminism also may help to explain gender gaps in political attitudes. Conover (1988) suggests that women must experience a sense of feminist identity and consciousness for a woman’s perspective to emerge. Thus women who are feminists differ significantly from men on a wide range of political values and domestic and foreign policy issues, whereas nonfeminist women do not (Conover, 1988). Further, the feminist movement has helped increase women’s economic and psychological autonomy with respect to men, encouraging a more independent and differentiated political perspective as well (Carroll, 1988). Political activists expressing feminist views and values do indeed tend to hold more liberal and egalitarian views on a variety of political issues. However, this relationship holds for men activists as well as women activists, and the direction of influence between feminist values and liberal preferences is difficult to establish empirically (Day and Hadley, 1997; Wilcox, Brown, and Powell, 1993).

The Data

The population surveyed consists of persons who contributed $200 or more to WISH List or EMILY’s List during the 1996 election cycle. The Federal Election Commission, which requires that all donations of $200 or more be reported by the organizations and records of contributions made available to the public, provided the names and addresses of contributors. A two-wave survey¹ was mailed in 1998 to the entire population of WISH List contributors and to a numerically equivalent sample of contributors to EMILY’s List. The respondents to the 1998 surveys were overwhelmingly female: 94 percent of the EMILY’s List contributors and 89 percent of the WISH List contributors were women. We were interested in learning more about the male contributors and how they compare to the women. Therefore, to expand the number of men in the analysis, a follow-up two-wave survey was mailed in 1999 to all of the men in the EMILY’s List 1996 election cycle database. Because questionnaires were mailed to the entire population of EMILY’s men, WISH women, and WISH men, but only to a sample of EMILY’s women, EMILY’s women were weighted by a factor of

¹A copy of the questionnaire is available from the authors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Statement</th>
<th>EMILY’s Women Mean Score</th>
<th>EMILY’s Men Mean Score</th>
<th>Eta: EMILY’s Men vs. Women</th>
<th>WISH Women Mean Score</th>
<th>Eta: EMILY’s Men vs. WISH Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against cuts in domestic spending in order to cut taxes</td>
<td>1.229</td>
<td>1.364</td>
<td>.058**</td>
<td>2.274</td>
<td>.475***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government improve blacks’ social/economic position</td>
<td>1.474</td>
<td>1.445</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>2.270</td>
<td>.503***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government guarantee job/good standard of living</td>
<td>2.392</td>
<td>2.313</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>3.282</td>
<td>.503***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government provide low cost doctors, health care</td>
<td>1.636</td>
<td>1.559</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>2.625</td>
<td>.579***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preference in hiring and promotion for blacks</td>
<td>2.368</td>
<td>2.284</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>3.247</td>
<td>.502***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government protect homosexuals from discrimination</td>
<td>1.504</td>
<td>1.517</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>.373***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government not involved in things people should do themselves</td>
<td>1.876</td>
<td>1.734</td>
<td>.048*</td>
<td>3.360</td>
<td>.734***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare Scale</td>
<td>7.061</td>
<td>6.925</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>11.500</td>
<td>.723***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Equality Scale</td>
<td>7.782</td>
<td>7.919</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>10.862</td>
<td>.510***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feminism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government improve women’s situation</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td>1.396</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>1.896</td>
<td>.338***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women equal role in business, industry, government</td>
<td>1.246</td>
<td>1.383</td>
<td>.070***</td>
<td>1.429</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make abortion legal</td>
<td>1.086</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>1.127</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers with small children need not remain at home</td>
<td>1.667</td>
<td>1.730</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>1.803</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism Scale</td>
<td>2.303</td>
<td>1.679</td>
<td>.299***</td>
<td>1.524</td>
<td>.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Militarism/Use of Force</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. should be reluctant to use military force</td>
<td>2.575</td>
<td>2.774</td>
<td>.064**</td>
<td>2.806</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against death penalty for murderers</td>
<td>2.073</td>
<td>2.211</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>3.329</td>
<td>.502***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut defense spending</td>
<td>1.709</td>
<td>1.776</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>2.712</td>
<td>.503***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ban the sale of handguns</td>
<td>1.493</td>
<td>1.708</td>
<td>.057**</td>
<td>2.013</td>
<td>.148*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Force Scale</td>
<td>7.811</td>
<td>8.395</td>
<td>.148*</td>
<td>10.891</td>
<td>.490***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Issues</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against prayer in public schools</td>
<td>1.456</td>
<td>1.384</td>
<td>.022</td>
<td>2.276</td>
<td>.470***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase spending on environmental protection</td>
<td>1.504</td>
<td>1.500</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>2.270</td>
<td>.484***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Responses are coded as follows: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly disagree. Responses have been coded so that the low score represents the liberal response. The four scales have the following ranges of possible scores: Social Welfare, 1–16; Group Equality, 1–20; Use of Force, 1–16; Feminism, –2–4.33. For the Feminism scale only, high scores represent more liberal, or feminist, positions.

***p < .001. **p < .01. *p < .05.
Surveys were mailed after eliminating duplicate entries by combining the records of those who contributed more than once in the election cycle and after expunging records without street addresses. Eighty-eight questionnaires were returned completed from WISH List donors, for a 44 percent return rate. One hundred forty-seven were returned from EMILY’s List contributors, for a return rate of 52 percent. In the 1999 mailings, questionnaires were completed and returned by 153 male contributors to EMILY’s List for a return rate of 36 percent. Since there were so few male contributors to WISH List (we received only nine surveys), we have excluded them from the following data analysis and discussion.

The political party identifications of contributors reflect the partisan orientation of the PAC to which they belong. More than 90 percent of EMILY’s List contributors identify themselves as Democrats and nearly 90 percent of WISH List contributors identify themselves as Republicans. Thus, partisanship and organizational affiliation are nearly the same, and we treat them as such in the discussion below.

Attitudes toward Equality

Partisanship, not gender, is the principal influence on attitudes toward social and economic equality among these contributors to women’s PACs. Table 1 compares the mean responses from EMILY’s List women, EMILY’s List men, and WISH List women on a wide range of political issues. Table 1 also compares the mean scores on three scales constructed from the issue questions—Social Welfare, Group Equality, and Use of Force—as well as a Feminism scale.

The clearest observation on first glance at Table 1 is that there are few significant differences between the women and men of EMILY’s List, but there are many significant differences between EMILY’s men and WISH women. This divergence along partisan lines is especially clear on issues related to economic and social equality. The Social Welfare scale consists of the four items on the trade-off between domestic spending and lower taxes, government guarantees of a job and a good standard of living, government provision of health care, and government involvement in things that people should do for themselves (Cronbach’s alpha = .89). The Group Equality scale consists of the five items on women’s equal role, government efforts to improve women’s situation, government efforts to improve African Americans’ situation, affirmative action for African Americans, and protection of homosexuals from discrimination (Cronbach’s alpha = .77). There is no significant difference between EMILY’s women and EMILY’s men on either scale, whereas the WISH women are significantly more conservative in their attitudes toward both social welfare and group equality. As a further check on the similarities and differences among the Democratically inclined
EMILY’s List contributors, we ran multivariate analyses of both the Social Welfare and the Group Equality scales using ordinary least squares regression, controlling for ideological, social, and demographic variables. The differences between the women and men of EMILY’s List remain statistically insignificant (see Table 2). Thus, partisanship clearly prevails over gender in influencing attitudes toward equality.

2 Independent variables in the multivariate analyses are coded as follows: Ideology, 5-point scale from 1 (very liberal) to 5 (very conservative); Trust in government, 4-point scale from 1 (high trust) to 4 (low trust); Church attendance, 5-point scale from 1 (almost never) to 5 (once a week or more); Age, continuous variable; Strong Democrat, Jewish, No religious preference, Teacher, Attorney, Physician, Business person, Married, and Sex are dichotomous variables in
Feminism and Women’s Rights

Although the women and men contributors to EMILY’s List are equally committed to economic and social equality in general, it is the women who display a higher degree of feminist consciousness. EMILY’s men, in turn, are statistically indistinguishable from the women of WISH List in their commitment to feminism. Thus, both gender and partisanship influence these contributors’ feminist allegiances.

Feminist consciousness is more than the belief in women’s equality with men; it also holds the patriarchal system responsible for women’s inequality, and it advocates collective action to promote social change (Fulenwider, 1980; Klein, 1984; Sapiro, 1983). Fulenwider (1980) suggests that a majority of Americans generally support feminism, but that feminist issues are more “personally significant” for women than they are for men. Klein (1984) asserts that feminist consciousness includes personal identification with other women and that therefore only women can have true feminist consciousness. However, men can have feminist sympathies and can hold feminist beliefs (Cook and Wilcox, 1991; Klein, 1984).

Our measure of feminism, following Conover (1988) and Cook (1989), combines feminist self-identification with feelings toward the women’s movement. The women contributors to EMILY’s List are significantly more feminist than both EMILY’s men and WISH women, as can be seen in Table 1. The difference in feminist consciousness between EMILY’s women and EMILY’s men remains significant in a regression analysis controlling for other variables (see Table 2). EMILY’s women also are significantly more favorable toward women’s equality in business, industry, and government than either EMILY’s men or WISH women, who are statistically similar on this issue.

Partisanship is a stronger influence on attitudes toward government efforts to improve women’s economic and social situation, however. Both the women and the men of EMILY’s List are significantly more favorable to-

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3 The feminism scale is an additive scale combining the relative feeling thermometer score, ranging from −1 to 2.33, and the 4-point feminist self-identification score, coded to range from −1 (never think of self as feminist) to 2 (think of self as feminist most of the time). The relative feeling thermometer score is calculated by subtracting the respondent’s mean feeling thermometer score for several groups from the women’s movement feeling thermometer score, then dividing by the mean score for the several groups [(score − mean)/mean]. This corrects for response bias that could contaminate a measure based solely on the women’s movement feeling thermometer score (see Cook, 1989). The respondents’ mean feeling thermometer scores are based on feelings toward conservatives, liberals, environmentalists, abortion opponents, abortion supporters, labor unions, the Catholic Church, big business, people on welfare, older people, Christian fundamentalists, blacks, whites, the military, lesbians/gays, Democrats, and Republicans, in addition to the women’s movement.
ward such efforts than are the women of WISH List, reflecting greater Democratic support for enhancing equality through government action. Finally, on the issues of abortion rights and whether mothers should stay home with young children rather than work outside the home, there is no significant difference among any of the three groups. Large majorities of each group (over 86 percent) support working mothers and strongly support legalized abortion.

**Militarism and Use of Force**

From the 1960s through the 1980s, gender differences in preferences toward policies that deal with the use of force and violence were found to be twice as great as differences regarding other policies (Shapiro and Mahajan, 1986). In their study of gender gaps among “nonfeminists,” “potential feminists,” and feminists, Cook and Wilcox (1991) suggest that the gender gap among feminists is largely confined to war and peace issues. In general, issues of force and violence have been the issues that most divide women and men across time and when controlling for a variety of other influences (Howell and Day, 2000; Smith, 1984). Women contributors to EMILY’s List indeed are less supportive of the use of force than are its men contributors. EMILY’s men, in turn, are less supportive of the use of force than are the women of WISH List, as can be seen in Table 1. The Use of Force scale consists of the four items on defense spending, military involvement abroad, the death penalty, and banning the sale of handguns (Cronbach’s alpha = .62). The division between EMILY’s men and EMILY’s women on the use of force, although statistically significant, is much smaller than the difference between EMILY’s men and WISH women. A multivariate analysis of this scale shows that EMILY’s women remain significantly more opposed than EMILY’s men to the use of force, even when controlling for ideological, social, and demographic variables (see Table 2). The position of EMILY’s men on the Use of Force scale, between the more liberal women of EMILY’s List and the more conservative women of WISH List, demonstrates the interaction of partisanship and gender as influences on attitudes toward the use of force.

**Political Priorities**

To explore further the differences among these three groups, we included in our survey a question that asked the respondents to report what they think is the most important problem facing the country. Responses to this question are found in Table 3.

Although there were several different issues listed as the most important problems, a plurality (16 percent) of EMILY’s men see the inequitable distribution of wealth as the most important problem facing this country.
Education is the most important to both groups of women (21 percent for both EMILY’s List and WISH List women), compared to 13 percent of EMILY’s men. Health care (12 percent), civil rights/racial problems (8 percent), and lack of national unity or morale (7 percent) follow inequality and education as the most important problem for EMILY’s men. For EMILY’s women, inequality (17 percent) follows education as the most important problem, with environmental degradation (11 percent) and health care (8 percent) third and fourth on the list. In general, though, EMILY’s List women and men share similar priorities as reflected in their thoughts about the nation’s most important problem.

The priorities of WISH List women offer more of a contrast. After education, they cite decay in morality, religion, and family values (11 percent), too much religious influence in politics (7 percent), and crime (7 percent) as the most important problems. Unlike EMILY’s women and men, almost none of the WISH List women (less than 1 percent) feel that inequitable distribution of wealth is the most important problem. The only area in which EMILY’s men and WISH women are similar and significantly different from EMILY’s women is the area of crime and terrorism. These two problems together are cited as most important by 9 percent of EMILY’s men and 8 percent of WISH women, but only 3 percent of EMILY’s women.

In general, then, what most distinguishes EMILY’s men from both groups of women is their comparatively high concern for economic and social equality, a concern demonstrated in their top three priorities of maldistribution of wealth, health care, and civil rights. In their political priorities, as in their policy preferences, however, EMILY’s men and women resemble each other more than either group resembles the women of WISH List.

### TABLE 3

The Most Important Problems Facing This Country (in percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EMILY’s List Men</th>
<th>EMILY’s List Women</th>
<th>WISH List Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic inequality</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Economic inequality</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil rights/racial problems</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale of nation/ national unity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremist groups/ terrorists</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Public apathy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime/violence</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table includes all issues cited by at least 4% as the most important national problem.
The same phenomenon is evident when we examine responses about the importance of various issues in deciding whether to support a candidate for office. Here again, the women and men of EMILY’s List are similar, and both differ from the women of WISH List. The WISH women rate both tax policy and national defense higher than do the men. EMILY’s women and men, in contrast, give higher priority than WISH women to gender issues, health care, affirmative action, environment policy, abortion, gay rights, jobs, race issues, and AIDS. There is no statistically significant difference between the women and men of EMILY’s List in their ratings of any of these issues. Thus, the issue importance ratings reflect partisan, not gender, differences.

The following comments on WISH List contributors’ questionnaires illustrate their libertarian or laissez-faire attitudes:

I vote for women who have a strong sense of self and don’t expect government to be the panacea for their life. I like self reliance and I believe we as a nation expect the government to be able to control all social issues. Behavior can not be controlled through regulations. We need to be more accountable for our lives and our actions.

I like Republicans for all fiscal policies but worry about them as prolife and too protective about big development.

Many of the problems this country has socially are caused by people’s unwillingness to grow and change into responsible people. It’s easier to blame others for their problems. Hence, they expect others to fix their problems for them.

The liberal egalitarian priorities of EMILY’s List men are illustrated in these comments from their questionnaires:

I appreciate the compassionate leaning of most women in politics.

We will have a more just and egalitarian society when women and other minorities are involved in politics, vote, and hold office in numbers proportional to their percentage of the total population. . . . I think [it’s] especially true in the case of women of all ethnicities.

As a liberal Democrat, I would prefer that women elected to office share my attitudes, but I think that most women have a more rational sensitive approach to social issues than do many men.

Finally, these comments demonstrate the feminist proclivities of women who contribute to EMILY’s List:

Women are a good influence in politics. They are more interested in children, health, and education. Their leadership style is more consensus building.

We should either revise the Constitution to state that all persons are created equal or pass the ERA.
Abortion is neither the only nor the most important item on the agenda; consider pay equity, equal opportunity for sports . . . separation of church and state.

Of course I am a feminist. I think, therefore I am a feminist.

Conclusion

Major contributors to EMILY’s List and WISH List all have demonstrated a commitment to women’s political representation and to reproductive rights by financially supporting prochoice women candidates. However, they often diverge in their policy preferences and priorities and in their commitment to feminism. Comparing the women contributors to EMILY’s List, the men contributors to EMILY’s List, and the women contributors to WISH List helps us disentangle the effects of gender and partisanship on political attitudes.

Understanding the attitudes and motivations of political contributors is important to candidates and PACs as they shape their appeals for contributions. Such understanding is also important to researchers and citizens who wish to know more about the sources of funds underwriting their elected officials’ campaigns. We find substantial differences in the attitudes and priorities of contributors who would seem to have very similar goals: electing more women and keeping abortion legal.

EMILY’s List women and men resemble each other far more than they resemble the women of WISH List in their political priorities and in their attitudes toward government promotion of economic and social equality. This demonstrates an overriding influence of partisanship on political attitudes. However, partisanship and gender interact to influence political attitudes in at least two areas. First, EMILY’s List men are more supportive of militarism and use of force than are EMILY’s List women, but they are less supportive of these things than WISH List women. Second, the women of EMILY’s List are more staunchly feminist than either EMILY’s List men or WISH List women, whereas the latter two do not differ significantly from each other on the feminism scale. We conclude that the source of each group’s financial commitment to women’s political equality and to reproductive rights is different: for EMILY’s List women, it is liberal feminism; for WISH List women, it is libertarianism; and for EMILY’s List men, it is general egalitarianism.

REFERENCES


