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Gen Z and the US Gender Gap

ABSTRACT. The gender gap that defines the difference between women and men in social, political, intellectual, cultural, and economic attainments and attitudes is increasing important in Gen Z and the mid twentieth century in the United States. Young people are more liberal in their attitudes than older people, however but also, Generation Z females are more liberal and highly politically engaged than their male counterparts. These changes in gender gaps are particularly important to analyze and understand the complex changes in gender relationships and power.

The first section traces the change in the labor force, education and payment of women and men. The labor force is examined over changes of women and men. The annual pay changes of women and men is investigated. The changes and attitudes of women and men of Gen Z will be analyzed, particularly of generation women and men. The issues and importance of attitudes toward several issues Gen Z on abortion, the environment, crime, and discrimination are examined. Additionally, religion and politics are assessed. Finally, the gender gap is evaluated in comparison how the United States rates in relation to the other industrial countries in relation to economic participation and opportunity, and educational attainment.

KEYWORDS: gender gap, United States, Gen Z, attitudes, politics

Introduction

As the Z gen of Americans reaches adulthood there is mounting interest in their attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyle, particularly the similarities and differences between the genders and minorities. A Pew Research Center in 2018 Pew Research Center analysis of Census Bureau data finds that the “post-Millennial” generation the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, also among the most educated (Fry & Parker, 2018).

There are many definitions of the gender gap. One of the most comprehensive and sociological analytical is defined by Harris in 2017 of the World Economic Forum. “The gender gap is the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes.” This will be the definition that will be used in

this article. While women in the US have made gains from 50 years ago in the labor force, some of that progress has halted (Schaeffer, 2024). In general, young people are more liberal in their attitudes than older people, but also, but in contrast to males the Generation Z females are more liberal and highly politically engaged than their male counterparts (Miller, 2024a). These changes in gender gaps are particularly important to analyze to understand the complex changes in gender relationships.

The first section traces the change in the labor force and payment of women and men. Gender labor force is examined over changes of women and men. The annual pay changes of women and men is investigated. The changes and attitudes of women and men of Gen Z is analyzed, particularly of generation women and men. The issues and importance of attitudes toward several issues are inspected, including religion and politics. Finally, the gender gap will be evaluated in comparison how the United States rates to in relation to the other industrial countries in relation to economic participation and opportunity, and educational attainment.

Theory and Methodology

This paper gives an overview of the development of the generation of females and males of Gen Z and factors and attitudes influencing gender concept. Gen Z are born between 1995 and 2012 (Twenge, 2017). According to Mannheim (1952) and sociologists (Elder, 1974; Weil, 1987; Schuman, 1989; Griffin, 2004), social consciousness and of youth reaching maturity in a particular time and place significantly influence their attitudes and actions by the major historical events of that era. A critical point is that this major historical event must occur and must involve the individuals in their youthful age shaping their attitudes, as later experiences will tend to receive meaning. One of the difficulties of this approach is that it does not illustrate the differences in gender differences from young females and males.

The classic theories of generational change focus on events that change generations. While it is difficult to analyze what changed young women, the MeToo Movement, and Supreme Court's decision that eliminated the constitutional right to abortion were certainly important (Miller, 2024a). Also, more education and emphasis on the right to equality, including sports, were part of their socialization. These changes affected young women more than young men.

Twenge (2017) argues that this view does not completely explain generation change. She observes that all the ways in which life today is vastly different from previous generations. Twenge contends that the root cause is the generation change in technology. Recent technologies have reshaped social interaction from rigid norms and values to individualism (Twenge, 2023).

According to Burns and colleagues the most important transformation has been the increase in women's education. Women are now more likely than men to earn college and graduate degrees. Another key factor is an increase in the presence of women as high-profile and successful office seekers (Burns et al., 2018).

The gender gap for young men and women between ages 18 and 29 is becoming larger than the previous generations. In 2001 young women and males had similar political ideologies. In about 2016 this changed significantly, and women aged 18 to 29 became more liberal than previous generations of males of the same age. According to a Gallup study in 2024 40% of young women identify as liberal compared to 19% who say they are conservative. The view of young men is more likely to be conservative than liberal. Thirty percent identify as conservative and 25% as liberal (Mille 2024a; Saad, Jones, & Fioroni 2024).

Most of what we know about Gen Z attitudes and political behavior, including religion and voting comes from recent academic polls. These include the Times/Siena poll, the Pew Research Center, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement of youth. The Global Gender Gap Report compares over 50 countries on similar indicators. Also included are the census and US government information. US information shows significant changes in women's labor force participation and education.

Overview of Women's Participation in the Labor Force

Women's labor force participation increased rapidly labor market during the second half of the 20th century. Women's labor force participation increased from the 1960s through the 1980s. Female labor force slowed in the 1990s before reaching it highest at 60.0% in 1999. Labor force participation among women then began to decline, which accelerated in the wake of the December 2007–June 2009 recession before leveling off around 2014. Male labor force decreased over this time from 76% in

1990 to 7 to 73% in 2007. Participation for both women and men declined severely during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and began to rebound from pandemic-era lows in 2022. Labor force participation among men trended down since its 1948 peak of 86.6% to 68% in 2003 (Household Data, Annual Averages 2024).

American women made considerable progress toward closing the gender pay gap in the second half of the 20th century. But the gap has hardly changed over the past two decades. In 2022, American women earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men for full-time year- workers. That was about the same as in 2002 when they earned 80 cents to the dollar. One of the main contributors to the gap is the motherhood penalty and the fatherhood dividend. Women's pay decreases when they have children, while men's pay increases. As women age, their pay relative to the pay of men decreases for individuals 47–56 years old (Kochhar, 2023; Grose, 2024).

By the first quarter of 2024 the median income only one cent higher to 83% of full-time round-year median income between men and women. Although Hispanic and Black women made less. Median earnings of Hispanics who worked full time \$879 were lower than those of Blacks \$908, Whites \$1,157, and Asians \$1,505 (The Economic Daily, 2024).

By sex, median weekly earnings for Black men \$935 were 74.6% of the median for White men \$1,254. Median earnings for Hispanic men \$914 were 72.9% of the median for White men. Earnings of Asian men \$1,67) and women \$1,331 were higher than those of their White counterparts (The Economic Daily, 2024).

The difference was less among women, as Black women's median earnings \$887 were 85.3% of those for White women \$1,040, and earnings for Hispanic women \$825 were 79.3% of those for White women. However, the gender gap continued in comparison to white men. Black women earned 70 of white men, Hispanic women earned 68% (The Economic Daily, 2024). Latinas have increasingly become a driving force of the U.S. economy as they enter the workforce at a faster pace than non-Hispanic individuals. Between 2022 and 2023, the number of Latinas working full time surged by 5% while the overall number of full-time female workers stayed the same (Olsen & Savage, 2024).

Based on the wage gap, independent of race would have to work longer over their lifespan to catch up with men. The gender gap means if a female started working at 20 full time on average she Would have to work until she is 68 years old to be paid what her counterpart would be

paid by 60 years old. Black and Hispanic is even longer between 80–90 years old (Javaid, 2024).

In an extensive study by the U.S. Census in 2020 although the average gap is 17% in 2024, the authors found the gender gap varies considerably. It is larger than 15% of occupations. In contrast 43% of occupations were lower than the average wage. Occupations in finance had the highest gender wage gap (Foster et al., 2020).

Occupational segregation of women is a leading determinant of gender earnings inequality. Gauchat and colleagues found that the effects of globalization only slightly diminished earnings, still various aspects of the global economy, still influence the globalization of the U.S. economy has affected gender inequality (Gauchat, Kelly, & Wallace, 2012). More analysis needs to be done on how the global economy affects men. There is no single explanation for why progress toward narrowing the pay gap has all but stalled in the 21st century (Kochlar, 2023).

Sexual harassment still contributes to sex segregation and pay inequality in the labor market. Combining nationally representative survey data and administrative data, both harassment and wages vary strongly and systematically across workplaces. Women self-report more harassment from colleagues and managers in male-dominated workplaces where wages are high, and men self-report more harassment in female-dominated workplaces where wages are low. These patterns imply behavior that harassment may contribute to gender inequality. Sexual harassment discourages women and men from applying for jobs in workplaces where they are the gender minority (Folke & Rickne, 2022).

A survey conducted in 2017 by the Pew Report Center found that women employed in majority-male workplaces are more likely to say their gender has made it harder for them to get ahead at work. Slightly less than half, 48% say women are treated fairly where they work when it comes to recruitment and hiring, just 38% say women are treated fairly in promotions and advancement (Parker, 2018). This is disconcerting since women now have more formal education than men.

Gender and Education

Women outnumber men in the U.S. college-educated workforce, at the end of 2023. They make 51% of ages 25 and older. Women first exceeded men in the college-educated labor force at the end of 2019. They re-

mained more were half of this group through the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic and recession declined the size of the US labor force. The gender shift in the college-educated labor force happened in 2018 when women passed men in the number of adults earning a bachelor’s degree. In 2023 32.6% of women and 31.9% of individuals 25 or older were in the labor market have a B.A. (Schaeffer, 2024).

The number of women 25 or older possessing a bachelor’s degree in 2022 was even higher. Forty-eight of women possessed a B.S in contrast to only 41% of men (Kochlar, 2023). There was also a notable change in political attitudes between the two genders that led to a gender gap in US society.

In general, college educated are more liberal than males and women with no college. College educated women are more liberal than college educated men. According to the Gallup survey 44% of college educated women from 2017–2024 who were 18–29 years old identified as liberal. Their male counter during the same time was 30%. Among women and men during the same period and age were less likely to identify as liberal. Thirty women with no college educated identified as liberal. Only 20% of males with no college education identified as liberal (Saad, Jones, & Fioroni, 2024).

Race does not have educational influence in the gender gap. Young women have become more liberal whether they went to college, and whether they are white or Black (Miller, 2024a). The reasons that black women become more liberal is still understudied.

Women and men have vastly different values in abortion, climate change, gun control and race relations, and gender discrimination. The following Gallup questions show a significant variation between young females and males 18–24 years old in the following 2017–2025 questions.

Table 1. Political identification of females and males

Abortion should be legal under any/most circumstances.	
Females	86%
Males	78%
Global warming caused by pollution from human activities not natural causes.	
Females	78%
Males	62%
U.S. doing too little to protect the environment.	
Females	86%

Males	62%
Think gun laws should be more strict.	
Females	74%
Males	51%

Saad, Jones, and Fioroni, 2024. Exploring Young Women's Leftward Expansion. Gallup

Discrimination is also more apparent in young Gen Z young males and females among senior high school seniors. Males and females saying there is difficulty in many fields.

Table 2. Young boys and girls and discrimination

Gaining leadership positions	
Girls	70%
Boys	33%
Getting elected to political office	
Girls	68%
Boys	32%
Getting equal pay for equal work	
Girls	67%
Boys	24%
Obtaining top jobs	
Girls	51%
Boys	20%

Broga and Aragao (2024)

Young adults are more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations. This could be a contributing factor to increased liberalism among 18–29-year-olds from 2017–2024. However, the gap in liberal identification between White women and Women of color has remained similar in terms of percentages. Forty-one percent of White women identified as politically liberal. Women of color that included Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians politically identified politically as liberal. Men in both similar groups had lower percentages. Twenty-two percent of White men identified as political liberal, and 28% of men of color identified as liberal (Saad, Jones, & Fioroni, 2024).

Although different issues were asked in 2022 of Gen Z which were critically important to them the Gen Z gender gap remained. Sixty-eight percent of women and 43% of men answered abortion were personally im-

portant. Mass shooting also had a similar gender gap 69% of women and 51% of men. The women in the Qualtrics questionnaire were also much more concerned with racial inequality 65% of women versus 39% of Gen Z men (Deckman, 2024).

Ethnicity and race diverge on policy issues. Between Gen Z men and women of color. However at least in conditions of their basic ideology, cultural diversification does not appear to be driving the rise in liberal identity among young white and colored women. Even religion has witnessed a gender gap.

Religion and the Gender Gap

Gen Z and minority millennials express skepticism due to past histories related to the church. However, despite criticisms, most minority millennials and Gen Z report they are spiritual and according to a study by spiritual by Manalang (2022). A Barna 2018 study found that Gen Z the percentage of teens who identify as atheist is double that of the general population, 13% versus 6% of all adults. The proportion that identifies as Christian reduces from generation to generation. Seventy-five Boomers are Protestant are Catholic or Christians, while just three in five 13- to 18-year-olds say they are some kind of Christian (Barna Group, 2018).

Books such as *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* by Beth Allison Barr (2021) is making conservative churches to reconsider gender. Barr argues that patriarchy may be a part of Christian history, but that does not make it Christian (Barr, 2021). Her book became a best seller.

Religion among Generation X also has witnessed a gender gap. Church membership has been dropping in the United States for several years. But within Gen Z, 18–29 years old almost 40% of females are religiously unaffiliated, compared with 34% of men, among individuals who are disaffiliated from religion according to the Survey Center on American Life (2023).

This may be related to more knowledge, and the rise of feminism Sixty-one percent of Gen Z women identify as feminist, greater than women from previous generations. Younger women are more concerned about the unequal treatment of women in American society and are more apprehensive of institutions that support traditional social arrangements. In a poll by the Survey Center on American Life 65% of young women said they do not believe that churches treat men and women equally as opposed to 54% of men (Cox & Hammond, 2024).

The Political Politics Gender Gap

The political gap is even evident in 18-year-olds according to the Pew Research Search sample of female and males on four critical issues. The percentage of twelfth graders is responded that women are discriminated in each of the following areas. The range is from 48% to 53% of the nation's 12th graders in 2022 that women face a great or good deal of discrimination when it comes to:

The Democratic candidates led among young women, 62% for Harris versus 31% for Trump, Mr. Trump led among young men, 55% for Trump versus 38% for Harris.

The tallies are similar by party identification. In 2023 young women nationwide have leaned Democratic, 66% to 27%. Young men have leaned Republican, 53% to 40% Mr. Trump leads Ms. Harris among young men, 58% to 37%, across the last three Times/Siena national polls. Ms. Harris holds an even larger lead among young women, 67% versus 28% for young men (Cohn, 2024).

In /Siena polls of the six swing states in October 2024 taken after Ms. Harris became the Democratic nominee young men preferred Mr. Trump by 13 points. Young women favored Ms. Harris by 38 points, a 51-point gap. Former President's Trump's message has been particularly significant for young men without college degrees and young men of color. Although women are more likely than men to support Kamala Harris over Donald Trump in every age group, the gap is biggest among the youngest voter (Miller, 2024b). This is related to how the genders perceive masculinity.

In a comprehensive study of masculinity, the Pew Research Center found a much larger share of Republican men than Democratic men who rate themselves as highly masculine 53% versus vs. 29%. The partisan difference is less among women 38% of Republican women see themselves as highly feminine, compared with 32% of Democratic women. The study found fewer than half of the individuals questions said the changed gender roles of females have made it easier for men to have successful lives, (Horowitz & Parker, 2024).

The gender gap is evident in the entire society in the 2024 presidential election. The gap by education is twenty-nine points, with former President Trump ahead by ten points among people without a college degree and Vice President 19 points among those with a college education. Lake and Iovino conclude at the end of October 2024. "The story of this election could well be the gender gap between those Americans who went to col-

lege and those who did not. As the candidates consolidate support among their base, the divide between college-educated women and non-college-educated men.”

How Does the US Gender Gap Compare with Other Industrial Advanced Countries?

The Global Gender Gap Index was first introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 to benchmark progress towards gender parity across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health, and political leadership. The 2024 Global Gap reported in this paper is the results of 2024 that examined 146 countries. The top countries in 2024 were Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Germany. The United States ranked 43rd with a score of .747. The Global Gender average was 68.5 (Global Gender Gap Report, 2024).

The US highest scores were in educational attainment that it ranked first. Economic participation and opportunity were mixed at a 22nd rank among the 2024 countries. The lower score was related to wage equality, for similar work, and estimated earned income. For health and survival while the ratio of male and female were equal, the US came in much lower in healthy life expectancy. In Political Empowerment. Also needed improvement. In the United States, for every woman minister there are two men. In contrast in Canada, there is only a nine percentage-point Global Gender Gap. In both countries, the share of women in parliament or Congress is less than half that of men’s (Global Gender Gap Report, 2024). This could change if Ms. As President of the United States, which is uncertain before the election.

The analysis of 18–29-year-old men and women of the vote shows a similar gender gap. Young women preferred Harris to Trump by an 18-point margin: 58% to 40%. young men preferred Trump by a 14-point margin: 42% to 56%. The gap is larger than the gender gap for the electorate overall. Among voters of all ages, 53% of all female voters backed Harris, compared to 46% for Trump. While among all male voters, Trump won 54% to 44% (Youth Vote in the 2024 Election, 2024).

The gender gap is largest among the black community, particularly black women. Among young 18–29-year-olds. Sixty-four black men voted for Harris as opposed to 24% for Trump. Among black females the rate for Harris was 85% versus 13% for Trump, an extremely 72% difference (Youth Vote in the 2024 Election, 2024).

Conclusion

The findings of studies of the Gen Z gender gap contribute to our understanding of feminism and masculine identity and open the door for further research. Continued exploration in this field is vital for gender and society.

There is no adequate theory to completely comprehend the significant gender gap in Generation Z between females and males. Young adult women Gen Z women in the mid-21st century are much more liberal on several attitudes and viewpoints than men in the same generation than previous cohorts of young women, Gen Z women have more liberal positions on abortion, the environment, concern on crime, and discrimination than Gen Z males. Minority women also appear to be more liberal than men in the Gen Z generation. To what extent are political events such as the Supreme Court reduction of abortion affected their viewpoints help to shaping their attitudes?

Whether this change is primarily related to Gen Z or only a passing viewpoint is not clear. More analysis is important, particularly on minority young women. This analysis is a starting point to understand the significant changes of the gender gap of Gen Z and its relationship to society.

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