

National survey of economists uncovers vast gender gap in policy views

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Is there a "gender gap" in the views of professional economists? A new national study finds that while most economists agree on core economic concepts, values and methods, they differ along gender lines in their views on important economic policy.

The study – believed to be the first [systematic analysis](#) of male and female [economists'](#) views on a wide variety of policy issues – surveyed hundreds of members of the American Economic Association. The research team found that despite having similar training and adherence to core [economic principles](#) and methodology, male and female economists hold different opinions on particular current economic issues and specific economic policies including educational vouchers, health insurance and policies toward labor standards.

Women economists in the study, for example, are less likely to favor limiting government-backed redistribution policies than men. They also view [gender inequality](#) as a U.S. labor market problem more than their male counterparts do, and are more likely to favor government intervention over market solutions than men.

Meanwhile, the average male economist sees government regulation as more excessive, exhibits greater support for reducing tariffs, and is more opposed to mandating that employers provide their employees health insurance.

"We wanted to learn if it would make any difference if men or women

were at the table when economic policies were debated and alternatives considered," said Ann Mari May, professor of economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Business Administration and the study's lead author. "These results suggest that the answer to that question is a clear and definitive yes."

The research also found very different interpretations of the status of job opportunity for men and women, both in economics academia and in the broader job market. Male economists, on average, said that opportunities are relatively equal between the genders in the United States, while the average female economist in the study disagrees.

Similarly, when economists were asked about the gender wage gap, the average male economist agrees that differences in productivity and voluntary occupational choices lead to men earning more, while female economists tend to disagree.

The study comes at a time when the national discussion, including the presidential campaign, is dominated by the economy and about which policies are best for the United States. The authors say their results highlight the importance of including economists of both genders when forming policy to ensure that a variety of professional perspectives are included.

"If demographic differences such as sex help shape our views of policy related questions, it is important that women be included on boards and in policy-making circles at all levels of decision-making," said Mary McGarvey, UNL associate professor of economics and one of the study's co-authors. "While including women in policy-making circles does not prevent the selection of only those individuals with shared beliefs, it nonetheless may increase the possibility that diverse viewpoints will be represented."

Also among the findings:

- By 20 percentage points, women economists are more likely to disagree that either the United States or the European Union has excessive government regulations. They also are 24 percentage points more likely to believe the size of the U.S. government is either "too small" or "much too small."
- Women are 41 percentage points more likely than men to favor a more progressive tax structure and 32 percentage points more likely to agree with making the U.S. income distribution more equal.
- Men support the use of vouchers in education more strongly and were more likely to support drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The study is forthcoming in the journal *Contemporary Economic Policy*. In addition to UNL's May and McGarvey, the study was authored by Robert Whaples, professor of economics at Wake Forest University.

Provided by University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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