

# Project Approval According to Gender

The 2011 Saint Index Survey showed a distinct difference of nationwide infrastructure project approval between men and women.

By Jesse McKnight

**T**he 2011 Saint Index survey of 1,000 American adults nationwide found women are far more likely than men to oppose the construction of new power plants, shopping malls, big-box stores and infrastructure projects like power transmission lines, passenger rail, airport expansion and new cell phone towers.

Yes, it's a stretch to turn that into a blanket conclusion about gender and big infrastructure development. However, the findings raise interesting questions about how to go about establishing the clear and visible public support needed to get these often-controversial projects approved.

The survey results show a distinct divergence in priorities between men and women when it comes to growth and development. Just about any type of project that comes with potentially negative, environmental consequences — natural gas pipelines, nuclear power plants, quarries, malls — received much stronger support from the men surveyed than the women, usually with more than a 10 percent difference. For example, 50 percent of the men said they would support a new power plant in their community while just 32 percent of women said they would. Across the board, men were uniformly more open to development than women. Apartments and condominiums are the only kind of local development that women are more likely to support than men.

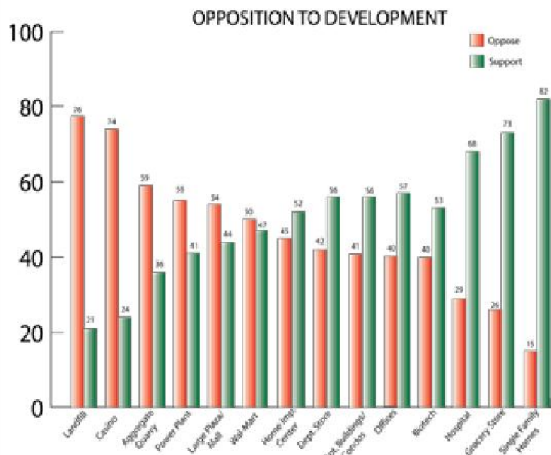
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development projects in your community?" Nearly three-quarters of the men said they were more likely to be well disposed to development; less than two-thirds of women did. Worries about harm to the community were more likely to hold women back, while hopes for the local economy were more likely to attract men's support for new projects, the writer observed.

Both men and women overwhelmingly agreed with the statement, "I like my community just fine the way it is" — 69 percent for women, 67 percent for men. But this statement had a different meaning for the two genders — to women, it means "Things are fine, so we don't need to change anything." While for men, it appeared to mean "Things are good, so let's build more."

Anxieties about harm to the community — greater traffic, less safety, more environmental harm — were much higher for women than men, and played major roles in the "no more growth" answers. Meanwhile, economic concerns spurred much of the male support for development. Whether or not these numbers mean anything profound about modern gender politics, they do indicate that our society is not united in its view of the "right" path for modern development.

For potentially controversial infrastructure projects, the gender split means proponents must carefully craft their message and outreach approach, so that it makes a point of addressing the concerns women clearly harbor about potential drawbacks to development by defining the benefits in a manner that resolves those worries.



In analyzing the Saint Index results, New York Times writer Felicity Barringer found one data point that might come closest to explaining the trend. Barringer noted that when the survey team asked, "In light of the current economic situation, are you more or less likely to support new commercial



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