Explaining the Widening Gender Ideological Gap in Recent Years: The Roles of Pandemic, Social Media, and Generative AI

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Abstract

This article examines the widening ideological gap between men and women through three contemporary factors: the COVID-19 pandemic, social media, and generative artificial intelligence. It argues that gendered experiences of economic insecurity, identity-based online communities, algorithmic filtering, and AI-related stereotypes and employment risks have pushed men and women toward increasingly divergent political positions. Together, these developments reinforce gender-based polarization and deepen the contemporary ideological divide.

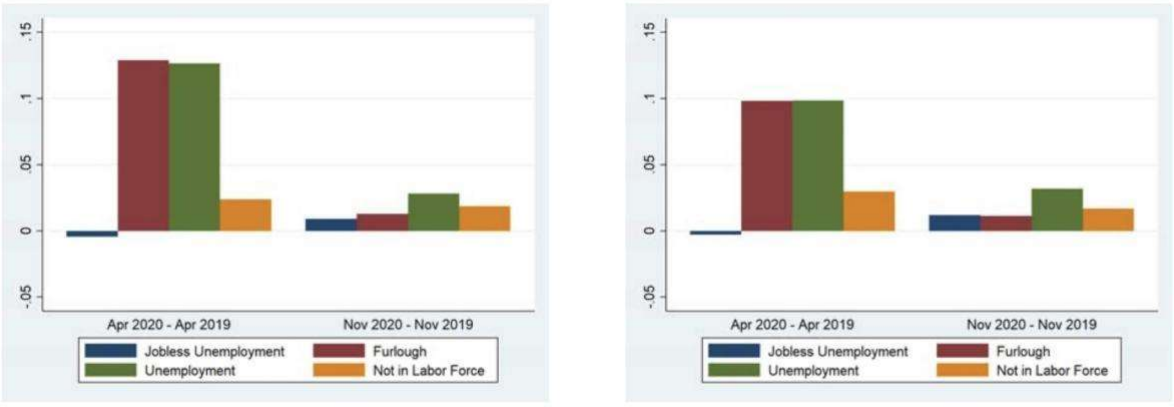
Keywords

Gender ideological polarization, gender political divide, algorithmic polarization, information cocoons, generative AI bias.

1. Introduction

Rising tensions over gender issues across Western liberal democracies point to the phenomenon that, a widening ideological gap between men and women is on the rise, with far-reaching social and political consequences [7,12]. This essay argues that there are three major modern-day factors contributing to the widening gender ideological gap in recent years: the impact of the pandemic, polarisation of social media and the development of generative artificial intelligence.

2. Pandemic and Gendered Backlash



(a) Female (b) Male

Fig. 1 Labor Market Impact of Covid-19 by Gender [9]

The COVID-19 pandemic brought transformations to both the economic base and the broader social atmosphere constituting the superstructure. These transformations did not affect men

and women similarly, but intensified different forms of gendered insecurity that translated into different ideological positions. As suggested in Figure 1 from Lee et al.'s research, women experienced more serious unemployment problems [9], and the pace of women's employment recovery following the pandemic was slower than men. International Labour Organization similarly reported that global female employment in 2020 fell by 5.0% in 2020 [6], whereas it fells by 3.9% for men. By 2021, women's employment still remained 13 million below its 2019 level, while men's was expected to be comparably pre-pandemic levels.

Correspondingly, egalitarian movements have already developed significantly through movements such as #Me Too, the Women's March, and Ni Una Menos, contributing to the further expansion of feminism and public visibility of feminist politics [3,12]. As a result, women became increasingly sensitive to gender-related issues and, following the pandemic, more acutely perceived the risk of being relegated to a more alienated and marginalized social position as their rights and socioeconomic security were threatened to varying degrees. In response to these perceived risks, many women sought mechanisms to combat post-pandemic disadvantages such as employment insecurity and structural inequality, including greater government intervention in the labour market. As women demonstrated a stronger demand for leftist policies, female voters became more inclined to support the Democratic Party in national elections.

Meanwhile, the pandemic intensified a sense of insecurity among men. In the post-pandemic era, some men saw policies aimed at addressing women's disadvantage not as structural inequality's compensation but as overcorrection. This perceived triggered the preservation of traditional gender interests, and further entrenched ideological differences. According to social dominance theory, dominant groups often support beliefs and institutions that preserve group-based hierarchy [15]. Applied to this context, men being historically dominant in the gender hierarchy might resist women's efforts to obtain political representation and social rights as they fear that these gains might challenge existing gender hierarchies. Review of research on men's backlash against gender equality suggests that male entitlement and zero-sum beliefs motivate opposition to feminist politics [1]. That men believe that women's advancement comes at their expense makes them more likely to support conservative gender politics. Yet governments have often been slow to recognize emerging challenges facing men, partly because policies targeted at men may be criticized as anti-women. This neglect can further reinforce the gender ideological divide that progressive institutions underrepresent the male group.

The pandemic also weakened public trust in government due to the structural failures in crisis management as well as the slow post-pandemic recovery of economies and labour markets. In Figure 2 adapted from Rieger and Wang's analysis of cross-national polls, citizens held the opinion that governments were simultaneously overreaching in areas while remaining inactive in others [14]. Men are usually more inclined towards right-wing approaches to solve the problems occurred, whereas women are more supportive of left-wing or interventionist policies. This further exacerbating the gender ideological gap because men and women, with their previously mentioned ideological inclination, interpreted state failure through different social positions. For men who felt economically or culturally displaced, declining trust in government often translated into stronger scepticism towards right-wing movements and reduced support for policies aimed at promoting social equality. By contrast, women's declining trust in government translated into increased demand for a more effective government, as well as greater support for more left-wing policies to deal with social inequality.

3. Social Media and Group-Based Information Cocoons

Due to the rise of digital media and online communication platforms, the spread of political ideas is no longer constrained by geography and national borders, extending public discussion

on gender-related issues to a scale that has never been achieved before. Social media became a major source of political information, especially among younger people. Pew Research Centre reported that 54% of U.S. adults at least sometimes got news from social media [11] , while YouTube, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram were constantly among the most widely used platforms for teenagers. On social media, gender-related ideological conflicts are encountered more frequently and, to one's worry, narrowly and emotionally.

First, due to the community-based nature of social media, gender politics manifest as form of group identity, where political attitudes are less like independent opinions and more like signs of gender-group loyalty. Digital communication has reshaped the nature of social interaction and community formation. Robert Putnam argues that late-modern societies have experienced a decline in civic participation and face-to-face social capital [13], weakening the shared spaces in which people encounter those with different views. In the post-pandemic era, this transformation became particularly obvious. Social fragmentation, uncertainty and instability fostered a desire for emotional belonging and safety. According to uncertainty-identity theory, periods of instability motivate individuals to seek stronger identification with communities and groups to reduce anxiety and uncertainty of existentialism [5]. Social media based on shared identity and collective thought framework foster belonging, but they can also turn into politically enclosed spaces where disagreement is unilaterally equated to "betrayal".

Individuals are not attracted to this new type of community only due to rational behaviour, but also due to the deeper psychological motivations, such as the desire for belonging, social validation, emotional safety and fear of isolation. Social identity theory [16] argues that individuals receive part of their self-concept from group membership and tend to align their belief with perceived group norms to keep an optimal social identity. Hence, political attitudes have become expressions of identity rather than independent decisions by individuals themselves. In discussions about feminism, LGBTQ rights, women voting rights and other gender issues, men and women tend to adopt positions that aligned with the major ideological tendencies of their respective gender communities. For instance, studies have shown that women are significantly more supportive of LGBTQ rights than men [8]. This can be due to online communication groups that required men and women to make decisions aligned with the major opinions respectively. As these ideological positions are tied to self-identity in online communities, gender has been transferred from a form of biological identification into an identity marker that has political and psychological bearings. As a result, online interactions not only explain the gender ideological gaps but also strengthen these gaps.

Second, algorithmic recommendation systems further reinforce these gendered online identities. Online communication platforms leverage on algorithm that filters personalised information shown to users. The filtering mechanism of digital communication is based on personalized algorithms that have the memory of registers' previous preferences and opinions. To gain profits through the activity of registers and attract registers continuously, this method tends to expose its registers to information aligned with their previous behaviour. Instead of creating a more pluralistic and liquid public atmosphere, such method generates filter bubbles and information cocoons [10]. More worryingly, due to the existence of confirmation bias, individuals are more likely to prefer information that confirms their prior beliefs and avoid information that challenges them (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2017). Therefore, men and women reinforce their existing ideological opinions and become more resistant to opposing perspectives.

Influenced by identity-based online communities and algorithmic reinforcement, men and women are exposed to different ideological politic contents related to different genders. Gender-related social issues are interpreted through divergent ideological frameworks. As Davies argues in his theory of "socio-technical recursion"[2], information cocoons are produced not only by algorithms themselves but also through users' pre-existing preferences and online

interactions, which reflect and reinforce the gender ideological gap. Digital media therefore extend the gender ideological gap by transforming ideological positions into markers of group identity.

4. AI and Gendered Politics

The final contributor to the widening gender ideological gap is the popularisation of artificial intelligence (AI) in recent years. A globally influential case is how AI policies promoted by the Donald Trump administration may intensify gendered political divisions through AI-based algorithmic mechanisms. In 2025, Trump pushed for the deregulation of AI. He launches America's AI Action Plan that emphasise the removal of regulatory barriers to accelerate AI innovation [17]. With rapid expansion of AI in daily life yet lacking necessary regulation, generative AI may easily reinforce gender stereotypes in the process of content generation. Studies found that when prompts [20]. This suggests that AI may reinforce toxic masculinity by strengthening hegemonic masculine identity, which can indirectly contribute to gendered political attitudes. Also, in Trump's 2025 AI Action Plan and related executive order, there is a directive policy requiring federal AI systems to be free from "ideological bias" and not promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)-oriented or progressive ideological content [17,18]. The Trump government therefore regulated the federal use of DEI-oriented and equity-focused AI, which may result in more conservative content generation. Men may agree with this conservative content more, while women may more easily regard the limitation of DEI content as a compromise with patriarchal politics and gender discrimination in the political sphere.

Moreover, AI widens the gender ideological gap by creating new forms of employment insecurity. Pew Research Center found that 52% of U.S. workers were worried about the future impact of AI in the workplace [12], while 32% believed AI would lead to fewer job opportunities for them in the long run. This anxiety is not gender neutral. Research identifies that women's employment is more exposed to generative AI than men's employment, especially because women are overrepresented in clerical and administrative jobs that contain tasks more easily affected by automation [4]. This prompts women to call for greater leftist government regulation (e.g., labour protection, retraining, anti-discrimination). At the same time, men may experience AI disruption as a symbolic threat to traditional masculine roles in skilled labour. Precarious manhood theory argues that masculinity is often experienced as a fragile social status that must be repeatedly proven and defended [19]. When AI appears to reduce the value of traditionally masculine skills or weaken the male breadwinner role, some men may respond defensively by supporting political movements that promise to restore national strength as well as traditional masculine authority and identity, coinciding with Trump's political rhetoric and anti-progressive narratives.

5. Conclusion

This essay argues the reason for recent widening gender ideological divide is three-fold. First, the socioeconomic changes brought by the Covid-19 pandemic produced different experiences of insecurity for men and women. Women became more aware of employment insecurity and structural inequality, which increased their demand for left-wing and interventionist policies. By contrast, some men perceived themselves as marginalized or overlooked, especially when gender equality policies were seen as overcompensating for women's disadvantages. Second, social media and algorithmic filtering have fostered enclosed communities that perpetuate radical beliefs. The proliferation of the internet and the emergence of online communities further exacerbate ideological differences, as they encourage people with opposing views to engage in heated political discussions, which reinforces gendered positions. Third. generative AI lacks sufficient regulation to prevent it from reproducing toxic masculinity and gender-

stereotypical ideas. Moreover, AI-related employment disruption may lead to practical and symbolic anxiety for women and men respectively, driving them to seek and reinforce contrasting political ideologies.

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