



Research Title: A Study on Changes in Voting Behavior and Policy Voting of Women Voters by Generation

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Abstract

- ◎ Split-ticket voting by gender is a phenomenon unique to the people in their 20s and 30s (“the 2030 generation”) and does not appear in other age groups. Accordingly, this study explores why split-ticket voting between male and female voters appears only among the 2030 generation, while also examining the overall voting behavior of women voters and generational voting patterns.
- ◎ This study holds significance for two main reasons: (1) it focuses on the voting behavior of women voters, particularly noting the trend since the mid-2010s in which female voter turnout has surpassed male voter turnout; and (2) it seeks to analyze how the discourse surrounding gender conflict in Korean society was reflected by political parties and voters in the 2022 elections.
- ◎ The findings suggest that the trend of women voters demonstrating collective identity through voting is likely to continue. Most notably, both male and female voters responded that “Public office candidates should demonstrate a strong awareness of gender equality and a high level of interest in related policies”, indicating that gender should no longer be framed as a divisive issue in electoral politics.

Background and Issues

- ▶ In the 2022 presidential election, split-ticket voting by gender was particularly prominent within the 2030 generation. Since this phenomenon was not observed among voters in their 40s and older, it is necessary to examine why gender-based split-ticket voting occurred only within the 2030 generation.

- ▶ Accordingly, this study analyzes the voting behavior and modes of political participation of women voters in detail by gender and age, and examines the overall generational patterns of voting behavior among women voters.
- Specifically, the study investigates whether the gender conflict dynamics in Korean society are reflected in the voting behavior of the 2030 generation, how gender equality awareness and attitudes toward political participation differ among the 2030 generation, and what the fundamental causes of the observed gender conflict dynamics are.

Policy Pledges for Women in Major Elections

- ▶ In the 21st National Assembly election held in 2020, the policy pledges for women announced by the four major parliamentary parties primarily focused on addressing low birth rates, family caregiving, and gender-based violence, regardless of party affiliation.
- ▶ In the 2021 mayoral by-elections in Seoul and Busan, both major party candidates included similar pledges related to the establishment of sexual violence response and support centers. A notable new trend in the 2021 Seoul mayoral by-election was the entry of feminist candidates from five minor parties out of a total of twelve candidates. These candidates generally emphasized gender equality, reducing inequalities, protection of labor rights, addressing climate change, respect for sexual minorities, and animal rights as their main campaign pledges.
- ▶ An analysis of the gender equality, women, and family-related policy pledges of the four parliamentary parties and the top three candidates in the 20th presidential election in 2022 showed that, similar to previous elections, the key areas were family caregiving (e.g., infant and child care), birth promotion policies, gender-based violence response, policies for single-parent families, and labor-related policy measures.
- ▶ A distinctive feature of the 20th presidential election in 2022 was the emergence of women's policy administration reform as a major campaign issue. Pledges ranged from the proposed abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family to counter-proposals for the creation of a Ministry of Gender Equality or a Ministry of Children and Youth.

Generational Differences in Candidate Choice and Policy Voting Perceptions by Gender: Survey Findings

Survey Overview

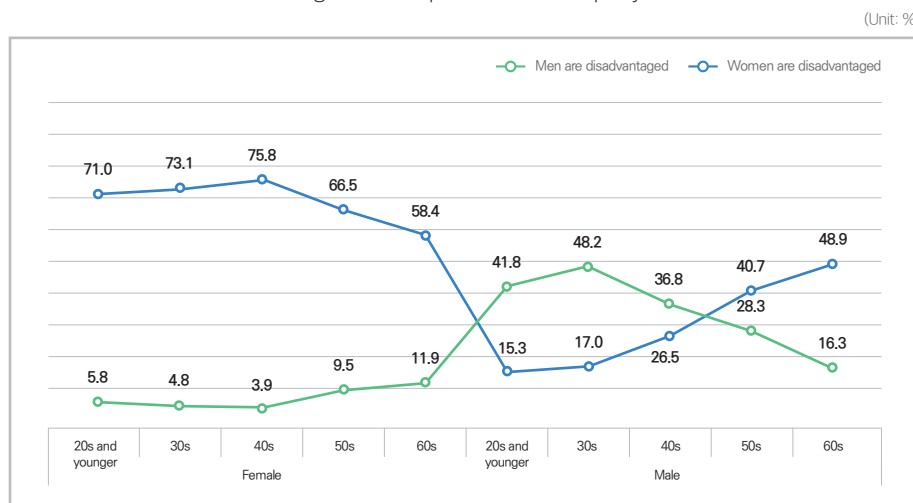
- ▶ This study conducted an online survey using a structured questionnaire with 3,000 male and female voters (1,474 women and 1,526 men) aged 19 and above, but under 69, across 17 metropolitan cities and provinces.
- ▶ The survey consisted of five main areas: political participation, voting behavior in presidential elections, voting behavior in local elections, interest and opinions on women's policies, and perceptions of gender equality.

- ▶ Data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics 26, applying basic statistics, frequency analysis, and cross-tabulation analysis. In particular, cross-tabulation was performed to examine statistically significant differences in responses across subgroups by gender, generation, and political orientation for each survey item.

● Perceptions of Gender Equality and Interest in Policies for Women

- ▶ When asked who they believe experiences greater inequality, 49.1% of all respondents stated “women are disadvantaged.” However, the gender gap in perceptions was most pronounced among voters in their 20s and 30s: 33.9% of men in these age groups answered “men are disadvantaged,” while 68.7% of women responded “women are disadvantaged.”

<Figure 1> Perceptions of Gender Equality



- ▶ Regarding the extent to which recent incidents and everyday issues in Korean society have influenced perceptions of gender equality (measured on a 5-point scale), respondents indicated they were most affected by gender-based violence issues (average: women 3.64 points, men 3.41 points), followed by issues related to livelihood and household responsibilities (average: women 3.24, men 3.19), and women’s political representation (average: women 3.19 points, men 2.89 points). Notably, men in their 60s showed up to 0.63-point difference compared to men in their 20s, with response levels similar to women in their 20s and 30s.
- ▶ Interest in women’s policy issues also showed a gender gap, with women reporting an average of 2.78 points and men 2.48 points. Among men, the generational gap was particularly wide between those in their 60s (averaging 2.72 points) and those in their 20s and younger (averaging 2.22 points). In terms of perceived need for specific women’s policies, the generational gender gap among voters in their 20s and younger was most pronounced in support for increasing the proportion of women in senior political and corporate leadership positions (1.03-point difference) and for promoting gender equality systems and cultural awareness (1.24-point difference).

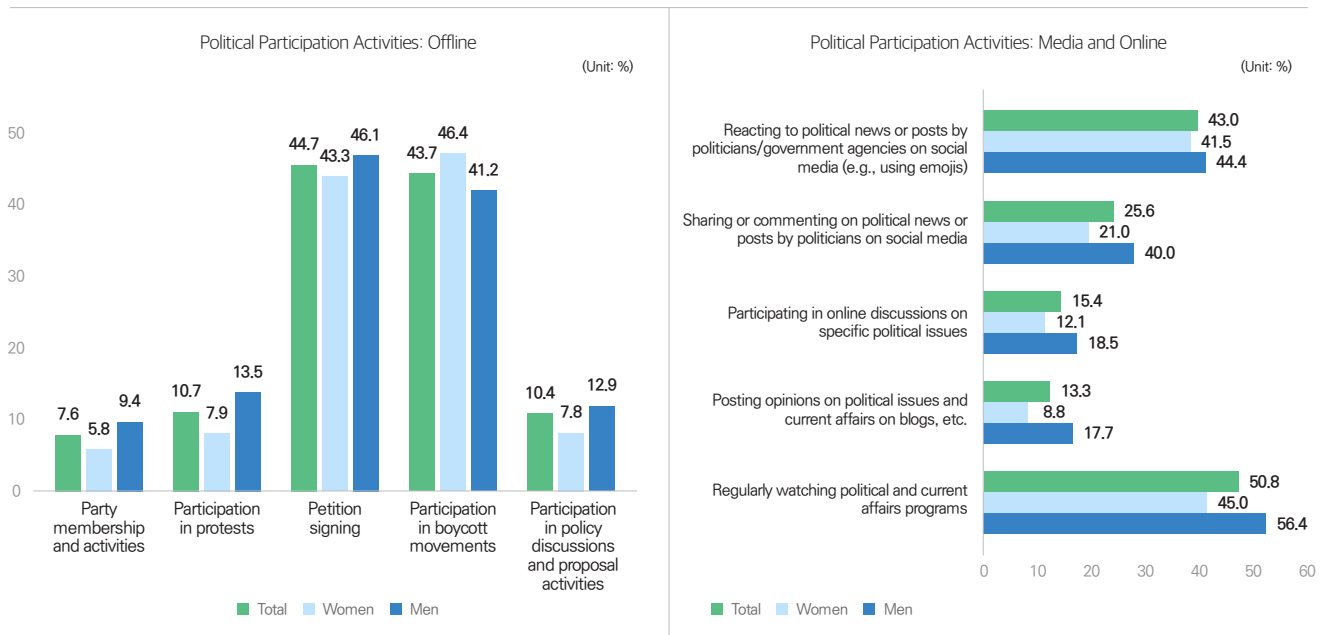
- ▶ Across all items related to gender equality awareness and interest in women's policies, gender gaps were consistently observed. In terms of generation, the largest gender gap occurred among voters in their 20s and younger. It is also notable that within male voters, a substantial generational gap was evident between those in their 20s and younger and those in their 60s.

Interest in Politics and Elections, and Political Efficacy

- ▶ Interest in politics overall was reported by 74.3% of women and 82.3% of men, indicating that men tend to show greater interest in politics than women. Regardless of gender, progressive respondents demonstrated a relatively higher level of interest (progressive women 85.7%, progressive men 90.1%).
- ▶ Interest in elections was higher for the presidential election (88.0%) than for local elections (73.8%). The gender breakdown of those who reported being "very interested" also showed higher interest in the presidential election (women 45.6%, men 57.1%) compared to local elections (women 20.2%, men 32.8%). Additionally, in both presidential and local elections, older age groups and progressive respondents showed higher levels of interest, regardless of gender.
- ▶ Regarding political efficacy, 74.2% of all respondents agreed with the statement "The general public can influence politics." There were no significant differences by gender or age; however, positive response rates were higher among progressive respondents of both genders (progressive women 83.5%, progressive men 80.1%). On the other hand, only 35.3% agreed with the statement "An individual's opinion is reflected in government policies," indicating widespread skepticism. Relatively high positive response rates were found among those in their 20s and younger (40.7% for women and 46.5% for men) and among progressives (37.8% for women and 38.6% for men), regardless of gender.
- ▶ In offline political participation activities, women most frequently engaged in boycotts (46.4%), followed by petition signing (43.4%). For men, petition signing ranked first (46.1%) followed by boycotts (41.2%). In terms of media and online political participation, "regularly watching political and current affairs programs" was the most common activity (women 45.0%, men 56.4%). The next most common form of participation was "expressing opinions by reacting (e.g., with emojis) to political news or posts by politicians and government agencies on social media" (women 41.5%, men 44.4%).

<Figure 2> Political Participation Activities

(Unit: %)



Voting Behavior

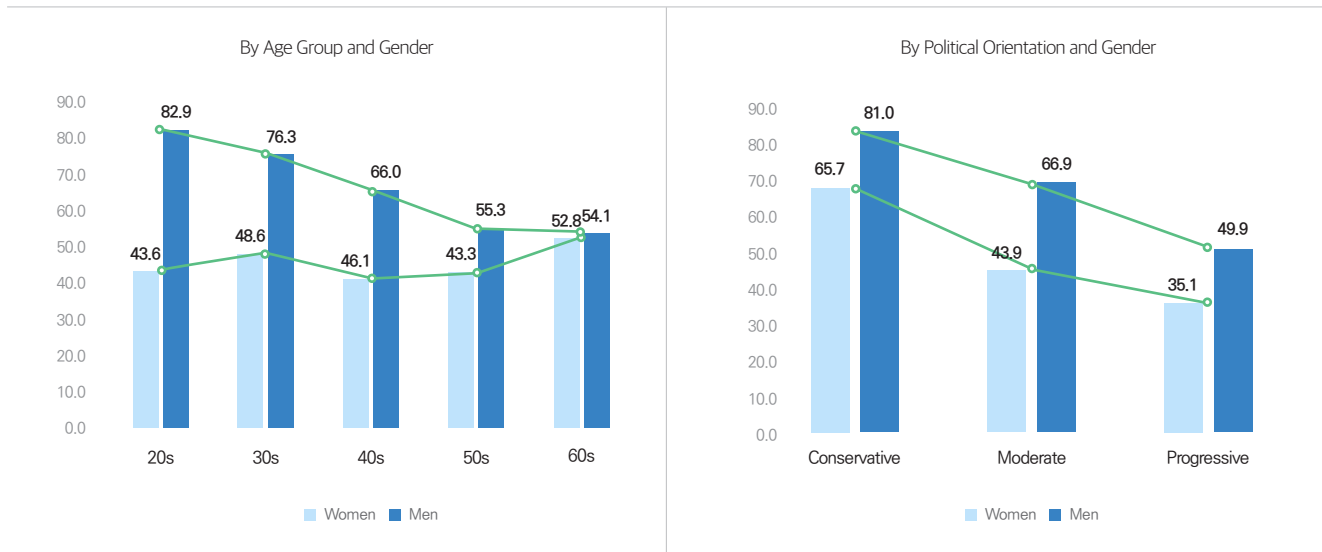
- ▶ The timing of candidate selection was reported to be most frequently more than one month before voting day for both presidential and local gubernatorial elections. The proportion of respondents who decided more than a month prior increased with age. By political orientation, centrist voters were more likely to decide on election day or within 1-3 days before voting.
- ▶ In terms of candidate selection criteria, for both the presidential and local elections, more respondents indicated that they were influenced by the candidate's personal qualities and capabilities, as well as their pledges and policies, rather than the candidate's political orientation or party affiliation. By gender, both women (presidential 86.3%, local 83.0%) and men (presidential 86.9%, local 79.7%) most frequently selected "the candidate's personal qualities and capabilities." Conservative voters tended to prioritize party affiliation, whereas progressive voters placed more emphasis on personal qualities and capabilities in both elections.
- ▶ When asked which candidate they voted for, the majority responded that they voted for "a candidate I supported from the beginning and who I thought would win" in the presidential election. In contrast, for local gubernatorial elections, the most common response was "a candidate I supported from the beginning even if I thought they might lose."
- ▶ The most frequently cited reason for changing candidate support, in both presidential and local elections, was "the candidate's capabilities." In the presidential election, more men (14.8%) than women (7.5%) reported that "support by a political figure I respect" influenced their change of candidate. This tendency was especially pronounced among men under 20 (18.8%) and men in their 30s (24.4%).

Policy Voting on Major Campaign Pledges in the Presidential and Local Elections

- ▶ This study examined differences by gender, age, and political orientation in agreement levels on major campaign pledges from the last presidential election, categorized into seven areas: jobs/labor, housing/real estate, low birthrate/work-life balance, women/human rights, diplomacy/national security, environment, and government structure.
- ▶ Regarding policies in the jobs/labor category, generational differences emerged between younger and older cohorts on issues such as expanding working hours and introducing a four-day workweek. Notably, political orientation strongly influenced responses in this category. In terms of housing/real estate policies, conservatives showed greater agreement with easing comprehensive real estate taxes and property holding taxes, while progressives showed greater support for introducing a land ownership tax and expanding youth housing options.
- ▶ For policies related to low birthrate and work-life balance — including extending after-school care to eight hours, introducing parental allowances, and establishing a universal parental leave system — over 60% of respondents across gender, age, and political orientation agreed with these proposals.
- ▶ In the women/human rights category, a majority of both men and women expressed agreement on most policy items. With the exception of addressing the gender wage gap and introducing a legal partnership registration system, men's agreement rates exceeded 70%. However, while a majority supported addressing the gender wage gap, significant differences were observed by gender, age, and political orientation. This suggests that women/human rights policies may increase the likelihood of feminist voting in the future, and that gender conflicts among younger generations on women/human rights issues may be less pronounced than societal perceptions suggest.
- ▶ In terms of diplomacy/ national security policies, opinions on the additional deployment of the THAAD missile defense system showed substantial gaps between genders, between young women and men, and across political orientations. Similarly, for environmental policies, attitudes toward expanding nuclear energy also revealed large differences by gender, youth gender subgroup, and political orientation.
- ▶ On the issue of abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, substantial differences in agreement were observed across gender, age, and political orientation. To further explore factors influencing policy support, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The results indicated that individuals with a higher level of interest in current women's policies, a stronger perception of the need for gender equality policies, and greater gender sensitivity were more likely to oppose the abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family.

<Figure 3> Agreement Rates on the Abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family

(Unit: %)



Changes in Voter Participation and Decision-making Process Regarding Candidate Choice

- ▶ In the survey, 77.8% of respondents reported participating in both the 2022 presidential and local elections (76.9% of women, 78.6% of men). Participation was highest among those in their 60s (women 83.3%, men 90.1%) and lowest among those under 20 (women 66.7%, men 59.9%). Across political orientations, progressive respondents showed the highest participation rates for both elections, regardless of gender (women progressives 85.1%, men progressives 86.1%).
- ▶ To assess whether voters engaged in straight-ticket voting in the 2022 presidential and local elections, held three months apart, participants were asked about their party choices: 66.1% voted for the same party, 26.4% voted for two different parties, and 7.5% voted for three. Men (69.9%) were more likely than women (62.0%) to vote consistently for the same party, while women (38.0%) were more likely than men (30.1%) to have split their votes across two or three parties (a 7.9 % point difference).
- ▶ In the 2022 presidential and local elections, the proportion of voters based on policy in their voting decisions was highest for the presidential election (women 76.2%, men 82.3%), followed by metropolitan mayoral elections (women 55.1%, men 58.3%), and lowest for municipal mayoral elections (women 42.1%, men 37.2%). In other words, men placed more emphasis on policy and pledges when voting for presidential and metropolitan candidates, while women showed relatively greater emphasis on these factors for municipal candidates.
- ▶ Regarding criteria for past voting behavior, 48.6% of respondents (women 50.1%, men 47.2%) indicated that while a candidate's competence and integrity were important, they also considered other factors. Additionally, 49.3% of respondents (women 49.9%, men 48.8%) said they voted for their preferred candidate regardless of that candidate's chances of winning. Finally, 90% of all respondents expressed support for increasing the political participation of women candidates.

The Rise of Women Voters as Political Actors and the Realization of Gender-Equal Politics

Factors Influencing Candidate Choice Among Men and Women Voters

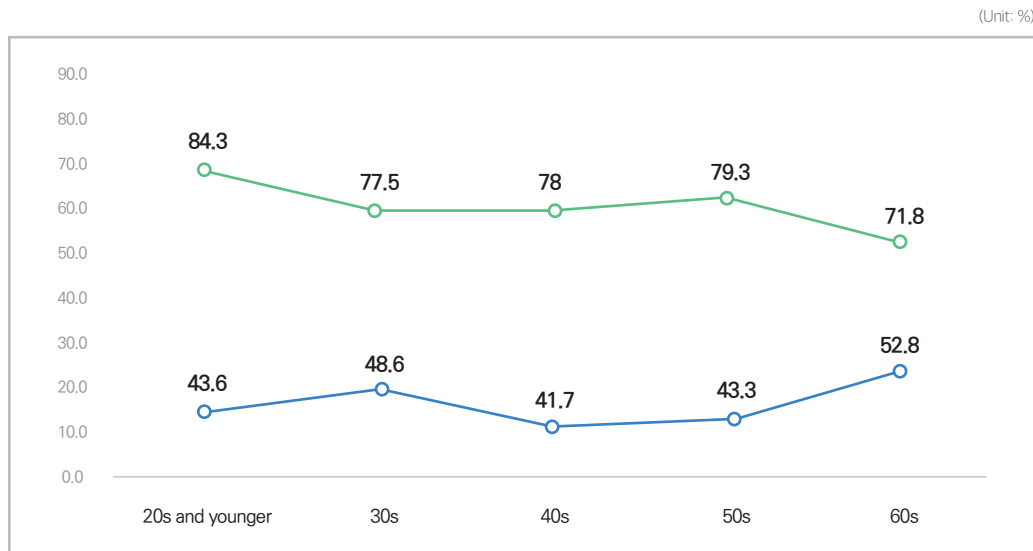
- ▶ In both the 2022 presidential and local elections, the primary factors influencing candidate choice among male and female voters overall were, in order: candidate's competence and capabilities, candidate's policy pledges, ideological orientation, and party affiliation. However, when broken down by gender and age, the order of importance varied notably among male and female voters in their 20s and 30s (the 2030 generation).
- ▶ For female voters, the candidate's competence and capabilities were the top consideration, followed by the candidate's policy pledges. However, in the local elections, this order was reversed, with policy pledges taking precedence. In particular, female voters in the 2030 generation rated the importance of policy pledges highest, with an average score of 3.04 points among voters under 20 and 3.08 points among those in their 30s.
- ▶ Male voters also prioritized candidates' competence and policy pledges. However, for male voters in their 50s and 60s in the presidential election, ideological orientation (average 3.10 points) was considered more important than party affiliation (average 3.07 points).
- ▶ Traditionally, previous studies have shown that male voters tend to prioritize party affiliation, whereas female voters give more weight to policy pledges. However, this study revealed a different pattern among the 2030 generation: women in this age group placed more emphasis on party affiliation than men, while from the 40s generation onward, the traditional pattern re-emerged, with men focusing more heavily on party factors.

Generational Differences in Policy Voting Among Women Voters

- ▶ According to women voters' level of agreement on policy voting by generation, revealed that "strict punishment for sexual crimes" ranked as the top priority for all age groups except those in their 50s and 60s. In contrast, "false accusation penalties," often positioned as a counterpoint to sexual crime policies, ranked fifth among women in their 20s but rose to first place for women in their 50s and 60s.
 - The policy pledge to "reduce the gender wage gap" was ranked second among women in their 30s, receiving the highest level of agreement in this group, and remained in third place among voters in their 40s and older. The "universal parental leave system" pledge also received its strongest support from women in their 30s, ranking third. The policy to "strengthen gender equality policy functions" ranked second among women in their 20s and younger but declined in relative importance as age increased, suggesting the responses may reflect the life-cycle experiences of women voters.
- ▶ A comparison of women voters' responses to the pledge to strengthen gender equality policy and the pledge to abolish the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family reveals a notable contrast among women in their 20s and 30s. While 43.6% and 48.6%, respectively, supported the abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, a significantly higher proportion — 84.3% and 77.5% — expressed agreement with strengthening gender equality policy.

- This indicates that support for abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family may stem from dissatisfaction with, or a lack of understanding of, the ministry as a delivery system, rather than from opposition to the functions or objectives of gender equality policies themselves.

<Figure 4> Policy Voting by Women Voters: Women's Policy Delivery System



- In the case of voters in 2022, while there was hope that the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family would more effectively strengthen gender equality policies, there was also resistance to these policies being implemented within the framework of "women" and "family." Furthermore, given the rise of diverse family structures, including single-person households, and increasing trends of remaining unmarried, support for abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family should be interpreted as a conditional approval — reflecting a desire to see gender equality policies delivered more effectively.

● Changes in Voting Behavior of Women Voters by Generation and Key Implications

- Recent elections have continued to show higher voter turnout rates among women than men.
- When examining factors influencing candidate choice, male voters tended to prioritize party affiliation, whereas female voters were more concerned with policy pledges. As a result, men exhibited stronger partisan identification, while women were more likely to engage in split-ticket voting.
- Among various influences on vote decisions, family members (spouses) were ranked as one of the least influential factors for female voters — only following acquaintances. Nevertheless, women (36.7%) still reported being influenced by family or spouses more than men (29.1%). In parent-child relationships, sons were more influenced by their fathers, while daughters tended to be influenced by their mothers. Among married individuals, those in lower income brackets showed greater influence from husbands, while in higher income groups, wives exerted greater influence on voting decisions.

- ▶ Women voters consistently reported higher levels of awareness of gender equality, interest in women's policies, and likelihood of considering gender-related policies in future voting decisions compared to male voters.
- ▶ Although progressive tendencies were observed among women in their 20s and conservative tendencies among men in the same age group, their voting behavior suggests that neither group has remained consistently aligned with a particular party. Given that the gender gap in voting appears to be more a result of electoral strategies than inherent ideological differences among men in their 20s and 30s, their future voting preferences remain difficult to predict.
- ▶ In conclusion, the long-standing notion that women are politically disengaged and therefore have lower voter turnout no longer holds true. Women's voting behavior demonstrates increasing political engagement and a growing collective identity as voters. Most notably, both male and female voters expressed the view that candidates for public office should possess a strong awareness of gender equality and an active interest in gender-related policies, indicating that gender should no longer be framed as a divisive issue in electoral politics.

Supervising Agency : National Election Commission

Related Agencies : National Assembly Research Service, Political Parties