

Gender gap at work reflects political views of boss

March 1 2016, by Greta Guest

Why are some male managers surrounded by a diverse group of subordinates while others only hire other men?

An organization's level of [gender inequality](#) may reflect its managers' political ideology, according to a nationwide study of male law partners by University of Michigan professor Seth Carnahan.

"In general, women are much less likely to be promoted, and much more likely to leave their firms. We found that this gender gap gets smaller when male bosses are more liberal, but it gets larger when male bosses are more conservative," said Carnahan, an assistant professor of strategy at Michigan's Ross School of Business.

Carnahan said previous research suggests that more diverse organizations may perform better, and he wondered why some organizations had higher rates of [gender diversity](#).

He and co-author Brad Greenwood of Temple University analyzed data on political donations and large American law firms and found that underlying political beliefs impacted who partners select as subordinates.

The findings also suggest that liberal male law partners are more likely than moderate partners to serve on diversity committees and to select female associates for their client teams, while conservatives are less likely to do so.

Conservatives tend to believe society is better served when there is a traditional division of labor in the household where men are money earners and women take care of the kids, he said. A conservative manager may be more likely to believe that their female subordinates will eventually leave to take care of children so they may be reluctant to invest in them.

On the other side of the spectrum, he said that liberal managers may use their jobs to push for gender equality, which they see as socially important.

"It is important to emphasize that we don't know the right level of diversity for each office, each organization. Our results should not be interpreted as 'anti-conservative' or 'pro-liberal'," Carnahan said.

When companies are evaluating the selection and personnel decisions of managers in an organization, it's helpful to know their [political ideology](#).

"They are probably not consciously discriminating against women, but their beliefs could influence their willingness to invest in female subordinates," Carnahan said. "And this could happen on both sides of the spectrum. You could have conservative managers who don't promote women enough and you can have liberal managers who promote women more than they otherwise should."

More information: Seth Carnahan et al. Managers Political Ideology and Gender Inequality within Organizations, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2016). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.2721979](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2721979)

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