

Gender Voting Gaps and Violence in Mexico

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The gender gap in voting provides a way to measure gender polarization in politics. A dramatic gender gap in voting emerged between young men and women in a number of recent elections across the globe. In the South Korean elections in 2022, 59% of male voters between ages 18 and 29 voted for the conservative candidate Yoon Suk Yeol (People Power Party) compared to only 34% of young women, a voting gap of 25 points.¹ In the United States, the gender gap in young people also increased dramatically from 2020 to 2024, with young men much more likely to vote for Trump. This pattern was replicated in the 2024 UK general election where young women were much more likely to vote for the Green Party and young men were more likely to vote for the far-right Reform UK. In Germany, young men were twice as likely as young women to vote for the hard-right AfD.² Gender gaps among young voters are especially large in elections with far-right parties as young men have embraced far-right ideologies and young women have been repulsed by them. The growing polarization between men and women seems to be contributing to democratic backsliding in countries such as South Korea and the United States. A similar process does not seem to be playing out in Mexico. Why not? Is there any evidence of gender equality creating backlash and gendered polarization in Mexico? How has violence influenced the gender voting gap in Mexico?

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/10/1243819495/elections-reveal-a-growing-gender-divide-across-south-korea>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/14/us-election-donald-trump-voters-gender-race-data>

Gender gaps in voting, comparative historical perspectives

In the post-World War II era, women in wealthy democracies tended to be more conservative than men in vote choice and party preference. This pattern is often referred to as the “traditional” gender gap. By the 1980s, the differences between men and women began to disappear, and by the 1990s in many wealthy democracies the gender gap reversed such that women tended to hold more left views and be more supportive of left parties than men.

In the first few decades after women gained the right to vote, there was a gender gap in which women were more likely to support center/right parties (Duverger 1955, Lipset 1960). This traditional gap was often explained by the greater religiosity of women. “Wherever the consequences of women’s suffrage have been studied, it would appear that women differ from men in their political behavior only in being somewhat more frequently apathetic, parochial, [and] conservative. . . . Our data, on the whole, confirm the findings reported in the literature” (Almond and Verba, 1963: 325). In the US, women favored Republican candidates in the 1952, 1956, and 1960 presidential elections, but these differences declined in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1980s women moved towards the Democratic Party and men moved towards the Republican party³ (Inglehart and Norris 2000, 445). By the 1990s a reverse gender gap began to emerge in most OECD countries, with women more likely to vote and prefer parties on the left (Inglehart and Norris 2003). This new gender gap is often referred to as the “modern” gender gap.

Explanations for the changing gender gap include arguments about generational replacement and the impact of modernization. Others have pointed to the entrance of women into the labor market and the role of divorce in creating diverging economic interests for men and women. In the first few decades after women gained the right to vote, older women who had been restricted from voting and participating in politics for most of their lives were much less likely to

³ Is there any reason to think this is related to partisan realignment following civil rights movement?

participate in politics and vote. Younger women who came of age as suffrage was extended to women were much more likely to vote. Throughout the middle of the twentieth century, generational replacement helps to explain a lot of changes in women's voting behavior (Dassonneville 2021).

Inglehart and Norris (2000) argue that the transformation of sex roles in postindustrial societies created value changes that led to the modern gender gap. Women became more secular and less likely to support religious parties. The rise of postmaterialist values gave greater weight to self-expression and gender equality demands. Inglehart and Norris (2000) argued that the different pace of modernization across countries explains varying gender gaps. During the 1980s and 1990s long term structural and cultural trends created a realignment of gender differences in electoral behavior in advanced industrial societies, but not in post-communist or developing countries (Inglehart and Norris 2000).

Did left parties change, and become more welcoming to women? See Chowning's argument that church offered women opportunities for leadership denied by the liberal state (Chowning 2023).

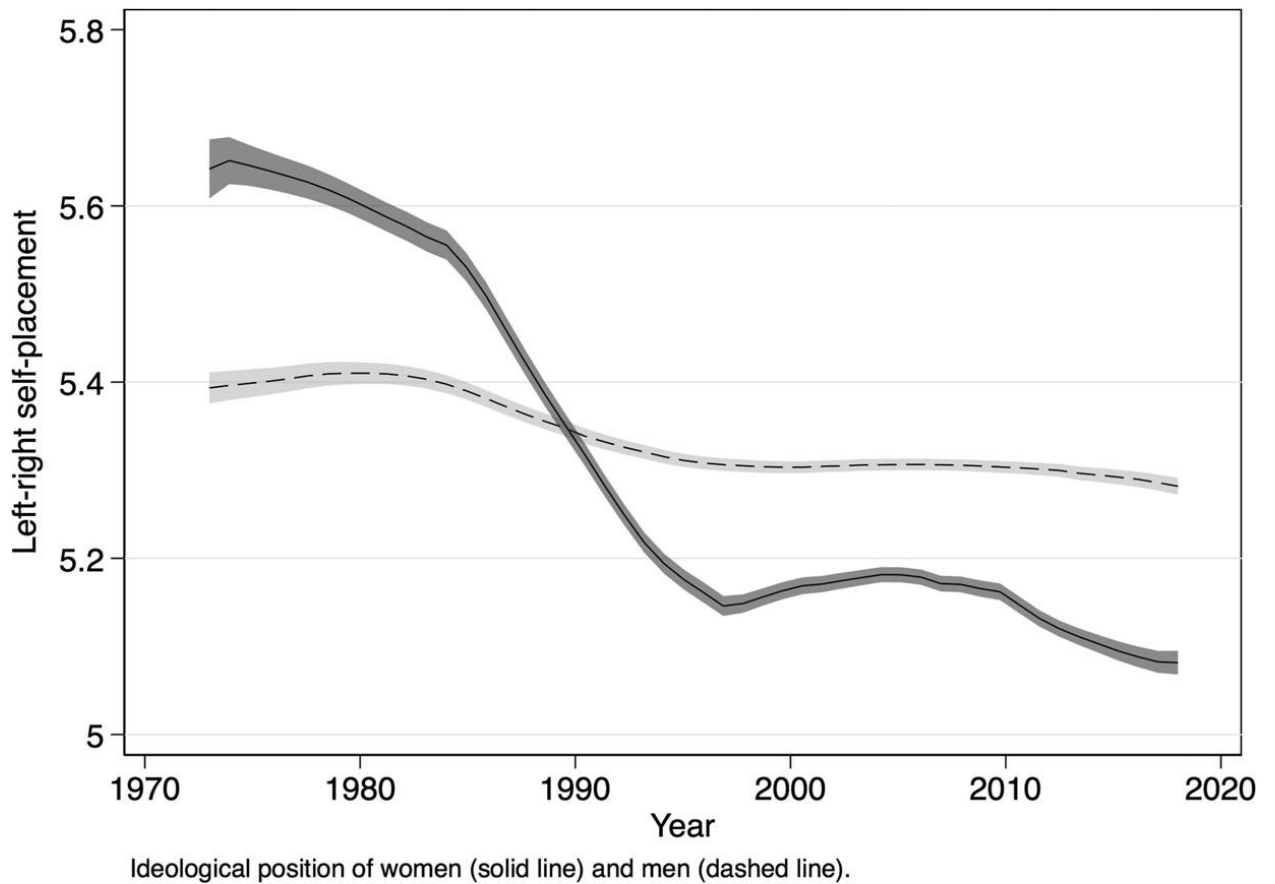
Other scholars have stressed women's mobilization and the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s with changing women's views about politics⁴, as well as women's labor force participation and women's education level. Women's role in the economy is clearly an important cause of changing female voting behavior. When women joined the labor force, childbearing and child rearing were no longer their only activities. Women were overrepresented in low paying jobs and suffered higher levels of poverty. As a result, women were more likely than men to support welfare state policies. In addition to a macro-level gender gap, the gender gap can also be seen at the individual level based on educational attainment, participation in the labor force, socioeconomic status, and religiosity.

⁴ Women's movement may have forced political parties to adopt official positions on gender equality?

Iversen and Rosenbluth (Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006) have pointed to the importance of rising divorce rates on generating a gender gap in voting. They find that in communities with very low divorce rates, married women tend to see their economic interests aligned with the economic interests of their husbands, because they do not expect to have their economic fortunes delinked from the economic fortunes of their husband. Thus, they tend to oppose higher taxation of their husband's income in order to support greater welfare spending. But as divorce rates in a community rise, women start to realize that their economic interests may not be the same as their husband's. According to Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006), as women witness the economic vulnerability of their female friends and neighbors who have recently divorced, they start to worry about their own economic vulnerability and begin to favor higher taxation and more generous welfare spending.

Dassonneville (Dassonneville 2021) built the most complete dataset to date of the ideological gender gap in all OECD countries from 1973 to 2018 using the Eurobarometer, the Latinobarometro, the European Social Survey, the World Values Study, the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and national election studies for particular countries. She finds that most of the shift to a modern gender gap took place among the silent generation and baby boomers in the 1990s. From the 1990s until 2018 when her data ends, the gender gap stabilized and younger generations of women did not continue to move left. See (Dassonneville 2020).

Graph 1: The Shifting Gender Gap across all OECD countries (1973-2018).



Source: Dassonneville 2021

Left-right placement is on a scale where 10 = far right, 1 = far left.

Graph 1 (borrowed from Dassonneville's research) shows the traditional gender gap in ideology where women were more conservative than men in the 1970s begins to close in the 1980s among OECD countries. And about the year 1990, women begin to report more leftist views than men. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s the gender gap is fairly stable, but even in this graph, the gap seems to be widening toward the end of the 2010s. The widening has continued into the 2020s, especially among younger people.

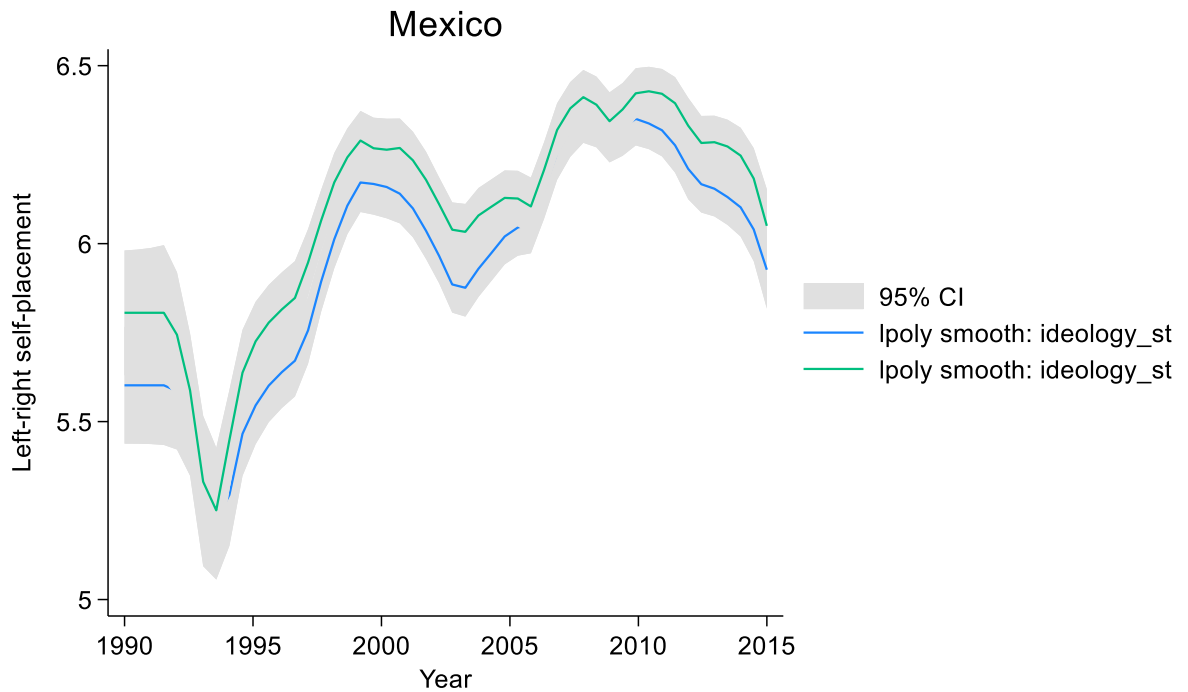
Gender Voting Gap in Mexico

Mexico is in many ways an outlier in the way gender has interacted with populism and democratic backsliding. While many of the political movements that are centralizing power in the hands of executives and dismantling democratic institutions are motivated by rightist ideologies, Mexico's political leadership is more aligned with the left. And in contrast with most populist leaders, Claudia Sheinbaum at least rhetorically identifies herself as a "feminist" and, while she has not been an ally of the feminist movement, she has sometimes supported policies to promote gender equality. How have these differences shaped the gender voting gap in Mexico? What are the implications of Mexico's gendered voting behavior for democratic institutions and gender equality policy? How have high rates of violence in Mexico shaped the gender voting gap?

There was no youth voting gap in the 2024 presidential elections in Mexico. And while there has been substantial democratic backsliding in Mexico, it has been driven by a leftist party that has at least rhetorically embraced feminism. Why is Mexico so different from the rest of the OECD countries?

The graph of the gender gap in Mexico looks very different from the average gender gap data across all OECD countries discussed above. Graph 2 shows the gender gap in Mexico using the same data as Graph 1. Until the 2024 presidential elections, Mexico maintained a "traditional" gender gap in which women were more likely to identify as more conservative than men. We can see the "traditional" gender gap in Mexico through 2015 using Dassonneville's (2020) data.

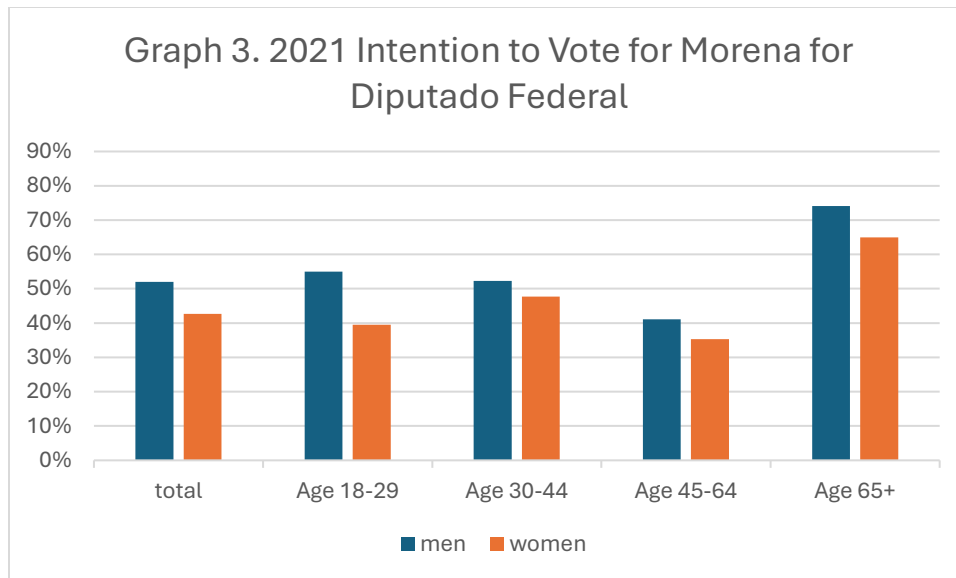
Graph 2. The gender gap in Mexico (1973-2018)



Source: Dassonneville 2020. Left-right placement is on a scale where 10 = far right, 1 = far left. The green line represents women's average ideological placement. The blue represents men's average ideological placement.

Mexico's traditional gender gap in voting corresponds to Mexico's low female labor force participation rate. In 2023, only 51% of Mexican women were employed, compared to an average among OECD countries of 71%. Mexico also has one of the lowest divorce rates in the world, though the divorce rate has increased dramatically since 2000.

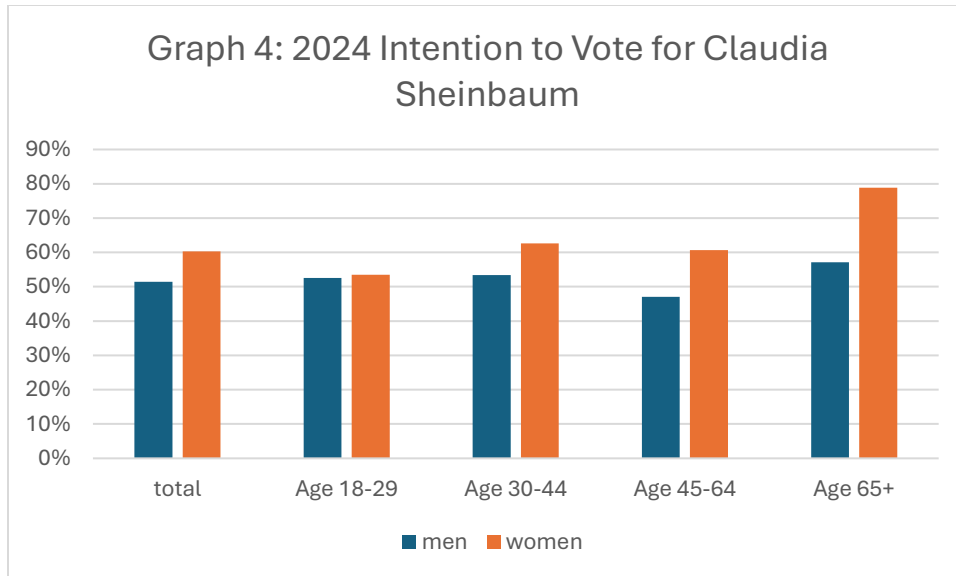
The traditional gender gap can also be seen in more recent electoral data.



Source. Encuesta Flacso Parametria, Elecciones 2021.

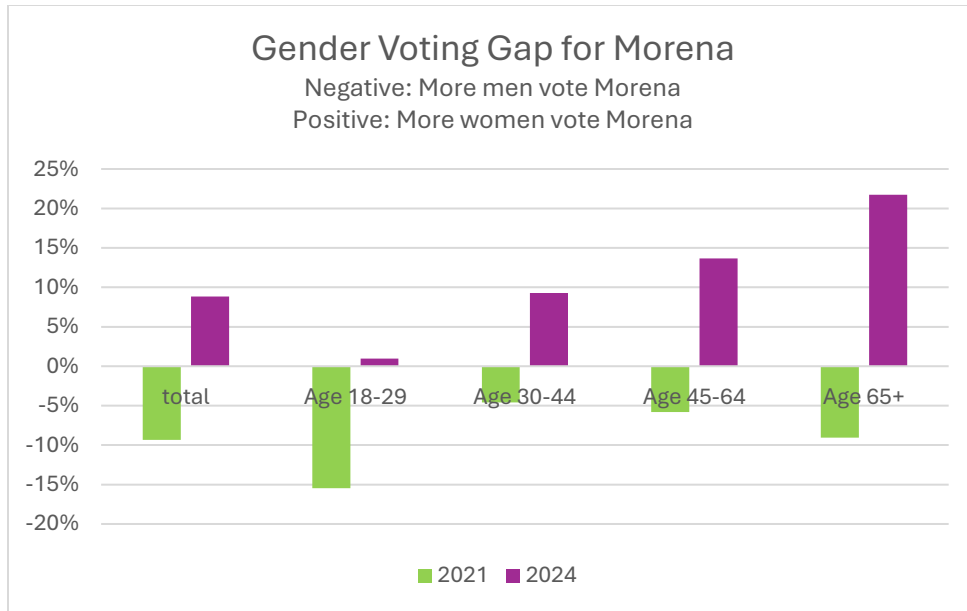
As shown in Graph 3, in the 2021 elections men were almost ten points more likely to vote for Morena for federal deputy. If we consider Morena the “left” option, this supports the ideological placements seen in Graph 2 in which women place themselves more to the right than men on average.

But in the presidential elections of 2024, the gender voting gap reversed. Mexican women were almost ten points more likely to vote for Claudia Sheinbaum than men. If we consider Morena to be the “left” option, then for the first time Mexican women were more likely to vote for the left option than men. Graph 4 shows the gender voting gap by age group in 2024.



Source. Encuesta Flacso ISA, Elecciones 2024.

The fact that the Morena candidate for president in 2024 was a woman may explain some of the shift in the gender voting gap. But since the other major party candidate was also a woman, it's not entirely clear that was the driving cause. Another shift from 2021 to 2024 is that in 2021, the largest gender gap was in the youngest age group. In 2024, the largest gender gap was in the oldest age group. Young men were 15 points more likely to vote for Morena in 2021, but young women were more likely to vote for Morena in 2024 by just 1 point. In 2021 the oldest men were 9 points more likely to vote for Morena, whereas in the 2024 elections the oldest women were 22 points more likely to vote for Morena. That represents a 31-point shift in the gender gap among the oldest voters. About half of the shift is from older men moving away from Morena, and half is from women moving to Morena. The dramatic change in the gender gap among older Mexicans is extraordinarily unusual. The large shifts in gendered voting gap in most OECD countries are taking place among the youngest voters. Given the widening gender gap among young people in many other countries across the globe, it is noteworthy that there is almost no gap between young men and women in the Mexico's 2024 presidential election.



What explains the unusual changes in Mexico's gender gaps? Clearly older men abandoned Morena, presumably because they were uncomfortable with the idea of a female president. But there is no evidence that men who were uncomfortable with a female president voted for Maynez. According to Encuesta Flacso ISA 2024, 7.14% of men intended to vote for Maynez and 6.40% of women intended to vote for Maynez. No one in the older group voted for Maynez (0/35).

(Konzevik Makowski and Castro Cornejo 2025) find that men hostile to gender equality are most likely to not vote in parity elections when candidates are female (rather than vote for a male alternative). But in our survey data, the older men 65+ are the least likely to abstain from voting.

Were older women inspired by the idea of witnessing a female president in their lifetimes? But they could have voted for Xochitl Gálvez? Vote of older women was driven by Morena's politics of direct payments? Look into this more in survey data. What other characteristics explain the switchers? Education level?

Young women were much less likely to vote for Sheinbaum than older women. These dramatic shifts may reflect weakness of party identification and the general collapse of the party system in Mexico. Does young people's relatively weak support for Morena suggest they do not

consider Morena the “left” option? Left/right scale may not be very meaningful in Mexico.⁵ Look into this more in survey data. Important difference between Mexico and other OECD countries is that partisan conflict in Mexico has not structured the agenda around gender issues.

Violencia y el voto por Sheinbaum

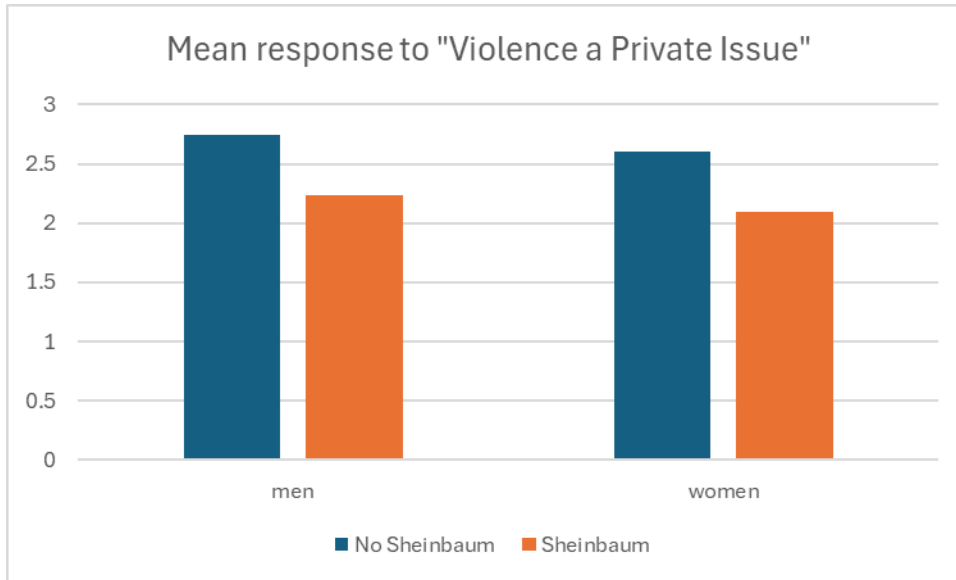
45. La violencia física entre miembros de una pareja es un asunto privado y debe manejarse dentro de la pareja o la familia cercana. Está usted					
		Frecuencia	Porcentaje	Porcentaje válido	Porcentaje acumulado
Válido	1. Muy de acuerdo	17933372	18.2	18.2	18.2
	2. De acuerdo	29762012	30.3	30.3	48.5
	3. Ni de acuerdo ni en desacuerdo	24002342	24.4	24.4	72.9
	4. En desacuerdo	12674202	12.9	12.9	85.8
	5. Muy en desacuerdo	3135319	3.2	3.2	89.0
	9. Ns/nc.	10822240	11.0	11.0	100.0
	Total	98329486	100.0	100.0	

Source. Encuesta Flacso ISA, Elecciones 2024.

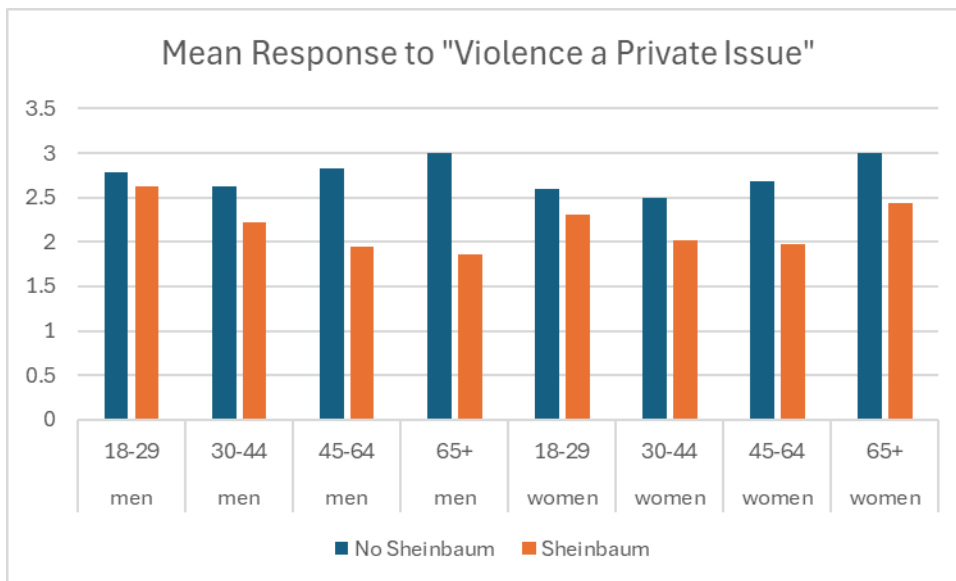
According to survey data from Encuesta Flacso ISA, Elecciones 2024, Only 16% of respondents disagreed with the statement that domestic issue that should be dealt with within the family. The mean response for people who planned to vote for Sheinbaum on question 45 was 2.1, compared with 2.7 for those who planned to vote for a different candidate for President in 2024. Sheinbaum voters were significantly more likely to believe that domestic violence is a personal

⁵ Fernanda comment: there is not gender gap in economic policy in Mexico, the gender gap only exists in social/moral policy. Think about ideology as two dimensional.

issue that should be solved within the family (and thus presumably government institutions should not get involved in protecting women victims of domestic violence).



Among both men and women, Sheinbaum voters were more likely to consider domestic violence to be a private issue than those who did not intend to vote for Sheinbaum. Women were slightly more likely than men to see domestic violence as a private matter.



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