

Trump's chauvinism appeals to some voters more than others

October 24 2016, by Lynn Prince Cooke

Even after mounting evidence of Donald Trump's exploitative and demeaning treatment of women, his standing in the polls [still hovers above 40%](#). On the face of it that's more than a little shocking – but less surprising is the gender split among his supporters.

A recent summary of gender differences in the polls [compiled by FiveThirtyEight](#) found that women favour Trump's female opponent, Hillary Clinton, by 15 percentage points overall; men, on the other hand, favour Trump by five. It's true that many Republican women are [standing by their man](#), but that's not enough for Trump to win women's vote overall.

No surprise at all to gender researchers, though, is that the first time a woman threatens to break through what Clinton called the "highest, hardest [glass ceiling](#)" of the US presidency, her nominated opponent is the embodiment of the "male chauvinist pig" – a man, usually in a position of power, who publicly expresses the opinion that women are by nature inferior to men and best relegated to the kitchen and the bedroom.

The term male chauvinism first emerged after World War II as more women entered paid employment. This threatened the self-esteem many men derive from their dominance over women in the family, the economy, and society at large.

The use of the term chauvinist pig became more widespread as women

in the US demanded not just employment, but the employment equality supported by affirmative action and Title VII of the [1964 Civil Rights Act](#). The epithet was in vogue during the late 1960s and early 1970s, at the height of second wave feminism.

Since then, many American men have adapted to women's economic gains. They are much more likely [to be married to employed women](#) than to women who aren't in the labour force. Men spend [twice as much time doing unpaid housework and childcare](#) as they did in the 1960s, and generally [report more egalitarian attitudes](#) to survey researchers.

Yet these gender equality gains are modest and fragile. Men's masculine identity is still linked to their economic role, and a man's chauvinist pig can resurface if this is threatened. But not all men are equally vulnerable to this threat.

Across the divide

All workers shared in the prosperity of the postwar era – but things began to change in the late 1970s, when wage inequality among men rose sharply in ways that affect their economic advantage over women.

Wage returns on a university degree steadily increased for both women and men, but the gender gap remains largest [at the top of the wage distribution](#). In other words, the wage gains of high-skilled women are not likely to threaten the masculinity of high-skilled men. In contrast, the gender wage gap has almost disappeared among the least-skilled men and women.

Low-skilled men's wages stagnated as the US de-industrialised and the real value of the minimum wage [declined](#). Collectively-bargained, high-wage manufacturing jobs evaporated; they were replaced by precarious, low-wage service sector positions. The upshot is that a couple or family

could not survive for long on a low-skilled husband's income alone.

The men most affected by this transformation are now lining up for Trump like no other segment of the electorate. As reported by [The Atlantic](#) back in March 2016, white men without a college degree form the core of Trump's supporters.

Without economic advantage, a man's inner chauvinistic pig can break out to reassert dominance over women in another way. One way is to objectify women, as Trump [was recorded](#) doing with Billy Bush in 2005. Trump's coarse comments may have scared away some of the Republican mainstream, but plenty of his supporters have dismissed them as typical masculine "locker-room talk" (a defence even shock-jock Howard Stern [rejected](#)).

Male chauvinists also use the state to assert their dominance over women. An example of this among a fair number of Trump supporters is the Twitter feed #repealthe19th – a cry to [repeal the amendment](#) that gave women the right to vote.

But women did not principally cause the economic woes that have left some voters so desperate as to think a chauvinist like Trump can save them. Indeed, it's precisely men like Trump who have used their power and privilege to widen the gap between the haves and have nots.

Trump's chauvinism will never make America greater than it is right now. Instead, his campaign has revealed just how damaging male chauvinism can be. And now, with his hyper-masculinity threatened by Clinton's edge in the polls, Trump is [attacking the very democratic process](#) a presidential candidate should passionately defend.

Assuming that not even Donald Trump can destroy American democracy, the real challenge begins for whoever is sworn in as

president on January 20 2017. Americans need more economic security for their enlightened sides to shine through again. This means more good jobs at living wages for men as well as [women](#). Only then can the country begin to close the social chasms revealed and fuelled by Trump's campaign – and only then can we banish chauvinism to the past, where it belongs.

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