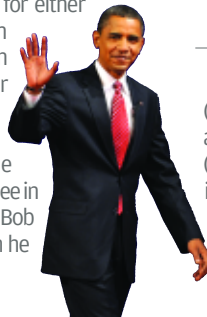


Bias and the Election

This year's presidential election is unique, even historic, in part due to the personal demographics of the candidates themselves—with race, gender and age playing a prominent role for three of the four names across the two tickets.

Barack Obama, of course, is the first African American major-party nominee for either president or vice president. Sarah Palin is only the second woman on a major-party ticket, after Geraldine Ferraro, the Democrats' vice-presidential choice in 1984. And John McCain, at 72, is the second-oldest major-party nominee in presidential election history, after Bob Dole, who was a year older when he was nominated in 1996.



How voters really feel about the candidates' race, gender and age



In fact, in the five previous elections before this one (1988 through 2004), every nominee was a white man, and all except Dole were between 41 and 68 years old. (Dan Quayle was 41 in 1988; George H.W. Bush was 68 in 1992.) This time, only one of the four candidates, 65-year-old Joe Biden, fits that same mold.

And yet questions about how Obama's race, Palin's gender and McCain's age affect the race

have largely been muted, with voters and the mainstream media preferring to focus—publicly, anyway—on the candidates' experience, ideology and stance on specific issues. To avoid talking about the candidates' race, gender and age is to sidestep any potential charge of racism, sexism or ageism.

But those attributes undeniably have an effect on voters' decisions and on the media's coverage of the candidates. To get a better sense of what that effect has been, Adweek fielded an exclusive online survey with JWT, which asked 1,146 American adults 18 and over about their thoughts on the matter. The survey was conducted Oct. 3-7. Some of the findings are presented here.

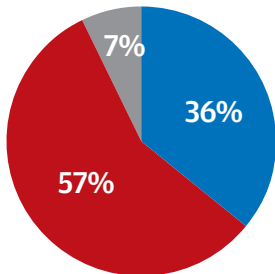
JWT director of trendspotting Ann Mack and director of brand intelligence Mark Truss analyzed the data with Adweek senior editor Tim Nudd.



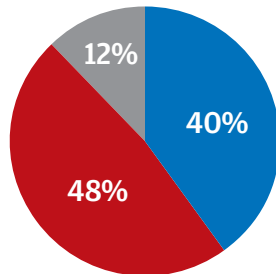
If the election were being held today, for whom would you vote?



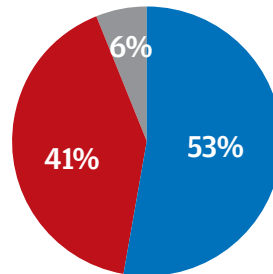
Silent (born before '45)



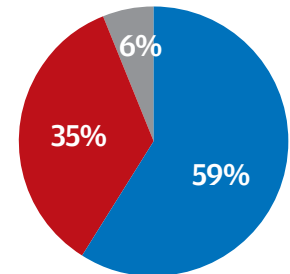
Boomers ('45-'64)



Gen X ('65-'77)

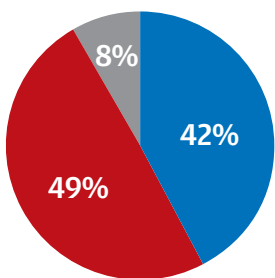


Millennials ('78-'00)*

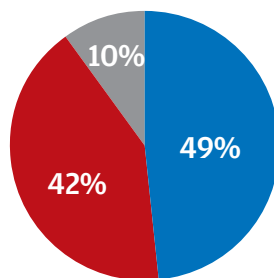


*'90-'00 not part of the survey

Men



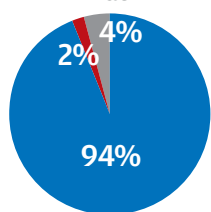
Women



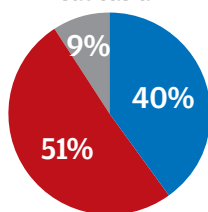
Before looking at the race, gender and age of the candidates, we'll look at the race, gender, age and income level of the voters. As the charts here show, the voters' demographics offer a good indication of who they are likely to vote for, with the divisions falling along traditional party lines. The younger you are, the more likely it is that you'll support the Democratic ticket; the older you are, the more likely it is that you'll support the Republican ticket. Minorities are strongly in favor of Obama, with 94 percent of African Americans saying they would vote for him and 64 percent of Hispanic voters saying the same.

McCain is commanding 51 percent of the white vote. Men are leaning toward McCain by 49 percent to 42 percent; women are leaning toward Obama by the same margin. The higher your income, the more likely it is that you'll support the Republicans; the lower your income, the more likely it is you'll support the Democrats.

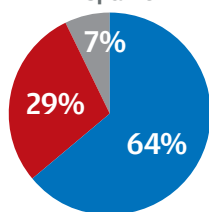
Black



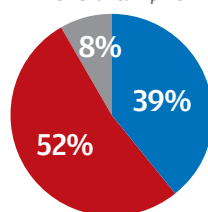
Caucasian



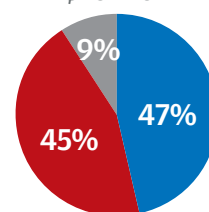
Hispanic



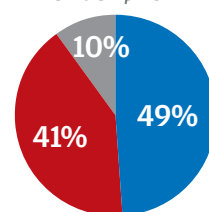
More than \$70K



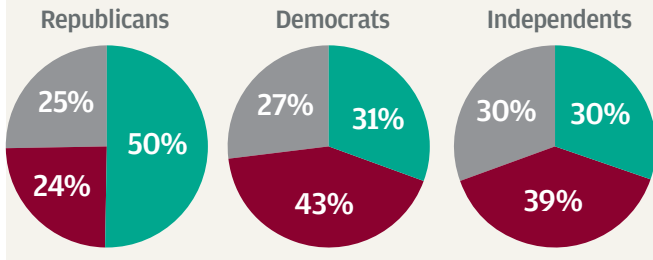
\$40K-70K



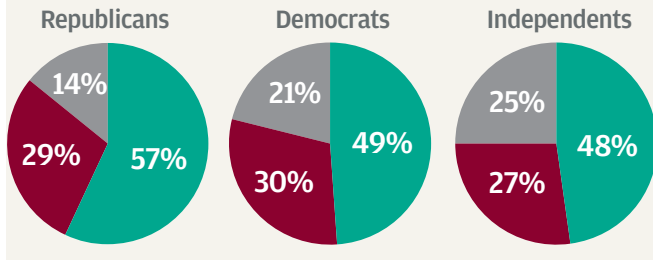
Under \$40K



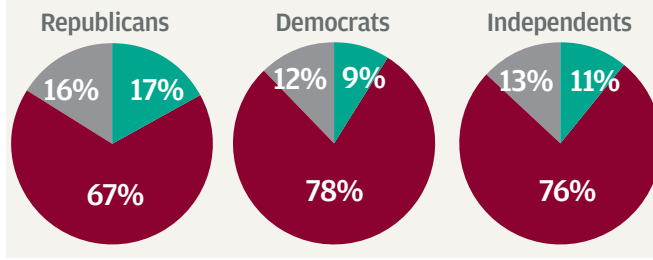
Would you say Barack Obama's race is an:
■ advantage ■ disadvantage ■ neither?



Would you say Sarah Palin's gender is an:
■ advantage ■ disadvantage ■ neither?



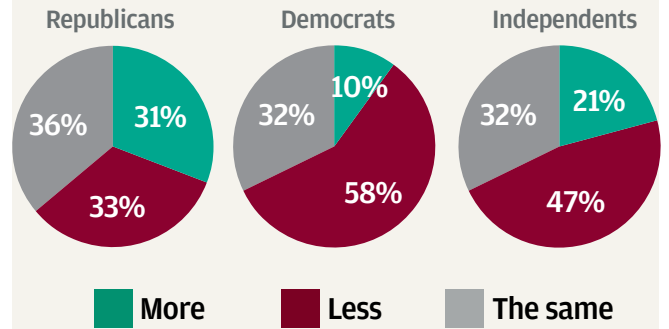
Would you say John McCain's age is an:
■ advantage ■ disadvantage ■ neither?



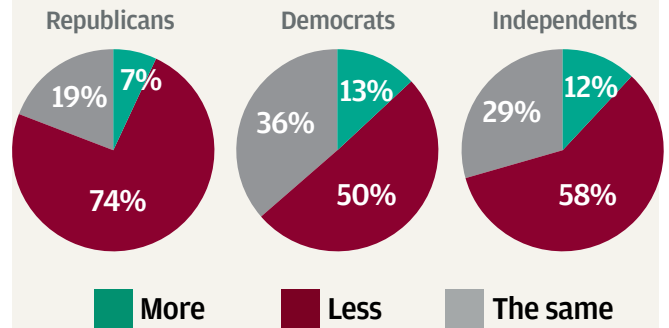
Being black, being a woman, being over 70—do these factors help or hurt a candidate? In this election, Republicans, Democrats and independents agree across the board on two of the three factors. They think Sarah Palin's gender gives her an advantage, and that John McCain's age puts him at a disadvantage. The parties disagree, however, on the impact of Barack Obama's race (top chart). Republicans see it as a strong advantage for the candidate; Democrats see it, less strongly, as a disadvantage. Independents are fairly evenly split on the matter, though more see Obama's race as working in his favor.

Are the candidates being held to added scrutiny due to their race, age and gender? Voters generally do seem to think so. Republicans, Democrats and independents all think that Sarah Palin and John McCain would be subject to less scrutiny if she were a man and if he were younger. Democrats and independents feel similarly about Barack Obama's race (top chart)—that he would be scrutinized less if he were white. Republicans are split on that matter, with about a third saying he'd get more scrutiny, a third saying less, and a third saying the same amount.

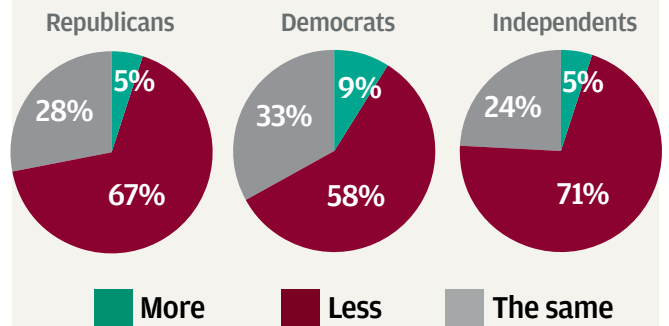
If Barack Obama were white, do you think he would be held to more or less scrutiny?

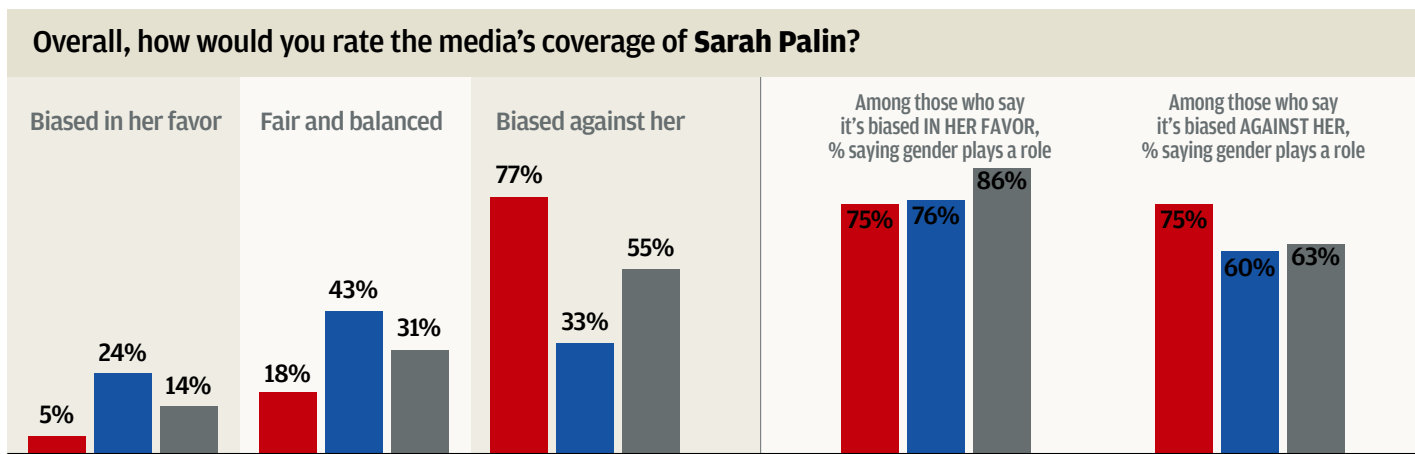
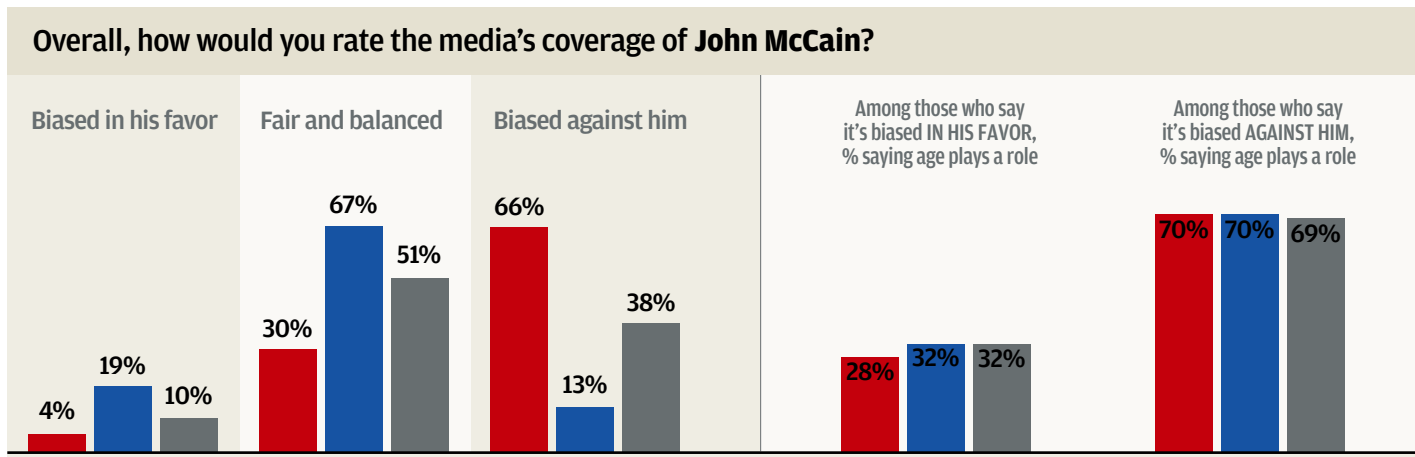
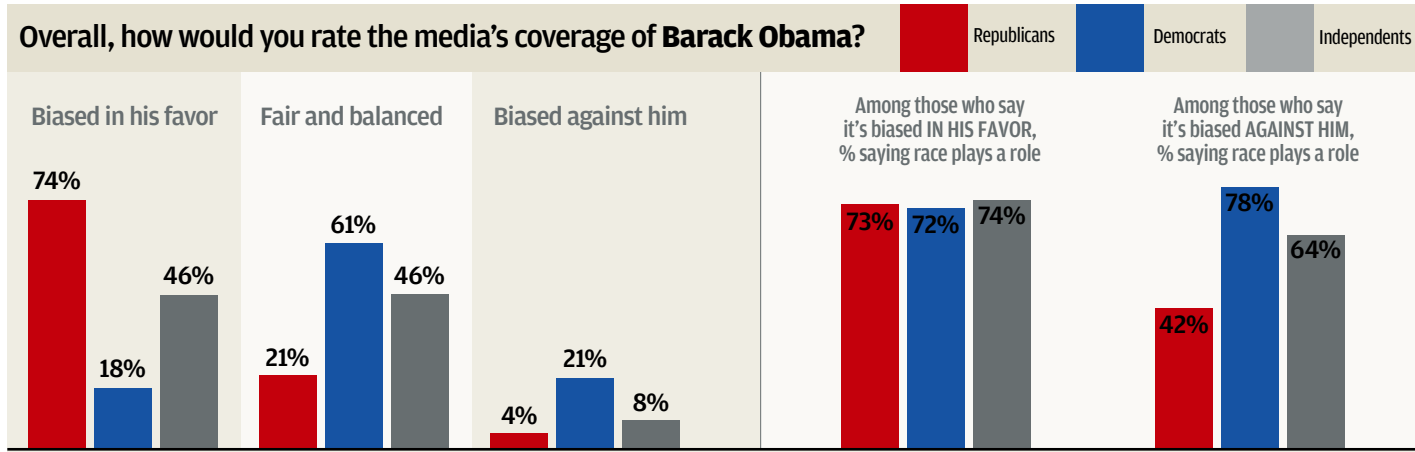


If Sarah Palin were a man, do you think she would be held to more or less scrutiny?



If John McCain were 15 years younger, do you think he would be held to more or less scrutiny?

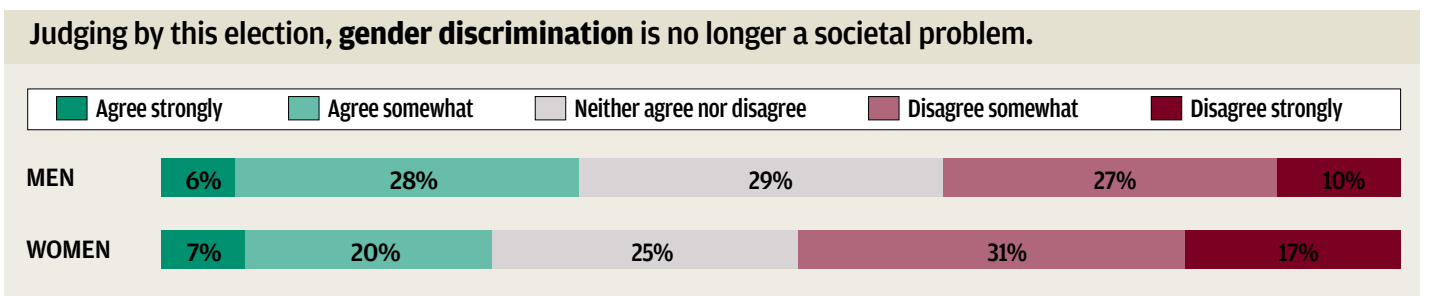
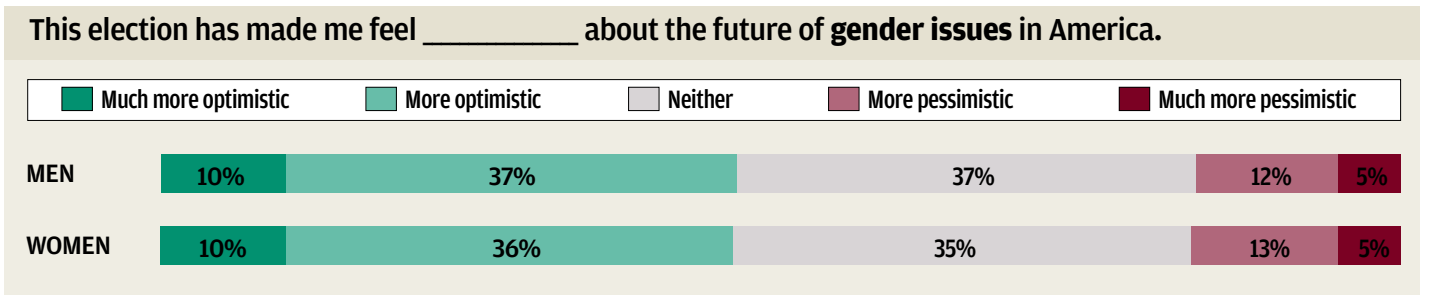
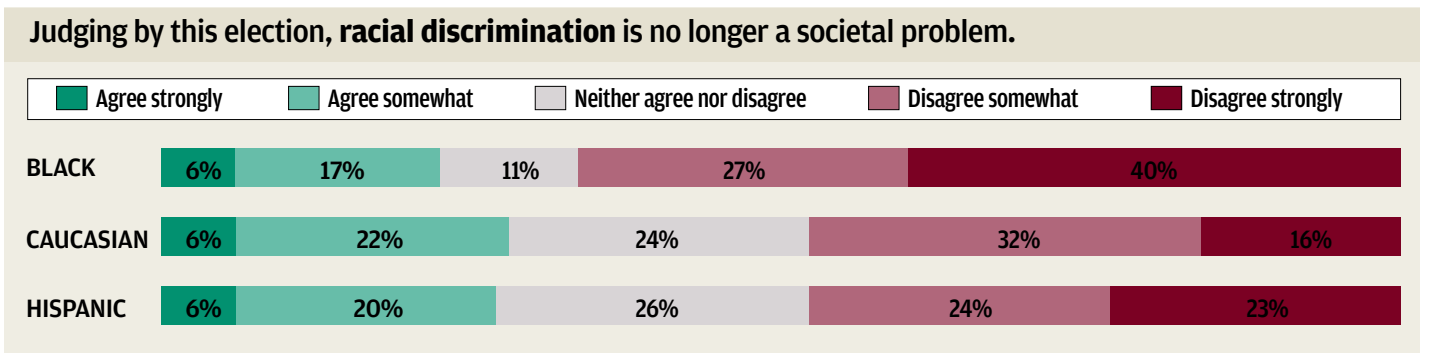
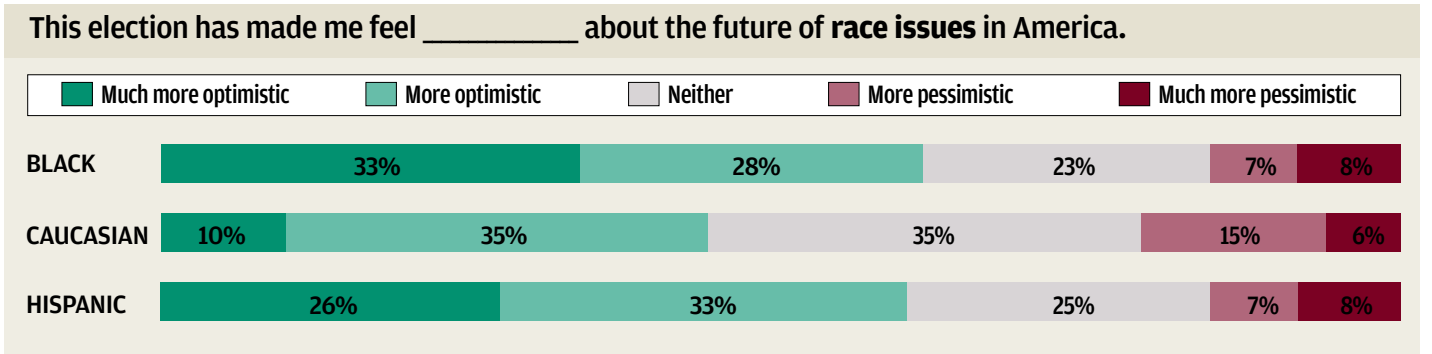




Charts on right: smaller base size, included for directional guidance only.

Voters' feelings about how the candidates' race, gender and age affect the media coverage of the race gets complicated, given that many voters already believe the American mainstream media are biased based on ideology. With that caveat in mind, most Democrats (61 percent) believe the media treatment of Obama has been fair and balanced in this election, while three-quarters of Republicans think it's biased in favor of him. (Independents are split mostly between thinking it's biased for him and thinking it's neutral.) When it comes to McCain, most Republicans (66 percent) say the coverage has been biased against him; most Democrats (67 percent) think it's been fair, as do a majority of independents (51 percent). All sides seem to agree that Palin has gotten the worst shake; majorities of Republicans (77 percent) and independents (55 percent) think media coverage is biased against her, and a full third of Democrats agree (compared to 43 percent who think it's been fair).

As for the role that race, gender and age play in this media bias, the only real consensus is that McCain's age has, if anything, soured the media on him. The ways in which Obama's race and Palin's gender might affect the media are less clear. The group of Democrats who see an anti-Obama bias and the group who see a pro-Obama bias are both strongly inclined to see his race as a contributing factor in each. Similarly, those who see a bias toward Palin, regardless of whether it's positive or negative, are strongly likely to see her gender as a factor there as well.



What effect will Election 2008 have on race and gender issues in America going forward? Voters are inclined to be optimistic about progress in those areas, but they hardly feel that the presence of a black candidate and a woman on the presidential tickets means that either racism or sexism is a thing of the past. A combined 61 percent of black respondents said this election has made them feel more optimistic about the future of race issues in America, with just 15 percent saying they feel more pessimistic. Still, 67 percent of black respondents disagreed with the idea that in light of this election, racial discrimination is no longer a problem. (Whites felt the same way, though less strongly, on both questions.)

Interestingly, there was no gender split in how voters feel about the future of gender issues in light of this election; 46 percent of women said they feel more optimistic about gender issues now, but so did 47 percent of men. However, women were more likely than men (by 37 percent to 27 percent) to disagree with the idea that gender discrimination is now no longer a societal problem.