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## About the Journal

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Journal of Academics Stand Against Poverty (Journal of ASAP) is an open access international multidisciplinary journal published under the ISSN 2690-3458 (electronic edition) and ISSN 2690-3431 (print edition) by Academics Stand Against Poverty, a non-profit organization based in United States (EIN # 32-0324998). Its mission is to publish high-quality work that can make genuine contributions to understanding and eradicating poverty and its effects in the real world. Such work will address the structural causes of poverty with an eye to the special challenges poor people face in such areas as nutrition, water, shelter, health and health care, sanitation, clothing and personal care, energy, education, social and political participation and respect, physical safety, family planning, environmental degradations and hazards, working conditions in employment and at home, navigating governmental agencies and the legal system, banking and credit, travel and transportation, and communications. Journal ASAP is committed to ensuring that perspectives of the poor are adequately represented on its pages, and that these pages are accessible to all. The journal makes substantial efforts to include voices from the global South as well as from non-elite educational institutions and from organizations, agencies and communities that are working toward poverty eradication. It also aims for the widest possible reach by being entirely open-access: its one/two issues each year are free for download anywhere in the world without any requirement to provide personal information. Journal ASAP invites submission of original work and maintains a rigorous double-blind peer review system that provides constructive feedback to assist authors in presenting their work in a way that is clear, broadly accessible and practically useful. Journal ASAP is a pure Open Access Journal and allows the author to retain the copyright in their articles. Articles are made available under a Creative Commons licence (CC-BY) to allow others to freely access, copy and use research provided the author is correctly attributed.

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## Gender Polarization in Voting: The Role of Negative Campaigning

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**Abstract:** Across the globe men tend to lean towards right-wing parties while women are more likely to vote left. In addition, there is a well-documented pattern which shows that negative campaigning tends to be more effective among male voters and that right-wing parties are more likely to employ negative campaign tactics. This leads to the question whether gender polarization in voting can be partially explained by men's greater susceptibility to negative campaigning. To explore this, a large-scale expert survey (NEGex) was merged with a collection of post-election surveys (CSES Module 5) to extract a database of 45,000 respondents, covering 200 parties over 34 national elections. The results confirm the hypothesis that the gender divide is partly due to men being more susceptible to negative campaigning, which right-wing parties commonly use more than their left-wing counterparts.

### Keywords:

1. Gender polarization
2. Political campaign adverts
3. Campaign tone

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. What Is Polarization and How Does It Affect the Population?

"When politicians start talking about large groups of their fellow Americans as 'enemies,' it's time for a quiet stir of alertness. Polarizing people is a good way to win an election, and also a good way to wreck a country." – Molly Ivins, American columnist, author and political commentator *"You Got to Dance with Them What Brung You"* (1998)

Over the last four decades, there has been the rise of a silent threat to democracy – polarization. Every election cycle, this term is frequently quoted in the press and by experts. But what does it actually mean? And why could it be dangerous?

Political polarization can be defined in two categories:

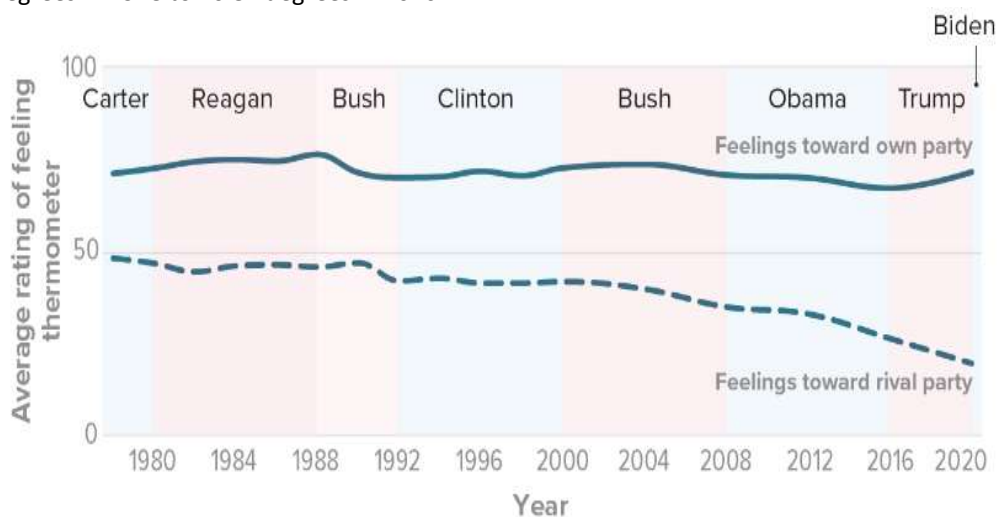
- (1) Affective polarization: the growing tendency for people to feel positive towards social groups they are part of, and negative towards social groups they are not part of – e.g. in the US a Democrat voter's growing dislike of the Republican party and stronger affinity to their own party (and vice versa for Republican voters).

- (2) Ideological polarization: the ideological divide between political groups; where individuals increasingly align with extreme positions rather than moderate viewpoints (EBSCO).<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is the growing divergence and radicalization of the policies people and parties want to enact.

Although both are on the rise, this study will focus more on ideological polarization.

### The Rise of Affective Polarization

A clear indication of the increase in affective polarization was noted in survey data which has been collected by the American National Election Study (ANES) over the past 40 years (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> “The review measured feelings of warmth or coldness toward one’s own party and the opposing party on a “feeling thermometer” scale from 0 to 100. It demonstrates that affective polarization, calculated as the difference between these ratings, rose from 22.64 degrees in 1978 to 40.87 degrees in 2016.”<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 1.** Affective polarization of parties: Own-party and rival party feelings (Source: Knowable Magazine adapted from the ANES Guide of public opinion and electoral behaviour)

### The Rise of Ideological Polarization

Since 1994, in the United States, the average Democrat is increasingly more likely to have liberal ideas whilst the average Republican is increasingly more likely to have conservative ideas.<sup>4</sup> This has been demonstrated by the Pew Research Center survey in Figure 2 – and clearly shows the rise of ideological polarization.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> EBSCO (2025) <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/political-science/political-polarization>

<sup>2</sup> [https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=affective\\_polarization\\_parties](https://electionstudies.org/data-tools/anes-guide/anes-guide.html?chart=affective_polarization_parties)

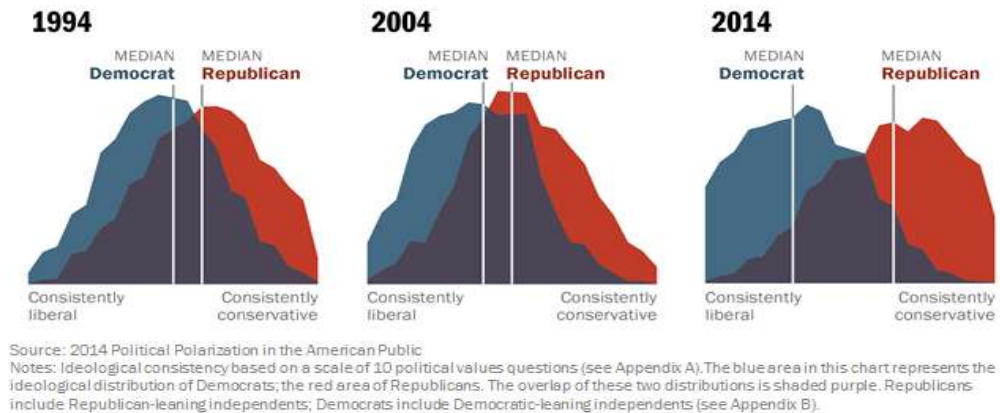
<sup>3</sup> Divided we stand: The rise of political animosity, Carl Johan Karlsson (2024)

<https://knowablemagazine.org/content/article/society/2024/latest-research-what-causes-political-polarization?>

<sup>4</sup> “The questions cover a range of political values including attitudes about size and scope of government, the social safety net, immigration, homosexuality, business, the environment, foreign policy and racial discrimination” (e.g. conservative position: “Most corporations make a fair and reasonable amount of profit; liberal position”: “Business corporations make too much profit”) <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/appendix-a-the-ideological-consistency-scale/>

<sup>5</sup> Political Polarization in the American Public, Pew Research Center (2014)

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>



**Figure 2.** Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values  
 (Source: 2014 Political polarization in the American Public – Pew Research Center)

### The Danger of Polarization

Ideological polarization has been associated with various negative socio-economic consequences. In 2021 Filip Milačić stated “people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of ‘us’ versus ‘them’”. This type of polarization weakens respect for democratic norms, corrodes basic legislative processes, undermines the nonpartisan stature of the judiciary, fuels public disaffection with political parties, exacerbates intolerance and discrimination, diminishes societal trust, and increases violence throughout the society.... At the end [the parties] no longer agree on the rules of the game and begin to disregard the basic norms of the democratic political system in order to win elections”. An example of this can be seen when, in 2019, the UK Conservative party announced that they planned to ignore court decisions related to Brexit.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.2. A Rise in Gender Polarization**

“At the core of today’s political extremes lies a deep-seated social anxiety, fuelled by atomisation and alienation between the sexes.” –Joel Kotkin, writer on urban affairs *“The Dangers of a Political Gender Gap”* (2025)

Ideological polarization isn’t just a coincidence – it is a pattern. What are the differences between the two ends of the polarized population?

Since the 1980s (Emanuele & Marino, 2024), it has been seen that the population is ideologically polarized by gender – where men increasingly tend to vote for more right-wing parties whilst women increasingly tend to vote for more left-wing parties (Hudde, 2023; Abou-Chadi, 2024; Yerushalmy, 2024).

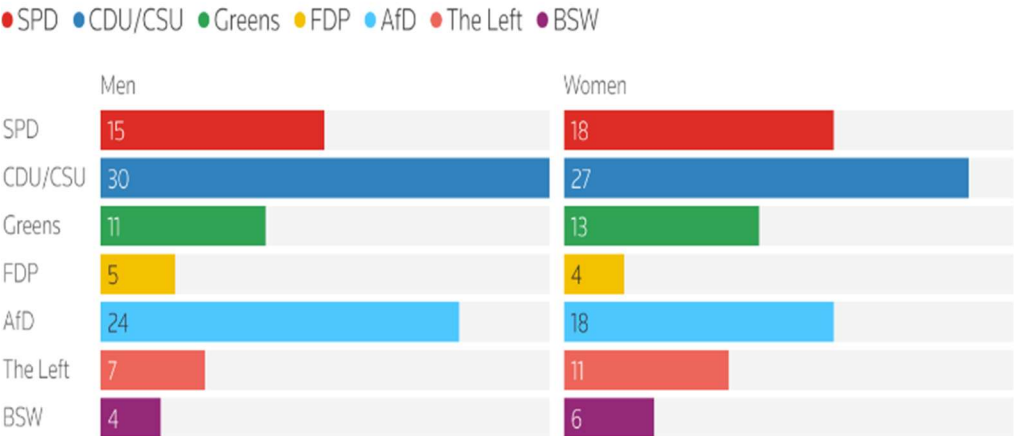
Gender Polarization can be seen in most countries worldwide. For example, Figure 3 shows data collected by ARD broadcast from the 2025 German Federal elections.<sup>7</sup> It demonstrates that gender polarization is apparent in all parties but especially in extremist parties where 24% of all

<sup>6</sup> Boris Johnson fuels speculation he could ignore Brexit delay law – Kate Proctor (2019)

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/sep/29/boris-johnson-fuels-speculation-could-ignore-brexit-delay-law>

<sup>7</sup> Germany’s election in graphics – Rachel More <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-election-graphics-2025-02-23/>

men voted for the AfD (Germany’s far right-wing party), compared to 18% of women, whilst 7% of men voted for Die Linke (Germany’s far left-wing party), compared to 11% of women. This is additionally seen in other countries. In the US 2024 presidential election, 43% of men voted for Harris whilst 55% voted for Trump. On the other hand, 53% of women voted for Harris whilst 46% voted for Trump.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 3.** How men and women voted in the 2024 German Federal election (Source: Rachel More – ARD Broadcast)

Another point to note is that, in recent years, this gender polarization has become most widespread throughout younger generations. According to the Financial Times,<sup>9</sup> the trigger event for this youth related gender polarization was the #MeToo movement which gained popularity in 2017.<sup>10</sup> However, the movement appears to have been solely the catalyst event which has subdivided Gen-Z into conservative and liberal camps based on their gender. This could pose an end to the assumption that the youth are usually liberal whilst the elderly are typically conservative - as stated by François Guizot “A man who is not a Liberal at sixteen has no heart; a man who is not a Conservative at sixty has no head”.

The Financial Times conducted research in 2024 and demonstrated the increasingly stark ideological divide of 18–29-year-olds based on their gender (figure 4). Observing the years when this gender related polarization began, this chart supports the idea outlined in the previous paragraph that the #MeToo movement was the catalyst of the divide, and that the phenomenon has now become self-sustaining surpassing solely sexual harassment issues.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> How voting patterns changed in the 2024 election: A detailed analysis | Pew Research Center (2025)

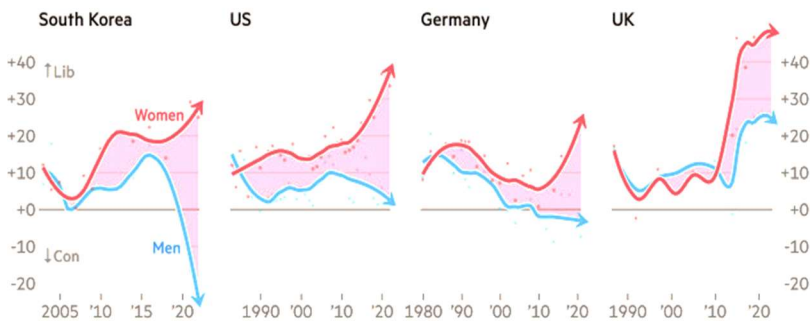
<sup>9</sup> A new global gender divide is emerging – John Burn-Murdoch (2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998>

<sup>10</sup> #MeToo is an awareness campaign founded in 2006 against sexual harassment. It grew online traction in 2017

<sup>11</sup> A new global gender divide is emerging – John Burn-Murdoch (2024) <https://www.ft.com/content/29fd9b5c-2f35-41bf-9d4c-994db4e12998>

### A wide ideology gap is opening up between young men and women in countries across the world

Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex



**Figure 4.** Political ideology of 18-29s (% liberal minus % conservative), by sex (Source: Daniel Cox, Survey Center on American Life; Gallup Poll Social Series; FT analysis of General Social Surveys of Korea, Germany & US and the British Election Study – Financial Times)

### 1.3. What Is Campaign Negativity and Is It on the Rise?

One type of political campaigning has taken centre stage in modern elections and has established its presence. Since the 1990s, campaign negativity has grown. Campaign negativity is “any criticism levelled by one candidate against another during a campaign” (Geer, 2006 p.23) and can be manifested through political attack advertisements. These can be subdivided into civil attack ads, which solely discredit the political policies of the opposing candidate (e.g. “My opponent has allowed violent crime to increase by 20%”) and uncivil attack ads, which in addition, discredit the opposing candidate as a person, often with offensive language (e.g. “My ignorant opponent has weakly allowed crime to increase by 20%”).

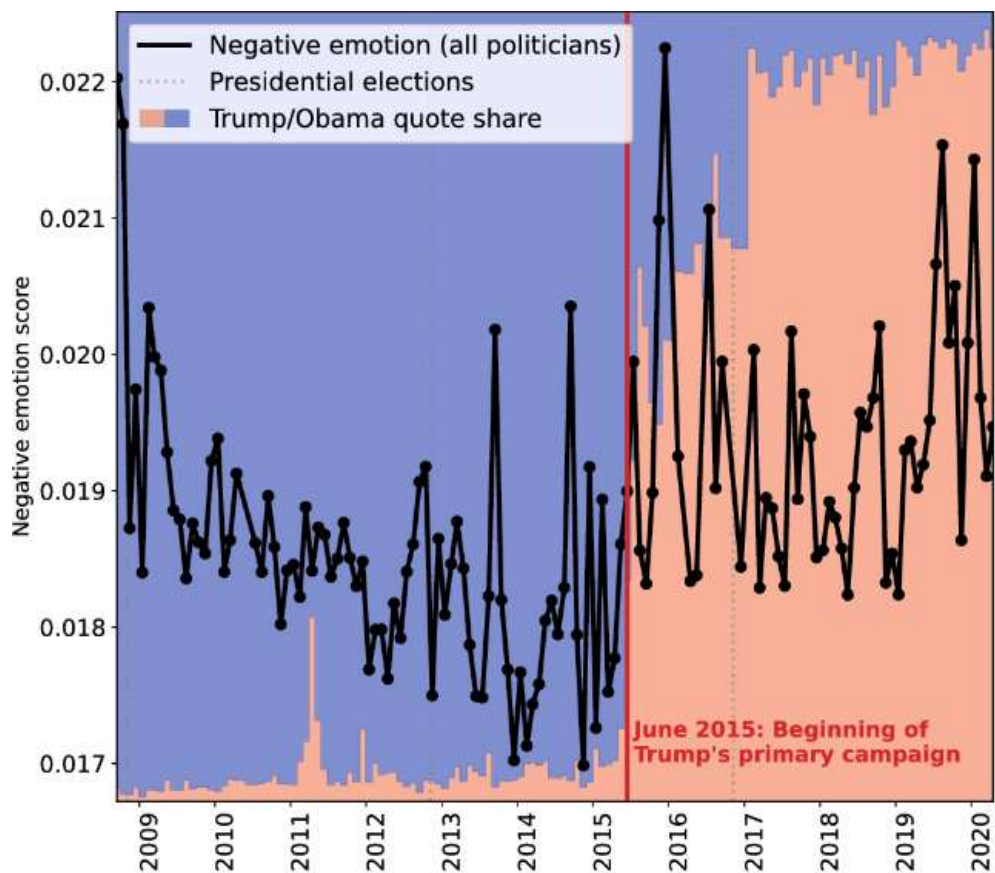
It’s heavily debated whether the presence of attack ads benefits or harms political campaigns and democracies in general. Political scientist Kenneth Goldstein argues that negative advertisements are more likely to be factual as they are designed to teach, whilst positive advertisements are designed to play on voters’ emotions. In addition, voters are more likely to remember the information of a negative ad, meaning they are more engaged and thus more likely to vote (Franz et al., 2007). However, other scholars argue that negative campaigning does not just divide voters - it makes it harder for democracy to function. According to these scholars, it fosters affective polarization, creates a demobilized, ill-informed and polarized electorate, discourages civil debate, erodes voter trust in institutions and alienates undecided voters (Kahn & Kenney, 1999; Desposato, 2011; Brader, 2005; Abramowitz & Webster, 2018).

#### The Rise in the Use of Negative Campaigning

According to data collected by Quotebank,<sup>12</sup> the belief of 85% of Americans that “the tone and nature of political debate in the United States has become more negative in recent years” is correct.<sup>13</sup> A notable turning point occurred in the 2016 Presidential Election when the overall negativity of campaigns rose and then remained elevated (see Figure 5) (Külz, J. et al, 2023).

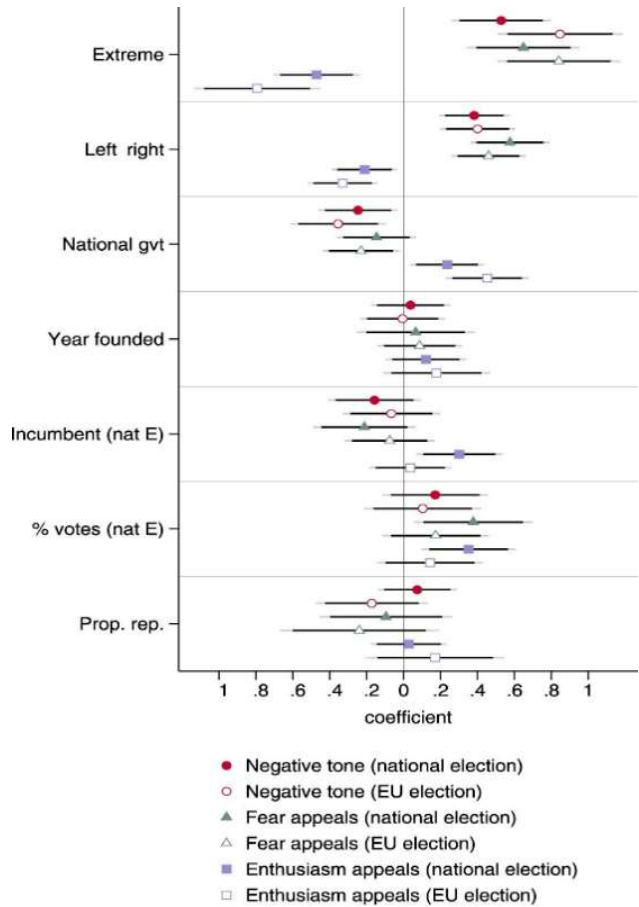
<sup>12</sup>The data spans 24 million online political messages (e.g. tweets, news articles etc.) by 18,627 US politicians between 2009 & 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Pew Research Center survey



**Figure 5.** Average negative emotion of US politicians between 2009 and 2020  
(Source: Külz, et al, 2023)

In addition, right-wing parties do not only lean conservative – they lean toward negative campaigning. Recent research suggests that they are more likely to run attack campaigns and use negative ads compared to their left-wing counterparts (Maier, Nai & Verhaar, 2024; Valli & Nai, 2020; Nai, 2018; Lau & Pomper, 2001). Even though this phenomenon hasn't been entirely explained it may be due to the fact that there is a right-wing inclination to view "the world as a ruthlessly competitive jungle in which the strong win and the weak lose" (Duckitt, 2006). Moreover, some studies demonstrate that negative acts in general (e.g. angry faces) tend to grab the attention of conservatives more than liberals (Hibbing et al., 2014).



**Figure 6.** Uses of campaign tactics based on party distinctions. The second row demonstrates that parties further to the right are more likely to use negative tones and fear appeals, whilst parties further to the left are more likely to use Enthusiasm appeals  
(Source: Maier, Nai & Verhaar, 2024)

### Comparison Of Negative Campaigning Between Left-Right Parties

Figure 6 from Alessandro Nai and Jürgen Maier shows how the use of negative tone, fear appeals, and enthusiasm appeals in campaigns varies depending on different characteristics of political parties. The horizontal position of each marker indicates whether a given party trait makes the use of that tactic more or less likely. Looking at the “Left–right” row (second from top), we see that right-wing parties are more likely to employ negative tones and fear appeals, whereas left-wing parties are more inclined toward enthusiasm appeals. The “Extreme” row (top) reveals that extremist parties are generally more prone to negative campaigning and less likely to rely on enthusiasm.

Other research suggests that how the voter reacts to political ad campaigns is partially dependent on their gender. Men tend to be more susceptible to negative campaign ads whilst women are more susceptible to positive campaign ads.<sup>14</sup> Galasso and Nannicini argue that

<sup>14</sup> By “susceptible” I intend that political attack ads and campaign negativity in general works to a better effect on men as they are more likely to be convinced into supporting a message of this genre.

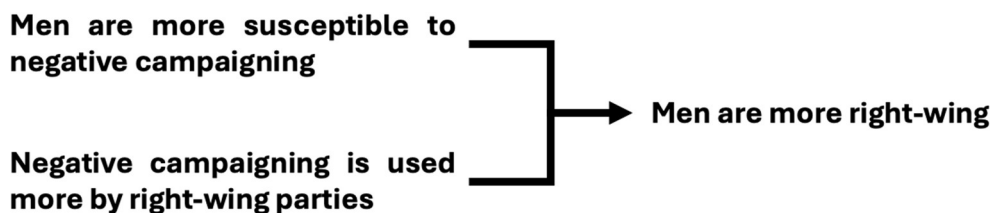
“women tend to prefer competition and aggressive behaviour less than men, also in politics. Fridkin and Kenny (2011) show that female voters have lower tolerance toward negative advertisements, especially if uncivil or related to personal life. Gilligan (1982) and feminist theory suggest that women prefer less confrontational procedures compared with men.... Outside the real-world politics, females and males are also recognized to differ in their attitudes toward competition and negotiation (Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Bertrand, 2010; Niederle & Vesterlund, 2011)” (Galasso & Nannicini, 2025).

The more people think poorly of politicians, the more they believe negative ads.  
The more they believe negative ads, the more they think poorly of politicians

#### 1.4. Why Is Gender Polarization on the Rise?

Is the increase of gender polarization (men voting right and women voting left) in part due to the rise of negative campaign ads, which are used more by right-wing parties and impact men?

### WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION?



**Figure 7.** The inverse may be done with women (women are more susceptible to positive campaigning and positive campaigning is used more by left-wing parties--> Women are more left-wing) (susceptible in this graphic has the same meaning as explained in footnote 14)

## 2. Testing out Hypotheses

### **H1: Men tend to vote for more right-wing parties than women do**

The first step is to test whether there is gender polarization in current elections. In other words, whether men are more likely to vote for more right-wing parties and vice-versa for women. Current literature strongly suggests that this hypothesis is true, Kaufmann and Petrocik propose a possible explanation (1999): “The gender gap resulted from the changed partisanship of men, as the party bias of women has changed very little, if at all.... Our conclusions regarding which attitudes cause the gender gap are more tentative, but social welfare issues were a principal correlate of the gender gap in the last two US presidential elections and may be its primary cause. The measured effects of military and defence policy questions, feminist issues, and social issues were weaker and more erratic.”

### **H2: Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties**

“Hit first, hit hard and keep on hitting.” - Jeremy Sinclair, *founding director of M+C Saatchi ad agency*, when talking about aggressive conservative campaign tactics.

Are right-wing parties more likely to use negative campaigning compared to left-wing parties? Right-wing parties may be more motivated to run negative campaigns for two reasons:

- (1) Negative campaigning may have the consequence of losing the support of non-loyal voters and undecided voters. As right-wing parties are mainly formed of older, loyal voters, going negative is a lower risk for right leaning parties than for left leaning parties, who are formed of more undecided, non-loyal voters (Lau et al., 2007).
- (2) Modern conservative campaigns usually use a targeted “enemy” to blame for certain problems (for example, in the typically right-wing issue of immigration). Going negative helps them define this enemy and mobilize voters (Crespo et al., 2022).

**H3: Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaign strategies**

Following on from H1 and H2 who is more susceptible to negative campaign ads? It is suggested that negative campaigning mobilizes men and alienates women. This article assesses this by testing whether men tend to vote for parties whose campaign tone is more negative. This information matters to parties because it shapes how they target and influence voters.

**H4: Gender polarization in elections can be in part explained by the higher use of negative campaigning by right-wing parties, combined with men’s greater susceptibility to such messaging**

Taking the three sustaining hypotheses together, we can formulate a broader theory:

**WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION? (H4)**

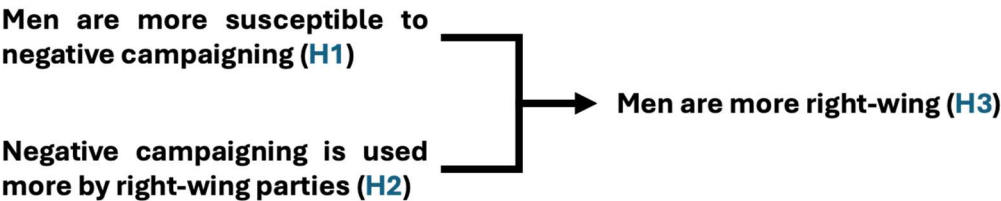


Figure 8. (see figure 7)

**3. Data and Methods**

**3.1. Data Sources**

To test the four hypotheses, two independent data sources were used and merged:

- (1) Negative Campaigning Comparative Data (NEGex), version 2 is a collection of expert-survey data covering 142 national elections worldwide between June 2016 and March 2020. After each national election a sample of experts of that country was contacted to answer a systematic survey about the campaign content of the most prominent

candidates and parties.<sup>15</sup> Experts were used to obtain a holistic assessment of the campaign as a whole, but these types of surveys are not free from risk as they can present bias. For this reason, the measurement of campaign tone was corrected via parametric adjustments to be the “net” of the ideological distance between the average expert and the candidate (Walter & Van der Eijk, 2019). In addition, evidence exists that the expert ratings of the campaign tone show high external validity (Petkevicius & Nai, 2021). The database was assembled by Professor Alessandro Nai of the University of Amsterdam to include data at the elections, parties and candidates’ level

- (2) Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 5 (2016-2021) “Democracy Divided? People, Politicians and the Politics of Populism” is a collection of post-electoral surveys completed by 114,714 respondents over 56 national elections in 45 countries (Mean = 2048 per election). Each respondent answered demographic and personal questions regarding their political beliefs and what party they voted for in their previous national election.

The overlap between these two databases was created to test the hypotheses. This includes data of 44,830 respondents who voted for 200 unique parties over 34 national elections in 32 countries and for each respondent includes:

- Respondent ID
- Country of election
- Year of election
- Respondent gender (the database is made up from 49.4% female respondents and 50.6% male respondents)
- Political party voted for
- Campaigning used by party on a positive-negative scale
- Political ideology of party on a left-right scale

### 3.2. Measures

One of the main difficulties of political surveys is accurately measuring certain subjective data about the parties. Among the information needed to conduct the tests, data relating to the political ideology and campaign negativity are the most difficult to assess.

To quantify the political ideology of the parties, the NEGex database used a 7-point scale ranging from 1 “far-left” to 7 “far-right” to indicate each party’s left-right position. This information was gathered using each party’s Wikipedia “information box”. “Although not ideal, Wikipedia can often provide factual information (Brown, 2011). Indeed, an external validity check discussed in Nai (2018) shows that comparing the information in Wikipedia with left-right measures in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Polk et al., 2017)<sup>16</sup> and the Benoit and Laver (2007) yields very high correlations.” (Valli & Nai, 2020).

To quantify the campaign tone of election per party, the NEGex database asked experts to rate candidates, parties and elections based on the “tone” of the campaign from -10 “very

<sup>15</sup> Experts are scholars with expertise in electoral politics, political communication and country politics who are identified via their scientific outputs (e.g. publications) and self-described expertise. “On average experts in the dataset were quite familiar with the election they were asked to rate ( $M = 8.2$ ,  $SD = 1.6$  on a 0-10 scale). 29.7% of experts are women, 88.5% have a PhD, and 77.0% are domestic experts and work in the country where the election they were asked to rate took place. The average expert is relatively centrist ideologically ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ , on a 1-10 left-right self-positioning scale) (Nai et al., 2024).”

<sup>16</sup> Chapel Hill Expert Survey <https://www.chesdata.eu/>

negative” to +10 “very positive”. The survey included 6 example messages that experts had to rate to “anchor the experts’ ratings”. These were then used to do some parametric adjustments which transformed the 21-point scale into a 7-point scale from 1 “very positive” to 7 “very negative”. A robustness check was run by triangulating the expert measures with two independent data sources which calculated the negativity of political campaigns on twitter and in TV ads in the US 2018 midterms. The experts’ measurements were confirmed to be “significantly and positively correlated with the negativity in the Twitter and in TV ads” (Valli & Nai, 2020).

4. Results

A series of tests were run with the merged database to assess whether the hypotheses are true.<sup>17</sup> These tests turned out to be very intriguing and so, in this section, each hypothesis is considered in turn and the results are examined.

H1 – Men are more likely to vote for right-wing parties

The first test considers whether it is true if gender polarization is present in current elections. The data clearly supports this. On average, male respondents voted for parties at 4.353 on the 7-point political ideology scale where 1 is “far-left” whilst 7 is “far-right”. Female respondents, on average, voted for parties at 4.199 on the same scale. Even though this 0.154 difference (3.67% difference over the entire 7-point scale) may not seem significant, modest shifts can be very important in politics - especially in countries where election vote margins are usually slim (for example, in the United States where, since 2000, the average popular vote margin between the two candidates of the Presidential election has been 3.16%)<sup>18</sup> or in countries where there is a large gender discrepancy, for example, in France, where there are 2,085,000 more women than men, or, in India where there are 45,711,000 more men than women. (Figure 10 displays the number of men per 100 women in each country).<sup>19</sup>

**Table 1.** Average political ideology respondents voted for, by gender (7-point scale – higher mean = more right-wing)

| <i>Gender</i> | <i>N.<br/>respondents</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Coefficient of<br/>variation</i> | <i>Mean rank</i> | <i>Sum rank</i> |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>Male</i>   | 22303                     | 4.353       | 1.541     | 0.01      | 0.354                               | 22639.176        | 5.049×10+8      |
| <i>Female</i> | 21740                     | 4.199       | 1.537     | 0.01      | 0.366                               | 21388.841        | 4.650×10+8      |

<sup>17</sup> The statistical services JASP and Jamovi were used to assess the NEGex database and the merged database. To test H1 a linear regression of the merged database was conducted in which the dependent variable was campaign tone, the covariate was party position, and the factor was gender of respondent. To test H2 a Descriptive Statistics test of the NEGex database was conducted in which the variable was campaign tone, and the split was party position, in addition, an ANOVA and Post-Hoc test was conducted in which the dependent variable was campaign tone, and the fixed factor was party position. To test H3 the same linear regression data from H1 was used. Finally, to test H4 a GLM Mediation Analysis of the merged database was conducted where the outcome was party position, the mediator was campaign tone, and the predictor was gender of respondent.

<sup>18</sup> The average popular vote margin was retrieved from The American Presidency Project which lists all the popular vote margins since the 1824 Presidential election. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/presidential-election-mandates>

<sup>19</sup> Why the former USSR has far fewer men than women – George Gao <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/08/14/why-the-former-ussr-has-far-fewer-men-than-women/>

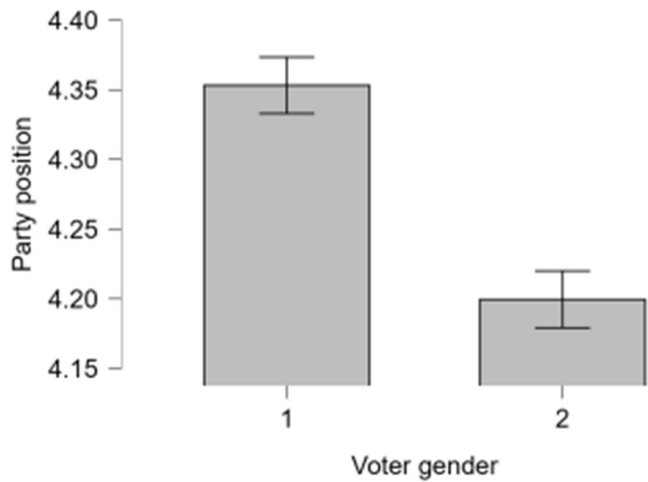


Figure 9. Graph displaying the same information as Table 1

Where Women Outnumber Men, and Where They Don't

Gender ratios in 2015

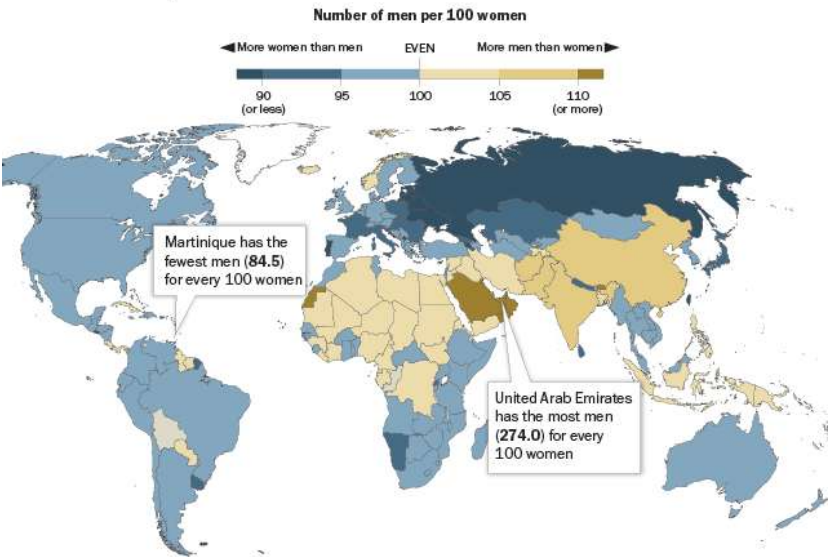


Figure 10. Displaying number of men per 100 women in each country (Source: United Nations, DESA. World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision. – Pew Research Center)

H2 - Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties

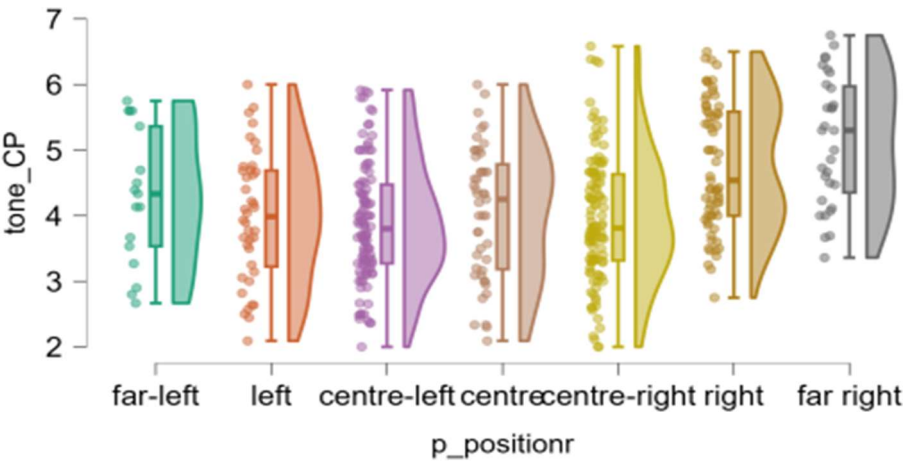
The data also validated the second hypothesis. Tests were run both on solely the NEGex database and then the merged database, both results confirmed that right-wing parties are more likely to use negative campaigning. Through the merged database it can be seen that, on average, for each 1-point increase in campaign tone negativity on a 7-point scale, the average party is 0.63 points further to the right on a 7-point political ideology scale (see Table 4).

In addition, the NEGex database on its own showed that the party ideology with the highest average campaign tone (higher = more negative) is far-right followed by right, far-left, centre, left, centre-right and centre-left parties.

The extensive use of negative campaigning by far-left parties is due to the fact that extremist parties are more likely to run negative ads (Valli & Nai, 2020). An example of this can be seen in the 2024 US Presidential Election campaign tone where, according to Election Analysis,<sup>20</sup> 72% of ads run by Kamala Harris (left leaning) were negative, whilst 99.8% of ads run by Donald Trump (right leaning) were negative (Ridout et al., 2025).<sup>21</sup>

**Table 2.** Mean campaign tone used by parties, by political ideology (higher mean campaign tone = more negative)

| POLITICAL POSITION | FAR-LEFT | LEFT  | CENTRE-LEFT | CENTRE | CENTRE-RIGHT | RIGHT | FAR-RIGHT |
|--------------------|----------|-------|-------------|--------|--------------|-------|-----------|
| VALID              | 17       | 40    | 109         | 47     | 114          | 67    | 31        |
| MISSING            | 0        | 1     | 4           | 2      | 1            | 3     | 0         |
| MEAN               | 4.290    | 3.983 | 3.893       | 4.059  | 3.958        | 4.759 | 5.141     |
| STD. DEVIATION     | 1.046    | 0.987 | 0.905       | 1.006  | 0.970        | 0.966 | 0.980     |
| MINIMUM            | 2.667    | 2.091 | 2.000       | 2.091  | 2.000        | 2.750 | 3.360     |
| MAXIMUM            | 5.750    | 6.000 | 5.917       | 6.000  | 6.583        | 6.500 | 6.750     |



**Figure 11.** Graph displaying the same data as Table 2. This raincloud plot shows the average campaign tone used by parties divided by their ideological position (higher campaign tone = more negative)

<sup>20</sup> Advertising trends in the 2024 presidential race - Election Analysis - United States (2025)

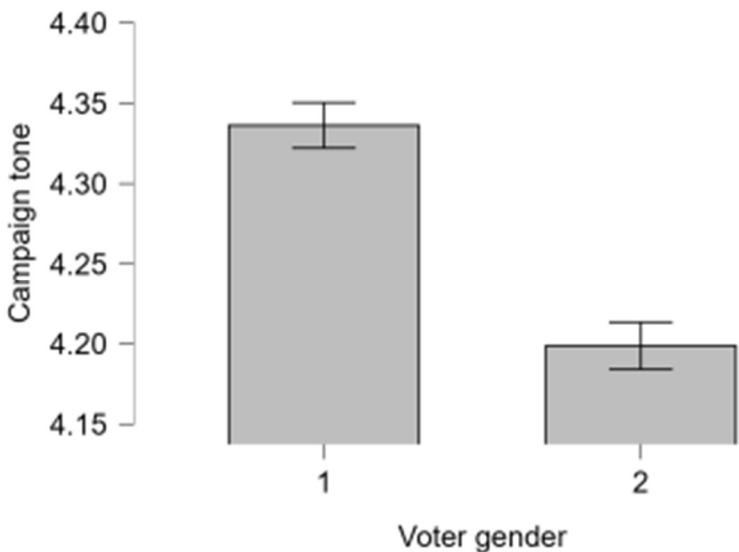
<sup>21</sup> In the analysis negative ads comprised both contrast and attack ads. Contrast attacks mention both the favoured candidate and the opponent, whilst attack ads solely mention the opponent, they are both considered negative ads as the opponent is always cast in bad light.

**H3 - Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaign strategies**

The third test confirms this hypothesis that men are more susceptible to campaign negativity. On average, male respondents voted for a party with an average campaign tone of 4.336 (St. Dev. = 1.085) (on a 7-point scale, where 1 is a “very positive” tone and 7 is a “very negative” tone) whilst female respondents voted for parties with an average campaign tone of 4.199 (St. Dev. = 1.110). Similarly to H1, the difference between the average campaign tone of parties voted for by men and the average campaign tone of parties voted for by women (0.137), even though numerically modest, can have large consequences on elections.

**Table 3.** Mean campaign tone of parties, by respondent gender (higher mean = more negative)

| <i>Gender</i> | <i>N.<br/>respondents</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Coefficient<br/>of variation</i> | <i>Mean Rank</i> | <i>Sum Rank</i>     |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Male</i>   | 22678                     | 4.336       | 1.085     | 0.007     | 0.250                               | 23244.165        | $5.271 \times 10^8$ |
| <i>Female</i> | 22151                     | 4.199       | 1.110     | 0.007     | 0.264                               | 21566.108        | $4.777 \times 10^8$ |



**Figure 12.** Graph showing the same information of Table 3

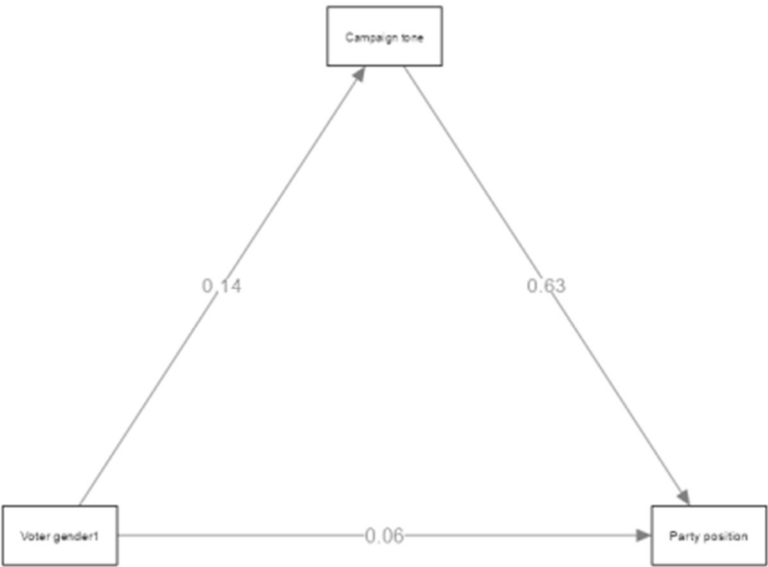
**H4 – Gender polarization is fuelled by campaign negativity**

The findings confirm the key hypothesis: gender differences in political ideology are partly driven by the fact that right-wing parties use more negative campaigning and men are more receptive to it. Overall, men vote for parties 0.1537 points further to the right than women on a 7-point left–right scale (where 1 is “far left” parties and 7 is “far right” parties). Of this gap, 0.0900 points—around 59%—is explained by men’s greater susceptibility to negative campaign messages. The remaining 0.0637 points reflect the gender difference that persists even after accounting for this effect. Thus, approximately 59% ( $0.1537 / 0.0900$ ) of the gender divide is explained by the hypothesis (men are more susceptible to negative campaigning).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> To test H4 a GLM Mediation Analysis of the merged database was conducted where the outcome was party position, the mediator was campaign tone, and the predictor was gender of respondent. The research was conducted with the statistical software Jamovi using the “jamm – Advanced Mediation Models” module. I did not consider any unmeasured confounders when researching the correlation, meaning that there may be a third variable that causes

**Table 4.** Displaying the direct effect of gender on party position, as well as the indirect effect (through campaign negativity

| Type      | Effect                                        | Estimate | SE      | Lower  | Upper  | B      | z      | P     |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------|----------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| Indirect  | Voter gender ⇒ Campaign tone ⇒ Party position | 0.0900   | 0.00664 | 0.0770 | 0.1030 | 0.0292 | 13.55  | <.001 |
| Component | Voter gender ⇒ Campaign tone                  | 0.1433   | 0.01048 | 0.1227 | 0.1638 | 0.0650 | 13.66  | <.001 |
|           | Campaign tone ⇒ Party position                | 0.6282   | 0.00596 | 0.6165 | 0.6399 | 0.4494 | 105.46 | <.001 |
| Direct    | Voter gender ⇒ Party position                 | 0.0637   | 0.01313 | 0.0380 | 0.0895 | 0.0207 | 4.85   | <.001 |
| Total     | Voter gender ⇒ Party position                 | 0.1537   | 0.01467 | 0.1250 | 0.1825 | 0.0499 | 10.48  | <.001 |



**Figure 13.** Graph displaying the same information as Table 4

both a preference for negative campaigning, and a preference for right-wing politics. Future research could be based on finding the influence of separate covariates (e.g. age of respondent).

## 5. Conclusion

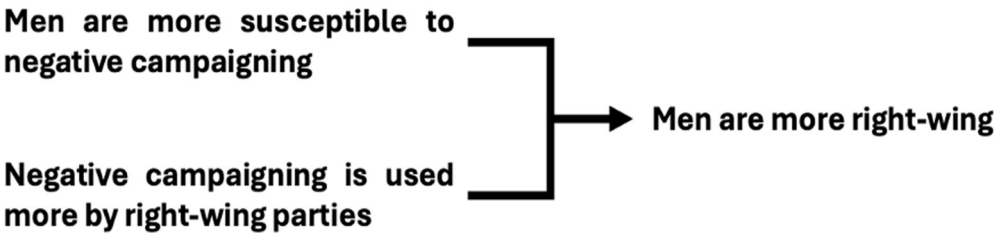
“Variation in political attitudes between individuals owes less to ideology and more to differences in receptivity to elite discourse—how much people hear, accept, or filter out political messages” — John Zaller, *political scientist and professor at the University of California, “The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion” (1992)*

This study sheds new light on the gender dynamics of political polarization, revealing a powerful and underexplored force shaping modern elections: the interaction between campaign tone and voter gender. It began by considering three assumptions that have already been made in current literature – and found to be true:

- (1) Men tend to vote for more right-wing parties rather than left-wing parties
- (2) Campaign negativity is more frequently used by right-wing parties
- (3) Men are more likely than women to vote for parties that employ more negative campaigning strategies

Taking each of these considerations a causal chain hypothesis can be formulated to try and explain the presence of gender polarization in recent elections across the globe.

### **WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF GENDER POLARIZATION?**



**Figure 14.** (see figure 7)

The results demonstrated that 59% of gender polarization is due to the gender difference in being susceptible to negative campaigning. This number is very significant in countries across the globe where election margins are very slim and gender polarization is high. This was confirmed by tests that were run on a survey database made up of 44,000 respondents over 34 national elections between 2016 and 2020. As can be seen a survey conducted by YouGov,<sup>23</sup> during the 2024 British General election, 17% of men voted for Reform UK while only 12% of women did so. This 5% discrepancy equates to a 737,000 difference in votes just for Reform UK. A few next steps can be taken to further research in this field. First of all, it would be interesting to examine whether the observed effects vary across different age groups. Since the CSES database already includes respondent age, this would require only the integration of age as a variable into the mixed dataset, followed by re-running the statistical tests. In addition, a larger database could be created to conduct further tests and build a model that is able to predict electoral outcomes based on campaign tone modifications by several parties (e.g. how would

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<sup>23</sup> YouGov (2024) How Britain Voted in the 2024 General Election <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49978-how-britain-voted-in-the-2024-general-election>

the percentages of women/men's votes change in the German election if the SPD conducted a campaign 2 points more negative, and the CDU conducted a campaign 3 points more positive).

### United We Stand Divided We Fall

In recent years, the population has become dangerously divided along political lines, placing democracy itself under threat.

This study identifies one cause of that division; campaign tone affects voters differently depending on their gender. This creates an incentive for political strategists to exploit campaign tone to target certain voters.

Our fight is not against each other, but for unity - because without it, democracy cannot survive.

### **Acknowledgments**

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**Effectiveness of 4Ps Family Development Sessions:  
Learning Outcomes of Beneficiaries****Jerome L. Hipolito**

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**Abstract:** This systematic literature review synthesizes evidence from 36 studies that examine the effectiveness of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Family Development Sessions (FDS) in shaping learning outcomes and behavioral change among household beneficiaries. Moving beyond descriptive program evaluation, the study integrates the Kirkpatrick Model with a capability-oriented and development communication perspective to critically examine how learning, behavior, and empowerment are constructed within conditional cash transfer (CCT) systems. Findings indicate that while a majority of studies report improvements in knowledge acquisition, parenting practices, and intra-household communication, these outcomes are uneven and highly contingent on the quality of facilitation, contextual relevance, and socioeconomic conditions. Importantly, the review reveals that behavioral change is not solely a product of knowledge transfer but is mediated by structural constraints such as poverty, limited access to services, and cultural norms. From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that FDS operate as both an empowerment mechanism and a form of behavioral governance, reflecting a tension between capability expansion and conditional compliance. While FDS enhance human capital development, they also shift the burden of poverty alleviation toward individual behavior, potentially obscuring structural inequalities. By situating the 4Ps within global CCT discourse and engaging with Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, this study offers a more critical and nuanced understanding of poverty interventions. The findings underscore the need for context-sensitive, participatory, and structurally informed approaches that move beyond compliance-based models toward more transformative and equitable development strategies.

**Keywords:**

1. Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)
2. Family Development Sessions
3. Conditional Cash Transfer
4. Poverty Alleviation
5. Development Communication

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**1. Introduction****1.1. Poverty, Development, and the Limits of Behavioral Interventions**

Poverty remains one of the most persistent and complex global challenges, extending beyond material deprivation to encompass limitations in human freedom, agency, and opportunity.

From the perspective of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, poverty is understood not merely as a lack of income. Still, as a deprivation of the substantive freedoms necessary for individuals to lead lives they value (Sen, 1999). This reconceptualization shifts the focus of development from economic outputs toward human capabilities, raising critical questions about how social protection programs define, measure, and address poverty.

Over the past three decades, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programs have emerged as a dominant policy response in low- and middle-income countries. By linking financial assistance to compliance with health, education, and behavioral conditions, these programs aim to address both short-term consumption needs and long-term human capital development (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Evidence from Brazil and Mexico suggests that CCTs can improve school attendance, healthcare utilization, and child welfare outcomes (Parker & Todd, 2017). However, a growing body of scholarship questions whether these gains translate into sustained empowerment or merely reinforce compliance-driven forms of development (Bastagli et al., 2019).

### **1.2. Global Expansion of CCTs and Policy Transfer**

The global diffusion of CCT programs reflects broader processes of policy transfer shaped by international development institutions such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2018). While these programs are often presented as evidence-based solutions to poverty, they also carry embedded assumptions about individual responsibility, governance, and social behavior. Critics argue that such models may impose standardized, technocratic approaches that inadequately account for local socio-cultural and political contexts (Bastagli et al., 2019).

In this regard, the Philippine Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) represents both a national policy initiative and part of a wider global development paradigm. Established in 2008 and institutionalized through Republic Act No. 11310, the program provides conditional cash grants to poor households in exchange for compliance with education, health, and participation requirements, including attendance in Family Development Sessions (FDS) (DSWD, 2020).

### **1.3. Family Development Sessions as Sites of Learning and Governance**

Within the 4Ps framework, Family Development Sessions serve as the program's primary mechanism for influencing knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. These sessions aim to equip beneficiaries with skills in parenting, financial management, health practices, and civic engagement (DSWD, 2020). While existing studies highlight their role in promoting positive behavioral outcomes, the extent to which these changes reflect genuine empowerment remains contested (Orbeta et al., 2021; Manguiat et al., 2021).

From a development communication perspective, FDS can be understood as communicative spaces where knowledge is negotiated and social change is co-constructed. However, they also function within a conditional system that regulates participation and incentivizes compliance. This dual role raises important ethical and philosophical questions: Do FDS expand beneficiaries' capabilities, or do they reinforce a model of development that places responsibility for poverty on individual behavior?

### **1.4. Research Gap and Critical Perspective**

Despite extensive research on the impacts of CCT programs, much of the existing literature remains descriptive, focusing on short-term outcomes and compliance indicators (World Bank,

2022). There is limited engagement with the philosophical, ethical, and political dimensions of poverty, including the structural conditions that constrain agency and the broader implications of conditionality.

In the Philippine context, studies on 4Ps and FDS often emphasize positive outcomes such as improved parenting practices and increased community participation (Brendo, 2024; Jumetilco, 2024). However, these findings are rarely situated within a critical framework that examines issues of inequality, power relations, and the potential for programs to reproduce dependency or be shaped by political dynamics (Saguin & Howlett, 2019). Furthermore, there is a lack of synthesis connecting local evidence to global debates on social protection and development theory.

### **1.5. Purpose and Contribution of the Study**

In response to these gaps, this study conducts a systematic literature review to analyze the perceived effectiveness of Family Development Sessions under the 4Ps program. Rather than limiting the analysis to descriptive outcomes, the study adopts a theoretically grounded, critically informed approach that integrates the Kirkpatrick Model (Kirkpatrick, 1959), the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999), and a development communication perspective.

Specifically, the study aims to: (1) synthesize existing empirical evidence on FDS learning outcomes; (2) examine how these outcomes are shaped by structural, social, and contextual factors; and (3) critically assess the extent to which FDS contribute to genuine empowerment versus compliance-based development.

By situating FDS within broader debates on poverty, capability, and governance, this study contributes to both theory and practice. It offers a more nuanced understanding of conditional cash transfer programs, highlighting the need to move beyond behavior-focused interventions toward context-sensitive, participatory, and structurally transformative approaches to poverty reduction.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### **2.1. Overview of the Framework**

This systematic review aims to synthesize the existing literature on the perceived effectiveness of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) Family Development Sessions (FDS), with particular focus on learning outcomes among beneficiaries. To guide the analysis, the study adopts the Kirkpatrick Model of Training Evaluation, a widely recognized four-level framework for assessing the effectiveness of learning and development interventions. The use of this model is both theoretically and methodologically appropriate, as FDS are structured, curriculum-based capacity-building sessions delivered regularly to adult beneficiaries. Similar to formal training programs, these sessions are designed not only to transmit knowledge but also to influence attitudes, behaviors, and long-term outcomes at the household level. The Kirkpatrick Model enables a systematic examination of effectiveness across four sequential dimensions: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results, which closely align with the intended objectives of FDS.

### **2.2. Theoretical Basis: Kirkpatrick Model Application**

Applying this model provides a structured and theoretically grounded approach to understanding how beneficiaries respond to, internalize, apply, and ultimately benefit from the sessions. Existing literature identifies several key factors that influence FDS outcomes, including

facilitator competence, the contextualization and relevance of module content, beneficiary engagement, and socioeconomic conditions. These factors operate across all four levels of the Kirkpatrick Model and shape the program's overall effectiveness. The term “perceived effectiveness” reflects the nature of the available evidence, which relies largely on self-reported experiences, qualitative narratives, and survey-based assessments rather than experimental or longitudinal designs. This distinction is important because beneficiaries’ perceptions significantly influence their motivation, level of engagement, and willingness to apply learned concepts in real-life contexts.

### **2.3. Input Factors Affecting FDS Effectiveness**

At the input level, the effectiveness of FDS implementation depends on several foundational components, including the quality, clarity, and cultural relevance of the modules; the skills and instructional competence of facilitators; the conditions of delivery, such as venue and accessibility; and the socioeconomic characteristics of beneficiaries. These inputs directly influence participants’ reactions, learning processes, behavioral application, and eventual outcomes.

### **2.4. Kirkpatrick Model Dimensions in FDS**

#### **2.4.1. Reaction Level**

At the Reaction level, facilitator competence and contextualized modules play a crucial role in shaping beneficiaries’ immediate responses, such as satisfaction, perceived relevance, and engagement. For instance, facilitators who employ participatory and culturally sensitive teaching strategies tend to generate higher levels of interest and involvement. In contrast, poorly delivered or overly technical sessions may lead to disengagement.

#### **2.4.2. Learning Level**

At the Learning level, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes is significantly influenced by the effectiveness of facilitators' communication of concepts and the extent to which modules are adapted to beneficiaries’ lived experiences. Facilitators who simplify complex ideas and encourage interaction enhance understanding and retention, while contextualized content ensures that lessons are meaningful and applicable. However, when instruction lacks clarity or relevance, learning outcomes may remain superficial or short-lived.

#### **2.4.3. Behavior Level**

At the Behavior level, the application of acquired knowledge in real-life settings depends not only on what was learned but also on how it was taught. Facilitators who provide practical demonstrations and real-life examples increase beneficiaries’ confidence in applying new practices, such as improved parenting, budgeting, or health behaviors. Nonetheless, external constraints such as poverty, limited resources, and time pressures may hinder sustained behavioral change despite adequate learning.

#### **2.4.4. Results Level**

At the Results level, the broader outcomes of FDS, including improved family functioning, better child health and education outcomes, and strengthened household decision-making, are influenced by the cumulative effects of reactions, learning, and behavior. Effective facilitation

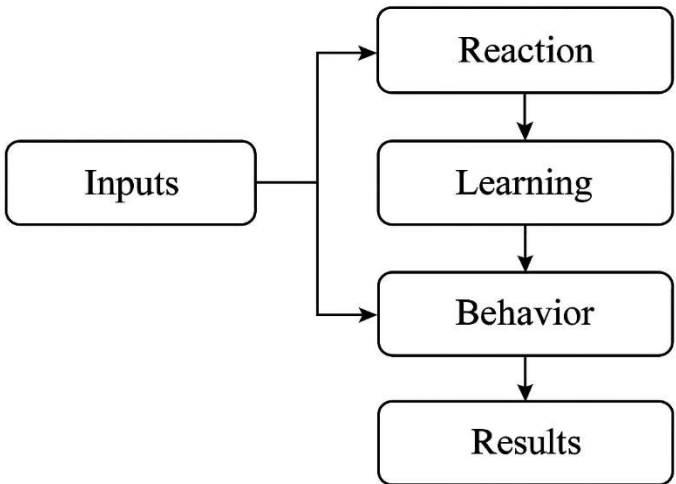
and relevant content can contribute to positive long-term impacts; however, inconsistencies in implementation quality and persistent structural barriers may lead to varied results across different contexts. While many studies report favorable outcomes, others highlight gaps between intended and actual program impacts.

**2.5. Evaluation of Facilitator Effectiveness**

Beyond participant satisfaction, which primarily reflects the Reaction level, the effectiveness of facilitators can be evaluated more comprehensively through multiple measures aligned with the Kirkpatrick framework. These include assessing knowledge gains through pre- and post-tests at the Learning level, observing behavioral changes among beneficiaries at the Behavior level, and linking facilitation quality to measurable household outcomes at the Results level. Additional methods such as peer and supervisor evaluations, facilitation rubrics, fidelity assessments, and facilitator self-reflection can further strengthen the evaluation process. This multi-dimensional approach provides a more robust and objective assessment of facilitator performance across all levels.

**2.6. Summary of the Conceptual Framework**

Overall, this conceptual framework integrates the Kirkpatrick Model with key influencing factors, providing a comprehensive and theoretically grounded lens for evaluating the perceived effectiveness of FDS. It emphasizes that program outcomes are shaped not only by the content of the sessions but also by the quality of facilitation, the relevance of materials, and the socioeconomic realities of beneficiaries. By examining these interacting elements across Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results, the framework offers a holistic understanding of how FDS contribute to learning and development among 4Ps beneficiaries (Fig. 1).



**Figure 2.** Conceptual framework of the systematic review

### 3. Statement of the Problem

This systematic review aims to analyze and synthesize existing studies on the perceived effectiveness of 4Ps FDS, focusing on the learning outcomes among existing household beneficiaries. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

- What do the existing studies present about the perceived effectiveness of 4Ps FDS's learning outcomes on existing household beneficiaries?
- What research questions can be gleaned from the existing literature on FDS for future studies and policy implementation?

### 4. Materials and Methods

#### 4.1. Research Design

The study design may be adapted by complementing the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with primary data collection and longitudinal approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term outcomes of Family Development Sessions (FDS) under the 4Ps program. While the SLR guided by the frameworks of Kitchenham (2004) and Okoli and Schabram (2014) ensures a systematic, transparent, and replicable synthesis of existing studies, it is inherently limited to previously published data, which may not fully capture contextual variations and long-term impacts.

To address this limitation, the design can incorporate a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data (e.g., surveys, program monitoring records) and qualitative insights (e.g., interviews, focus group discussions with 4Ps beneficiaries and implementers). This allows the inclusion of more diverse perspectives, particularly from underrepresented communities and local contexts that may not be adequately reflected in existing literature. Furthermore, adopting a longitudinal research component, such as panel studies or repeated observations of the same beneficiaries over time, would enable the tracking of changes in behavior, knowledge retention, and socio-economic outcomes resulting from FDS participation. This approach provides stronger evidence of causality and sustainability than cross-sectional or literature-based analyses alone. Additionally, the study may integrate secondary program data from government agencies (e.g., DSWD monitoring reports) to triangulate findings from the literature and primary data. This triangulation enhances the validity and robustness of the results.

Overall, by combining SLR with mixed-methods and longitudinal strategies, the study can move beyond descriptive synthesis and generate deeper, context-sensitive insights into the long-term effectiveness of FDS, thereby addressing existing research gaps and strengthening the empirical foundation for policy and program improvement.

#### 4.2. Corpus of Data

The studies were screened based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1). The data corpus consisted of selected studies that directly addressed the Family Development Sessions (FDS), the implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), and documented outcomes related to family or social development. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure that only studies aligned with the research focus were included. The corpus covered publications from 2015 to 2025, following clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Both qualitative and quantitative research, including mixed-methods studies, were included in the final dataset.

**Table 1.** Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

| Parameters                           | Inclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                                        | Exclusion Criteria                                                                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Journal<br>/Publication Type         | Primary research articles or scientific papers (full article) published in peer-reviewed journals                                                                         | Non-scholarly articles, blogs, opinion pieces, news reports, and unpublished drafts                                                                                                 |
| Language                             | Published in English and Filipino                                                                                                                                         | Publications in other languages without translation                                                                                                                                 |
| Year of<br>Publication<br>/Timeframe | 2015–present (to cover the period after the expansion and institutionalization of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program 4Ps in the Philippines)                         | Studies published before 2015                                                                                                                                                       |
| Demographic<br>Location              | Studies conducted in the Philippines, with priority to Pampanga or Central Luzon, may include comparative studies in other Philippine regions if relevant to the 4Ps FDS. | Studies outside the Philippines without direct relevance to the 4Ps FDS                                                                                                             |
| Descriptors                          | Keywords such as 4Ps, Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, FDS, household beneficiaries, impact, learning outcomes, program implementation, poverty alleviation           | Studies that do not focus on 4Ps, FDS, or household beneficiaries (e.g., purely economic policy papers, unrelated welfare programs, or generic poverty studies without 4Ps context) |

**4.3. Data Collection**

The researcher systematically retrieved studies from Google Scholar. Search queries used structured keywords derived from the inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as “Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program” OR “4Ps” AND “Family Development Sessions,” “4Ps learning outcomes,” “FDS effectiveness,” “beneficiary experiences,” and “implementation challenges.” To avoid bias toward positive findings, additional terms such as “limitations,” “barriers,” “impact evaluation,” and “program weaknesses” were included.

Grey literature and institutional evaluation reports were also screened to capture critical and mixed findings. Studies were initially screened by title and abstract, followed by a full-text review based on the established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Duplicate records were removed prior to the eligibility assessment.

**4.4. Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the studies using the PRISMA process by identifying relevant studies, screening them for relevance, assessing their eligibility, and including those that met the criteria in the final synthesis. The review prioritized high-quality scholarly sources, particularly peer reviewed articles published in Scopus-indexed and internationally recognized journals, to ensure the rigor and credibility of the analysis. The flow of study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion is presented in Figure 2. The selected 36 studies were organized in an author matrix to systematically identify and examine each study’s key concepts, research gaps, objectives, methods, findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

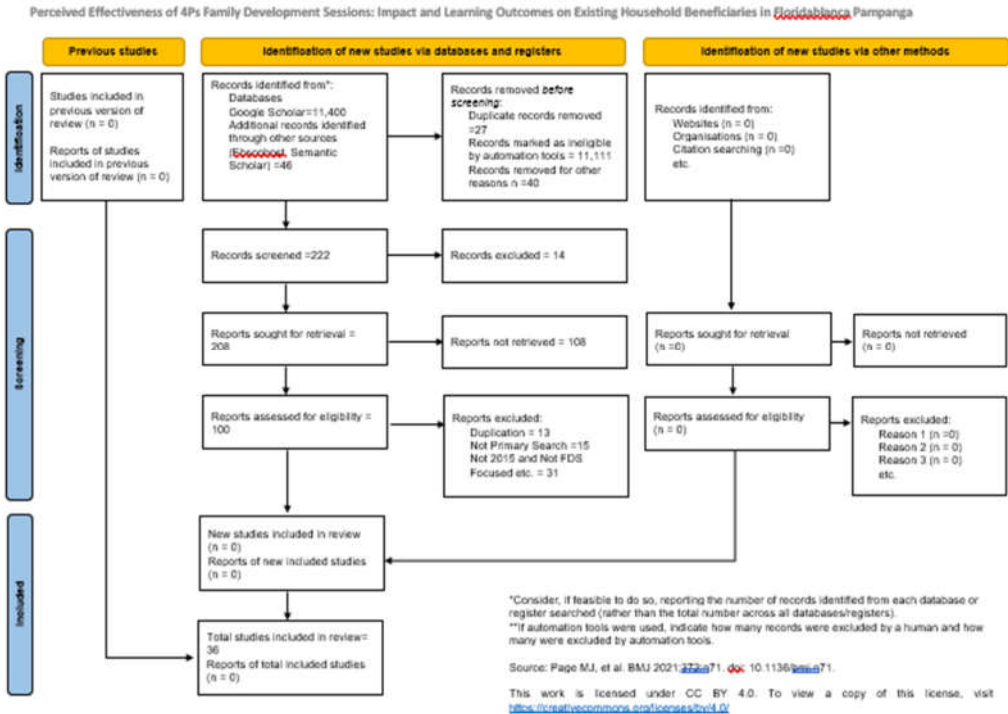


Figure 2. PRISMA Flow.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Thematic Analysis of the Perceived Effectiveness of 4Ps FDS Learning Outcomes

To ensure analytical rigor, the themes presented in this study were derived from a systematic thematic analysis of the 36 selected studies. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflexive thematic analysis approach, the process involved open coding, axial categorization, and iterative comparison across studies. Initial codes were generated inductively from recurring patterns in the literature and then clustered into broader categories based on conceptual similarity. These categories were further refined into overarching themes through constant comparison and validation against the dataset to ensure coherence, depth, and analytical distinctiveness.

Importantly, the analysis was guided by a development communication perspective, particularly drawing from participatory development and empowerment frameworks. Rather than viewing beneficiaries as passive recipients of knowledge, this study frames Family Development Sessions (FDS) as communicative spaces where learning, behavior, and social change are co-constructed. This lens allows for a more critical examination of power relations, contextual inequalities, and the extent to which FDS foster genuine empowerment versus compliance.

From this process, three analytically grounded themes emerged: (1) Learning Outcomes as Processes of Empowerment; (2) Behavioral and Social Transformation within Structural Constraints; and (3) Institutional and Contextual Limitations of Program Implementation.

These themes move beyond surface-level description and instead interrogate how and why FDS outcomes occur, for whom they are most effective, and under what conditions they may fall short.

Across the reviewed literature, FDS are consistently positioned as a mechanism for enhancing knowledge in areas such as child development, health, and financial management. However, from a development communication standpoint, these “learning outcomes” are not merely cognitive gains but represent processes of empowerment, wherein beneficiaries negotiate, reinterpret, and apply knowledge within their lived realities. Studies (e.g., Brendo, 2024; Basiri, 2024; Jumetilco, 2024) suggest improvements in decision-making capacities, yet these gains are uneven and often mediated by socio-economic conditions, raising questions about inclusivity and equity. Similarly, behavioral and social changes such as improved family communication and parental responsibility should not be interpreted as linear outcomes of program exposure. Instead, they reflect complex interactions between individual agency and structural constraints, including poverty, gender norms, and access to resources. This perspective challenges the implicit bias that places the responsibility for behavioral change solely on beneficiaries, highlighting the role of systemic barriers instead. The third theme underscores that implementation challenges are not merely operational issues but are indicative of broader institutional and contextual limitations. Inconsistent module delivery, varying facilitator competencies, and a lack of contextual adaptation reveal gaps between program design and on-the-ground realities. From a critical development lens, these issues point to the need for more participatory, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded program approaches.

Overall, while FDS demonstrate potential as a development intervention, this analysis argues that their effectiveness must be understood within a broader framework that considers power, participation, and structural inequality, rather than relying on purely descriptive or outcome-based assessments.

## **5.2. Learning Outcomes as Processes of Empowerment**

Rather than treating learning outcomes as static indicators, this theme conceptualizes them as dynamic and socially constructed processes shaped by communication, participation, and context.

### **5.2.1. Interactive and Participatory Strategies**

Consistent with participatory development principles, interactive approaches such as role-playing and collaborative problem-solving enable beneficiaries to construct knowledge rather than passively receive information. These strategies enhance critical consciousness and practical application.

### **5.2.2. Localization and Cultural Contextualization**

Learning becomes meaningful when grounded in local realities. Adapting modules to cultural contexts reflects a shift from top-down communication toward dialogic and culturally responsive development practice.

### **5.2.3. Simplification and Visual Enhancement**

The use of visual and experiential learning tools aligns with inclusive communication strategies, particularly for marginalized groups with limited formal education.

#### **5.2.4. Facilitator Training Improvement**

Facilitators play a critical role as development communicators. Their ability to engage, mediate, and co-create knowledge directly influences the depth of learning and empowerment.

#### **5.2.5. Monitoring and Behavioral Assessment**

A shift from attendance-based metrics to transformative indicators such as behavioral change and self-efficacy reflects a more ethical and meaningful evaluation approach.

#### **5.2.6. Peer Learning and Mentoring**

Peer-based approaches reinforce horizontal communication, fostering collective learning and community empowerment.

### **5.3. Behavioral and Social Transformation within Structural Constraints**

This theme situates behavioral change within a broader socio-economic and cultural context, challenging purely individualistic interpretations.

#### **5.3.1. Family Relationships and Communication**

Improvements in family dynamics reflect not only knowledge acquisition but also shifts in interpersonal power relations and communication patterns.

#### **5.3.2. Community Participation and Social Capital**

FDS contribute to building social capital; however, participation is shaped by existing inequalities and access to opportunities.

#### **5.3.3. Economic Factors Affecting Behavior**

Persistent poverty limits the translation of knowledge into practice, underscoring the need for integrated development interventions.

#### **5.3.4. Cultural and Social Influences**

Cultural norms both enable and constrain behavioral change, requiring culturally sensitive program design.

#### **5.3.5. Geographic and Structural Barriers**

Spatial and infrastructural inequalities significantly affect program accessibility and impact.

### **5.4. Institutional and Contextual Limitations of Program Implementation**

This theme reframes “challenges” as systemic issues rather than isolated shortcomings.

#### **5.4.1. Module Delivery Issues**

Standardized modules often fail to reflect diverse local contexts, limiting relevance and engagement.

#### **5.4.2. Facilitator Skill Limitations**

Variability in facilitator capacity highlights gaps in institutional support and training systems.

### **5.4.3. Logistical and Attendance Barriers**

Participation barriers reveal underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities that programs must address.

### **5.4.4. Monitoring and Evaluation Gaps**

Current systems prioritize compliance over meaningful impact, raising ethical concerns about how success is defined.

### **5.4.5. Structural and Social Barriers**

Stigma and inequality continue to shape access and outcomes, reinforcing the need for inclusive approaches.

## **5.5. Implications for Future Research and Policy**

The findings call for a shift toward participatory, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded development approaches. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method designs to capture the complexity of behavioral change and empowerment processes. Moreover, integrating FDS with livelihood, psychosocial, and community development initiatives can address structural barriers and enhance sustainability.

Ultimately, strengthening FDS requires moving beyond technocratic solutions toward a framework that prioritizes agency, equity, and meaningful participation, ensuring that development interventions genuinely serve the needs and realities of beneficiaries.

## **6. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

### **6.1. Summary**

This systematic review analyzed and synthesized existing studies on the perceived effectiveness of 4Ps Family Development Sessions (FDS), focusing on learning outcomes among current household beneficiaries. Various studies from national and local contexts were examined to assess the effectiveness of FDS and identify areas for further research.

The review revealed three major thematic areas: learning outcomes and acquired knowledge, behavioral and social impacts, and implementation challenges. FDS consistently emerged as a mechanism to influence behavior, promote responsible parenting, strengthen family communication, and encourage community engagement. The program has improved beneficiaries' understanding of their responsibilities in health, education, and child welfare, aligning with the human capital development goals of 4Ps.

However, the effectiveness of FDS varies across contexts. Factors such as poverty, inconsistent attendance, and limited livelihood opportunities disrupt behavioral continuity and hinder knowledge retention. While short-term awareness and compliance improved, the sustainability of these changes remains uncertain. Furthermore, implementation gaps were identified, including limited module localization, insufficient facilitator capacity, and inadequate monitoring tools to assess qualitative outcomes.

Despite these limitations, FDS remain a vital mechanism for social development. Evidence suggests that an ideal evaluation model for FDS should be longitudinal, context-sensitive, and iterative, capturing both quantitative and qualitative outcomes. Such an approach would allow tracking of long-term behavioral change, knowledge retention, and social impacts.

## **6.2. Conclusions**

### **6.2.1. Enhancement of Beneficiary Development**

FDS significantly enhanced the development of household beneficiaries across areas such as behavioral change, responsible parenthood, communication, and values formation. The sessions promote empowerment and social learning, enabling participants to adopt positive practices aligned with program objectives.

### **6.2.2. Influence of Contextual Factors**

Various contextual factors affect the effectiveness of FDS. Differences in facilitation, module relevance, and participation levels result in disparities in learning outcomes. Socioeconomic challenges often limit the sustainability of improvements.

### **6.2.3. Need for Sustained Support and Monitoring**

FDS contribute to improved education, health, and psychosocial well-being; however, these gains require continuous reinforcement. The lack of structured tools for assessing qualitative behavioral change limits the ability to evaluate program effectiveness comprehensively.

### **6.2.4. Need for Broader and Localized Research**

Existing studies are often concentrated in specific regions, limiting broader representation. There is a need for localized research to understand how sociocultural contexts influence program effectiveness and learning outcomes.

Overall, FDS remain a core pillar of the 4Ps program; however, its long-term transformative potential depends on improved implementation, contextual adaptability, and effective monitoring of learning outcomes.

## **6.3. Recommendations**

### **6.3.1. Integration of Psychosocial Support**

Integrating psychosocial support such as counseling, peer support groups, and values formation activities can enhance beneficiaries' emotional well-being, resilience, and decision-making abilities, leading to sustained behavioral change.

### **6.3.2. Strengthening Livelihood Support**

Linking FDS participation with livelihood opportunities such as skills training, microenterprise development, and financial assistance enables beneficiaries to apply learned knowledge effectively.

### **6.3.3. Development of Holistic Support Systems**

Combining psychosocial and livelihood interventions creates a reinforcing system that supports long-term behavioral transformation and reduces dependency on external assistance.

### **6.3.4. Improvement of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems**

Developing outcome-oriented monitoring tools that measure well-being, economic stability, and behavioral change will provide a more comprehensive assessment beyond attendance-based indicators.

### 6.3.5. Promotion of Contextualized Interventions

Programs should be adapted to local cultural, social, and economic contexts to improve relevance, engagement, and effectiveness among beneficiaries.

### 6.3.6. Ensuring Program Sustainability

Sustaining FDS impacts requires continuous integration of social and economic support mechanisms to maintain long-term benefits for household beneficiaries.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Characteristics of studies used in the SLR

| Research Number | Research and Author                                                                                                                                              | Year Publication | Type of Research                           |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1               | Aguado, A. – Implementation of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in Barangay Talumpok, Batangas City                                                     | 2021             | Descriptive Survey                         |
| 2               | Alinsunurin, M. K. – Gendered Relations and Time-use: Perspectives from Selected Households of Philippines' 4Ps in Calauan and San Pablo City, Laguna            | 2018             | Qualitative–Descriptive                    |
| 3               | Arcayna, C. J., Arcayna, J. J., & Arcayna, R. J. – Implementation of 4Ps Conditional Cash Transfer and Students' School Attendance in Don Vicente Romualdez NHS. | 2021             | Quantitative–Descriptive                   |
| 4               | Assessment of Family Development Session of the 4Ps: Contents, Process and Effects (Tabuk City, IJELS)                                                           | 2020             | Mixed-Methods Assessment                   |
| 5               | Basiri, N. – Study on the Effects of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) on Human Capital Development                                                      | 2024             | Quantitative (Econometric)                 |
| 6               | Brendo, P. C. – Implementation of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) on Academic Achievement Among Learner-Beneficiaries                              | 2024             | Quantitative (Descriptive–Correlational)   |
| 7               | Bustos, M. et al. – Examining the Association Between Household Enrollment in 4Ps and Child Nutrition/Related Outcomes                                           | 2023             | Quantitative (Cross-Sectional, Regression) |
| 8               | Calatan, J. I. – Conditional Cash Transfer Program: Its Contributions Among the Indigents of Kamog in Sablan, Benguet                                            | 2016             | Descriptive–Qualitative                    |
| 9               | Casco, J. J. M. J. – The Impact of Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program on Civic Engagement                                                                       | 2015             | Quantitative (Propensity Score Matching)   |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |      |                                               |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------|
| 10 | Diaz, J. – Assessing the Economic Impact of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in the Philippines: A Systematic Review                                                                                                 | 2025 | Systematic Review                             |
| 11 | Dodd, W., Kipp, A., Lau, L. L., Little, M., Conchada, M. I., Sobreviñas, A., & Tiongco, M. – Limits to Transformational Potential: Analysing Entitlement and Agency within a Conditional Cash Transfer Program in the Philippines | 2024 | Qualitative–Analytical                        |
| 12 | Doromal, H. O., Rojo, J. M. A., Bulajao, E. J., & Awa, A. L. – Civic Engagement of Selected Beneficiaries of the Social Development Strategy (4Ps)                                                                                | 2023 | Descriptive                                   |
| 13 | DSWD – Pantawid Official FDS Component and Process Evaluation Documents                                                                                                                                                           | 2018 | Program Evaluation (Descriptive)              |
| 14 | Dy, S. – Knowledge and Practices on Family Development of 4Ps Beneficiaries in Camarines Sur                                                                                                                                      | 2018 | Descriptive–Correlational                     |
| 15 | Garcines, J. – Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (Conditional Cash Transfer Program): A Qualitative Investigation                                                                                                               | 2017 | Qualitative–Phenomenological                  |
| 16 | Gorospe, B. M. S., Savella, M. R., & Tacbas, D. M. L. – Life Changes Among the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program Beneficiaries                                                                                                  | 2023 | Qualitative (Interpretative Phenomenological) |
| 17 | Jumetillo Jr, B. M. – Philippines’ Conditional Cash Transfer Program: Its Impact Towards Student-Beneficiaries                                                                                                                    | 2024 | Quantitative                                  |
| 18 | Jumlail Jr, E. H., & Alberto, J. I. – Empowering Families: Insights from the Pre-Testing Phase of the Family Development Scorecard (FDS <sub>c</sub> )                                                                            | 2024 | Instrument Development (Design-Based)         |
| 19 | Lachman, J. et al. – Effectiveness of a Parenting Programme Delivered Within a Conditional Cash Transfer System (SSRN Preprint)                                                                                                   | 2021 | Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT, Preprint)   |
| 20 | Lachman, J. M., Alampay, L. P., Jocson, R. M., Alinea, C., Madrid, B., Ward, C., & Gardner, F. – Effectiveness of a Parenting Programme to Reduce Violence in a Cash Transfer System in the Philippines                           | 2021 | Randomized Controlled Trial (Published)       |
| 21 | Mangotara, N. O. – Exploring the Effectiveness of 4Ps Family Development Sessions: Challenges and Impact on Exiting Beneficiaries in Marawi City                                                                                  | 2024 | Cross-Sectional + FGDs                        |
| 22 | Manguiat, T. S., Dy, M. F. R., Ferido, M. P., & Bacongus, R. D. T. – Perceived Effect of the FDS Seminars on Familial Relationship Among 4Ps Beneficiaries in Bay, Laguna                                                         | 2021 | Mixed-Method                                  |
| 23 | Nakamura, N., & Suzuki, A. – Information and Decision-Making Power: Explicating the Impact of Information Provision in CCT Program on Food Consumption Share                                                                      | 2022 | Quasi-Experimental                            |
| 24 | Narita, R. L., & Balasa, K. A. – Impact Assessment of the “Nurturing the Filipino Family” Extension Program for 4Ps Beneficiaries in Tampilisan, Zamboanga del Norte                                                              | 2023 | Quantitative–Impact Evaluation                |
| 25 | Orbeta, A. C., Melad, K. A. M., & Araos, N. V. V. – Reassessing the Impact of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: Results of the Third Wave Impact Evaluation                                                                | 2021 | Quantitative (Quasi-Experimental)             |

|    |                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |                                                |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------------------|
| 26 | Orge, N. B. A., Sembrano, J. A., & de Guzman, M. F. D. – Impact of Conditional Cash Transfer Program to the Socio-Economic Condition of Household Recipients in Iba, Zambales     | 2020      | Descriptive                                    |
| 27 | Pangilinan, M. K. A., Fernandez, M. C., & Quijano, N. – Examining the Effects of Drug-Related Killings on Philippine Conditional Cash Transfer Beneficiaries in Metro Manila      | 2019      | Qualitative–<br>Descriptive                    |
| 28 | Pantawid Impact Evaluation (Wave 3 RDD Report) – DSWD Impact Evaluation Report on Conditionalities and Family Development Sessions                                                | 2019/2020 | Program<br>Evaluation (Quasi-<br>Experimental) |
| 29 | Peñalba, E. – Exploring the Health Outcomes of Conditional Cash Transfer Program in Rural Philippines                                                                             | 2019      | Qualitative–<br>Descriptive                    |
| 30 | Pfutze, T. – Do Cash Transfer Programs Protect from Poverty in the Case of Aggregate Shocks?                                                                                      | 2023      | Quantitative<br>(Econometric)                  |
| 31 | Pineda, M. V., & Fabella, F. E. T. – The Lived Experiences of Former Pantawid Beneficiaries                                                                                       | 2019      | Qualitative–<br>Phenomenological               |
| 32 | Raitzer, D., Batmunk, O., & Yarcia, D. – Intrahousehold Responses to Imbalanced Human Capital Subsidies: Evidence from the Philippine CCT Program                                 | 2022      | Quantitative<br>(Econometric)                  |
| 33 | Reyes, J. D., & Briones, M. C. B. – Level of Awareness on Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) in San Carlos City, Pangasinan                                                | 2018      | Descriptive                                    |
| 34 | Saguin, K., & Howlett, M. – Policy Transfer and Instrument Constituency: Explaining the Adoption of Conditional Cash Transfer in the Philippines                                  | 2019      | Qualitative (Case<br>Study)                    |
| 35 | Salva, M., Ganir, F. D., Lacanilao, R. B., Simon, J. R., Torres, G. D., Yadao, M. E. G., & Calimag, V. P. M. – Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program: An Assessment                 | 2023      | Descriptive                                    |
| 36 | Vidal, A. L. A., San Pedro, A. B., Redoble, F. A., & Bermudez, M. M. – Level of Awareness and Participation of Pantawid Beneficiaries on Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation | 2018      | Descriptive Survey                             |