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## **A Gender Gap in Opinionation in Times of Crises and Political Stability**

*Abstract:* In the 70s and 80s, a number of analyses of nonresponses in questionnaires was conducted with the assumption that nonresponses carry much important information. The share of expressed nonresponses can be an indicator of apathy, ignorance and lack of information. Studies revealed a higher share of nonresponses being expressed by women in comparison to men. Changing social conditions, such as the period of transition after the change of political system, the emancipation of women and financial and economic crises, can have an impact on the gender inequality expressed in nonresponses. This article will analyse the differences in nonresponse answers between men and women to some socioeconomic questions for three periods: 1) 2000–2003, the period after the transition and before accession to the European Union (EU); 2) 2004–2008, the period after accession to the EU and the presidency of the Council of the EU, as well as a period of economic growth; and 3) 2009–2013, the beginning of economic, financial and political crises in Slovenia. The number of nonresponses between men and women is different in the three observed periods. In opposition to our assumption, the gap was higher in the first two periods and lower in the period of economic, financial and political crises.

*Keywords:* socioeconomic position, women, nonresponse, transition, Slovenia

### **Introduction**

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of studies was conducted to analyse nonresponses in questionnaires under the assumption that nonresponses carry a great deal of information (see e.g. [Ferber 1956](#); [Francis, Busch 1975](#); [Rapoport 1979](#); [1982](#); [1985](#); [Ferligoj et al. 1985](#)). In empirical analyses, nonresponses are usually removed, which could potentially mean a loss of information. In Slovenia, a similar study was conducted in the late 80s ([Ferligoj et al. 1989](#); [1990](#)). An analysis of public opinion data during the years 1984, 1986, 1987 and 1988 revealed higher differences in nonresponses between men and women in comparison to similar research conducted in old western democracies ([Rapoport 1982](#)). The economic, financial and political crises in the period of transition seemed to be the cause of this. Now, almost 30 years after the original research, after 25 years of Slovenia's independence and more than 10 years of full membership in the European Union (EU), we are interested in whether the gap between men and women in expressed opinions is still present. After all, the share of nonresponses should decrease with the emancipation of women and their active entrance into the public sphere, even more so if nonresponses are indicators of apathy, ignorance, lack of information or social and economic position ([Ferligoj et al. 1998](#); [1990](#)). We will consider three periods: the period after the transition

and before accession to the EU (from 2000 to 2003)<sup>1</sup>; the period after accession to the EU and the presidency of the council of the EU, as well as a period of economic growth (from 2004 to 2008)<sup>2</sup>; and period at the beginning of the economic, financial and political crises in Slovenia (from 2009 to 2013)<sup>3</sup>. Our assumption is that the difference in the number of nonresponses between men and women would be lower during the first two periods, periods of economic growth and stability, in comparison to the third period, a period of political crisis. The results of our analysis should be relevant not only for Slovenia, but also for Eastern and Central Europe and for Western Europe.

The question of gender equality remains a relevant issue in social sciences, especially when using an innovative approach and considering current social conditions.

### Nonresponses in Questionnaires

We differentiate between two types of nonresponses (Ferber 1956). The first type is a complete nonresponse, where the respondent refuses to participate in the survey, and the second is a partial nonresponse. In this case, the respondent agrees to participate in the survey but does not answer all questions or answers with the 'Do not know' answer. In this article, we took an innovative approach that analyses partial nonresponses<sup>4</sup> in public opinion surveys, which are usually excluded from analyses. When we treat nonresponses as missing values in our statistical analyses, we assume nonresponses are randomly distributed. With the increasing number of nonresponses treated as missing values, it becomes questionable if analysed respondents are true representatives of the population (Rapoport 1979). Nonresponses are indicators of ignorance, apathy or absence of opinion (Ferligoj et al. 1989). Based on nonresponses, we can make a distinction between opinionated and non-opinionated citizens (Uhan 1998). Several research studies have shown that nonresponses are not randomly distributed (Ferber 1956; Francis, Busch 1975; Rapoport 1982; Rapoport 1985; Ferligoj et al. 1989; Novak 2013) and are

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<sup>1</sup> In 1991, Slovenia declared independence and entered into a transition period oriented towards markets in the EU and Western Europe. Since independence, Slovenia has been a constitutional democracy with free and fair elections and an independent judiciary. Slovenia established a position of one of the most highly developed states in the region. Since independence, Slovenia has expressed intention to become an EU member state. On 1 September 1993, an agreement on the cooperation between Slovenia and the EU was signed (Lajh 2008–2014).

<sup>2</sup> In 2004, Slovenia became a member of the EU and joined NATO. In 2008, Slovenia as the first new member state took over the presidency of the Council of the EU. These were two of the most important goals of Slovenia. Since 2008, Slovenia and its politics have been missing a clear strategy. The period between 2004 and 2008 was also marked by a right-wing government, while the Slovenia majority of the time was under a left-wing government.

<sup>3</sup> Since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, the Slovenian government has been facing pressure to accept some unpopular austerity measures and structural reforms. During this period, trade unions occasionally mobilised to demonstrate for better living standards and to contradict these kinds of attempts. In the years 2012 and 2013, Slovenia was marked with mass protests and demonstrations against corruption, austerity measures and general dissatisfaction with the political and economic elite. At the same time, the public debt of Slovenia was increasing and the economic forecast remained poor (Lajh 2008–2014).

<sup>4</sup> When analysing nonresponses, researchers are limited only to respondents that agreed to participate in a survey. There is an existing assumption that citizens who refuse to participate in a survey are for our kind of research question even more relevant, as they usually have a low interest in politics and a low level of political knowledge (Kurdija and Štebe 1997). We should keep this shortage in mind when interpreting the results.

explained by level of education, gender, age, ethnic group, household type, marital status, region, community size, occupation, income, political inclusion, knowledge and general opinion. Politically active individuals, men, the ethnic majority and respondents with a higher economic position are more inclined to express opinions in comparison to politically inactive individuals, women, the ethnic minority and those with a lower socioeconomic position, who in higher proportions answer with the 'Do not know' answer (Rapoport 1982).

It is believed that a respondent will not answer a public opinion question when this question is too personal or when the respondent does not know the answer (Leigh, Martin 1987). It is hardly unlikely that an informed respondent will choose the 'Do not know' answer and represent him or herself as uninformed and ignorant. Respondents usually tend to want to please the interviewer, present themselves in a positive light and provide the interviewer with a meaningful answer (Fiske et al. 1990: 46; Luskin, Bullock 2011: 549). Acknowledging ignorance can embarrass a respondent. It is thus reasonable to assume that a respondent faced with two or three offered answers will prefer to guess rather than admit his or her ignorance (Campbell et al. 1960: 181). However, respondents may want to satisfy an interviewer by providing an easy answer and avoiding substantial cognitive effort, behaviour known as satisficing, where respondents either provide incomplete or biased information or do not provide the required information by simply answering 'Do not know' (Krosnick 1991; 1999; 2000). With a well-prepared survey that maximises respondent motivation and minimises task difficulties, we can avoid the effects of satisficing<sup>5</sup> (Krosnick 2000: 8). In addition, not all respondents are equally prone to satisficing and providing easy answers. Respondents with the same cognitive abilities and confidence in their answers can form different judgments about the appropriateness of their answers (Kerwin 1998). Analyses of political knowledge, for example, noted that women are less willing to guess the right answer in comparison to men, and women are more likely to admit their ignorance (Mondak, Anderson 2004: 497; Ferrin et al. 2016). There are two reasons why respondents choose nonresponses instead of content answers and in some way admit their ignorance (Rapoport 1982). Respondents can lack the information and knowledge to form and express an opinion, which we call objective knowledge. Besides objective knowledge, a respondent must also express some level of subjective knowledge and confidence to express a particular opinion. Objective and subjective knowledge are correlated, where higher levels of objective knowledge increase the level of subjective knowledge or confidence in one's knowledge (Rapoport 1982). Similarly, Campbell and colleagues (1960: 175–176) assumed that the expression of an opinion is dependent on cognitive and emotional factors. Respondents who are ill informed about any political dimension will not recognise the political issue in a question on the questionnaire. At the same time, a respondent must recognise political issues in relation to his or her values to be able to answer opinion questions. Besides a lack of objective and subjective

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<sup>5</sup> Surveys may encourage respondents to choose 'Do not know' answers by first asking them if they thought about this issue before and if they have an opinion on it. Questions that encourage respondents not to respond to the question result in a higher number of nonresponses (Krosnick 1991). The survey we used in our analysis (Slovenian Public Opinion Survey) does not encourage respondents to select the 'Do not know' answer. In fact, nonresponses are recorded only if the respondent offers this form of answer.

knowledge, Krosnick and Milburn (1990) identify two other reasons for nonresponses: perceived demand—‘perception of politicians’ interest in citizens’ opinions on policy issues (Krosnick, Milburn 1990: 51)’<sup>6</sup>—and the general cognitive competence of the respondent.

### Gender, Nonresponse and the Crises

A number of surveys show that nonresponses are not distributed equally between men and women. Women systematically choose ‘Do not know’ answers more often than men, regardless of their age and of whether they are asked a cognitive or opinion question (Francis, Busch 1975; Rapoport 1982; Atkeson, Rapoport 2003; Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996; Mondak, Anderson 2004; Banwart 2007; Dolan 2011; Ferrin et al. 2012; Fraile 2014; Ferrin et al. 2016). Research conducted by Ferligoj et al. (1989) on the Slovenian population revealed that the share of nonresponses in the late 80s was twice to three times greater for women in comparison to men. The gender gap in nonresponses increased in the years of economic and political crises in the period before Slovenia declared its independence. As demonstrated already in the research of Ferligoj et al. (1989), long-term economic and political crises can have a particular influence on some groups of citizens, with a greater influence on youth and women. Interviews with the elderly Slovenian population revealed that citizens engage in different active strategies to improve their economic position (Hlebec et al. 2010). In times of crises, families mobilise all materials and service resources and perform some of the services they have already searched for in the market on their own (Ferligoj et al. 1989). These strategies of economic survival affect women more, as they engage more in unpaid work performed in the private sphere. Consequently, in times of depression, women are more included in the private sphere and less included in the public sphere. However, even after the increasing inclusion of women in the public sphere following the emancipation of women, it seems women are not engaged much in public activities. Despite the increasing level of women’s economic independence, the level of women’s political communication remains lower in comparison to men (Atkeson, Rapoport 2003). Women are more likely to avoid expressing their opinions, but higher shares of ‘Do not know’ answers among women do not imply women are less intelligent or less cognitively capable. After all, a difference in nonresponses between men and women is different when we analyse non-political questions in comparison to political questions (Rapoport 1981; Ferligoj et al. 1990; Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996; Dolan 2011; Ferrin et al. 2016). However, it does mean that women are less ready to provide content answers when it comes to political public opinion questions or political cognitive questions (Almond 1960; Francis, Busch 1975; Rapoport 1981; Rapoport 1982; Ferligoj et al. 1989; Ferligoj et al. 1990; Krosnick, Milburn 1990; Mondak, Anderson 2004; Dolan 2011; Fraile 2014; Ferrin et al. 2016). Women portray a lower level of confidence in their opinions and knowledge (Rapoport 1982;

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<sup>6</sup> Respondents are prepared to answer public opinion questions if they believe that politicians and decision makers are interested in citizens’ opinions and that the expression of these opinions will matter.

Ferligoj et al. 1989; Mondak, Anderson 2004; Fraile 2014). While men are more willing to take a guess when answering public opinion questions, women are more prone to answer with the ‘Do not know’ answer, even if they have partial knowledge (Ferrin et al. 2016).

Ferligoj and colleagues (1989) argued that nonresponses expressed by women are not necessarily an indicator of lower subjective knowledge, but rather a sign of protest against being excluded from public life and having a lower socioeconomic position in comparison to men during crises. We could also say that women ‘choose silence’ (Ferligoj et al. 1990: 3) and exit from public debate. It is also a sign of cynicism, a sense of powerlessness and the belief that political leaders are not acting in the best interests of the people (Banwart 2007). Similarly, Francis and Busch (1975) believe that marginalised groups express their exclusion with nonresponses. However, at the same time, their marginalised position also means lesser access to resources. Nonresponses can be expressions of real exclusion from the public sphere and the low subjective competence of women or an expression of protest against exclusion. This is however not the only explanation for the gender gap in the number of nonresponses and for the gender gap in political knowledge. Some researchers (Delli Carpini, Keeter 1996; Ferrin et al. 1996; Rapoport 1981; Rapoport 1985; Mondak, Anderson 2004) explain this gender gap as a consequence of political socialisation and political learning. Women were traditionally raised to believe that politics is a man’s field and that women are not ready to enter this field.

The persisting gender gap in opinionation (Krosnick, Milburn 1990) and political communication, despite increased levels of education among women<sup>7</sup> and a higher share of employment among women,<sup>8</sup> is an indicator of the underrepresentation of women in politics. Political communication remains an area of gender inequality with possible political consequences. Expressing one’s opinion in anonymised public opinion surveys is less demanding than expressing one’s opinion openly and convincingly enough to change opinions (Rapoport 1981). If we are still facing a gender gap in nonresponses, we must be aware that a gender gap in general political communication is even more pronounced.

In our article, we are interested in what effect the current economic, financial and political crises have on the gender gap in nonresponses in Slovenia. To observe this, we will compare the share of nonresponses between men and women in three periods: in the period after the transition and before accession to the EU; the period after accession to the EU and the presidency of the Council of the EU; and the period of the economic, financial and political crises in Slovenia. Our hypothesis is as follows: the share of nonresponses to socio-economic questions is higher among women, and the difference in the share of nonresponses between men and women is higher in the period of financial, economic and political crises in comparison to the other two periods.

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<sup>7</sup> The number of women who finished high school, finished college and finished university already exceeds the number of men who accomplished the same (Statistical office RS 2014).

<sup>8</sup> The share of work activities for residents in Slovenia older than 15 years in 2013 was 46.9 for women and 58.1 for men (Statistical office RS 2014).

## Methods and Data

### Data

For the purposes of our analysis, we will use data collected from the longitudinal project Slovenian Public Opinion Survey (SPOS).<sup>9</sup> The SPOS enables the analysis of identical questions about key social, economic and political issues over a longer period, and it is conducted on a stratified representative sample of adult inhabitants of Slovenia. It uses standardised questions in face-to-face field interviews, where specially trained interviewers conduct surveys with respondents.<sup>10</sup> We will analyse data in three periods: 1) the period after the transition and before accession to EU (2000–2003); 2) the period after EU accession and the presidency of the Council of the EU (2004–2008); and 3) the beginning of economic financial and political crises in Slovenia (2009–2013). For the first period, we aggregated surveys conducted in November and December 2000, October and November 2001, May and June 2002, February and March 2003 and October and November 2003 in one database by adding cases. For the second period, we joined data gathered in surveys conducted in March and April 2005, October and November 2006, from October to December 2007 and April and May 2008. For the third period, we aggregated data from surveys conducted from October 2010 to January 2011, from March to June 2011, from October to December 2012 and from September to December 2013. In the analyses, we used a method similar to that of Ferligoj and colleagues (1989; 1990) and Rapoport (1982) to ensure at least some level of comparison, but we applied some changes to enable a comparison among three periods. First, we perform a simple mean comparison and analysis of

<sup>9</sup> The Slovenian Public Opinion Survey has been periodically conducted by scholars at the Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana since 1968, and it remains a comprehensive source of public opinion data for Slovenia ([Public Opinion and Mass Communication Research Centre 2014](#)).

<sup>10</sup> The following surveys are used in our analysis:  
 SPOS 2000/1, November and December 2000, N = 1,097;  
 SPOS 2001/2, 18 October–19 November 2001, N = 1,098;  
 SPOS 2002/1, 23 May–26 June 2002, N = 1,123;  
 SPOS 2003/1, 7 February–30 March 2003, N = 1,073, response rate = 66.65%;  
 SPOS 2003/4, 4 October–20 November 2003, N = 1,054, response rate = 64.58%;  
 SPOS 2005/1, 17 March–25 April 2005, N = 1,002;  
 SPOS 2006/2, October and November 2006, N = 1,003;  
 SPOS 2007, October–December 2007, N = 1,010;  
 SPOS 2008/1, April and May 2008, N = 1,366, response rate = 66.62%;  
 SPOS 2010, 20 October 2010–31 January 2011, N = 1,403;  
 SPOS 2011/2, 9 March–15 June 2011, N = 1,069;  
 SPOS 2012/2, 1 October–31 December 2012, N = 1,257; and  
 SPOS 2013, 21 September–18 December 2013, N = 1,010, response rate = 56.11%. (We provided publicly available response rates).

The first period has the sample size of 5,445 units, the second period 4,381 units and the third 4,739 units. The survey population is adult residents of the Republic of Slovenia older than 18 years and living at a permanent address in Slovenia. The sampling procedure for all years is based on the Central Register of Population (a list of names and addresses constantly updated by public administration), which is used as a sampling frame. The selection is random, where every population unit has an equal probability of selection, which is done in two stages. The selection of PSU in the first instance was random, with a probability proportional size of clusters of enumeration areas (CEAs). CEAs are stratified according to 12 regions × 6 types of settlement. At the second stage, we obtain a fixed number of persons with names and addresses using a systematic random selection inside the CEA ([Social Science Data Archive 2013](#)).

variance to observe the differences in nonresponses among gender, age groups and education groups. Later, we perform a simple linear regression to determine which factors affect the level of nonresponses.

### **Dependent Variable: Level of Nonresponses**

We operationalised the level of nonresponses with the number of nonresponse answers ('Do not know' and 'no answer') to socio-economic opinion questions. We used seven questions about current issues and formed an additive index of nonresponses. Several variables that measure attitudes towards current issues were computed.<sup>11</sup> This enabled us to compare results in the period before accession, the period after accession to the EU and the period of economic, financial and political crises, as well as to observe possible changes among these three periods. We only used the questions that had an option of a 'Do not know' answer. 'Do not know' or missing answers were coded as value = 1, representing a nonresponse. Content answers were coded as value = 0, indicating the presence of a content answer. Afterwards, we added values for all variables into one index ranging from value 0 = content answers on all questions to value 7 = nonresponses on all observed variables.

The distribution of answers in our dependent variable is asymmetrical. On average, 51.4% of respondents provided a content answer to all questions. Most respondents are inclined to offer content answers to research questions and to make a positive impression on the interviewer (Bishop in Uhan 1998: 104). Respondents have a tendency to present themselves as informed and knowledgeable citizens. When they form an answer, they tend to rely on the most recent information at their disposal, as this is the least time and effort consuming (Zaller 1990) or they simply provide a satisfactory answer (Krosnick 1991). The tendency of respondents to answer all the questions results in the asymmetrical distribution of the dependent variable. Due to the asymmetrical distribution of our variable, we were limited in the analyses performed.

### **Independent Variables: Gender, Level of Education, Age Group**

The independent variable used in the analysis is gender controlled by age group and level of education. For the comparison of means and simple analyses of variance, the variable *age group* consists of six categories: up to 25 years, 26 to 30 years, 31 to 40 years, 41 to 50 years, 51 to 60 years and 61 years and more. The variable *level of education* has four categories: elementary school, professional school, high school and college or university. The difference in the level of nonresponses between genders (gender gap) is calculated as a quotient, where the mean value of the index of nonresponses for women is divided by the mean value of the index of nonresponses for men. Values lower than one indicate a higher opinionation and a lower level of nonresponses among women in comparison to men.

<sup>11</sup> As we could not find seven questions that would repeat in identical form in all analysed surveys, we chose similarly difficult questions; after all, we differ only between content answers, and nonresponses and analyses are performed for each measurement separately. The seven questions included in our index of nonresponses are as follows: (1) Self-placement on a political scale from left to right; (2) Four questions on trust in political institutions: National Assembly, Government of Republic of Slovenia, President of Republic, political parties, courts and public administration; (3) Three typical views of the society in which we live (for the years 2000 to 2006) and satisfaction with democracy in Slovenia (for the years 2007 to 2013).

We continue the analysis with a linear regression, where the dependent variable is the number of 'Do not know' answers calculated in the same way as described above. The analysis includes the following independent variables: gender (0 = woman, 1 = man), education (1 = no education or unfinished elementary school, 2 = finished elementary school, 3 = unfinished high school or vocational school, 4 = finished two or three years of vocational school, 5 = finished four years of high school, 6 = unfinished college or university, 7 = finished two years of college or 8 = finished university, academy or more), age (in years), size of place of living (1 = up to 500 inhabitants, 2 = 500 to 2,000 inhabitants, 3 = 2,000 to 4,000 inhabitants, 4 = 4,000 to 10,000 inhabitants, 5 = 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants, 6 = above 50,000 inhabitants), marital status (0 = not married, 1 = married), religiosity (0 = non religious, 1 = religious), time period (1 = before accession to the EU, 2 = after accession to the EU and the presidency of the Council of the EU and 3 = economic, financial and political crises) and year of the survey (1 = November, December 2000; 2 = October, November 2001; 3 = May, June 2002; 4 = February, March 2003; 5 = October, November 2003; 6 = March, April 2005; 7 = October, November 2006; 8 = October to December 2007; 9 = April, May 2008; 10 = October 2010 to January 2011; 11 = March to June 2011; 12 = October to December 2012; 13 = September to December 2013).

### Analysis and Results

In our first step of the analyses, we compared the level of nonresponses between men and women in all three observed periods. The results are presented in [Table 1](#). In all three observed periods, the quotient of nonresponses for women in relation to men is higher than one. This means that the level of nonresponses was higher for women than for men. In [Rapoport's \(1982\)](#) analyses, the highest quotient of nonresponses for women in relation to men was two, with an average of around 1.5. [Ferligoj et al. \(1989\)](#) in their survey came across the highest quotient of 2.8. In our survey, the quotient level was 1.67 before accession to the EU; 1.49 after the accession; and 1.36 during economic, financial and political crises. Our assumption has been that the difference in the level of nonresponses would be higher in the third period during economic, financial and political crises. However, this is not the case. The difference in the level of nonresponses is actually the lowest during the period of economic, financial and political crises. During the period before accession to the EU, the level of nonresponses was the lowest for both genders, but it later increased for both after the accession and again decreased during economic, financial and political crises, but this was true for women a bit more than for men, leading to a decrease in the gender gap. It seems as if the gender gap in the level of nonresponses is finally decreasing, a trend that was noticed in western democracies in the 80s ([Rapoport 1982](#)). Due to the current political crises and general discontent regarding politics in Slovenia ([Haček 2013](#)), it might be easier for women to form an opinion and express discontent, which lowers the level of nonresponses and decreases the gender gap in opinionation. However, the difference between the quotients in all three periods is not substantial.

In a further analysis, we will compare the level of nonresponses between men and women while taking into account level of education. Previous research (e.g. [Rapoport 1982](#);



Table 1

**Differences in Nonresponses Between Men and Women**

	Total	Men	Women	Women/Men	F—statistics P < 0,01
Accession period to the EU (2000–2003)					
Mean	0.69	0.51	0.85	<b>1.67</b>	166.595
Std. deviation	0.97	0.80	1.08		
N	5,289	2,498	2,498		
After accession to the EU and EU presidency (2004–2008)					
Mean	0.85	0.67	1.00	<b>1.49</b>	84.806
Std. deviation	1.15	1.01	1.25		
N	4,284	1,989	2,295		
Economic, financial and political crises (2009–2013)					
Mean	0.77	0.64	0.87	<b>1.36</b>	56.066
Std. deviation	1.07	0.97	1.13		
N	4,734	2,121	2,613		

Source: My elaboration on SPOS data.

Ferligoj et al. 1989) noted that women needed a higher level of objective knowledge to have a high enough level of subjective knowledge to form an opinion. This can be observed based on a fewer number of differences in the expressed nonresponses between genders among individuals with a higher level of education. The results are presented in Table 2. The main difference in the level of nonresponses among various levels of education was between the least educated group and the rest (Novak 2014). In addition, when we control for education, the gender gap remains present for all education groups. The difference in nonresponses between men and women seems to be lower for the group with higher education, at least in the first period. This may mean that with a higher level of objective knowledge, the level of subjective knowledge also increases, which is evident in the lower gender gap in opinionation. In the second and third periods, the difference in nonresponses between men and women remains similar for the most and least educated groups.

Our second control variable in the analyses is age group. Some research (e.g. Rapoport 1982; Ferligoj et al. 1989; Novak 2014) has already indicated that the elderly are more inclined to choose nonresponses than younger generations. A mean comparison of the non-response index controlled by age group is presented in Table 3. In addition, in our analyses, the mean value of the nonresponse index is usually higher for the elderly. This is more the case for women than for men. For women, the mean value of the nonresponse index is the highest either for the youngest (second and third period) or the oldest (first, second and third period) group. This is why the gender gap in nonresponses (quotient of women and men) is also usually higher for the older group (all three periods), as well as for the youngest group (first two periods). On the other hand, the gender gap is lower for the working population. As nonresponses are indicators of the social and economic position of women (Ferligoj et al. 1989), this confirms that elderly women as a group have the most vulnerable socio-economic position. Some other research (Hlebec et al. 2010) also shows that older women

Table 2

**Mean Values of Index of Nonresponse Based on Gender and Education**

	Elementary school	Professional school	High school	College or university
Accession period to the EU (2000–2003): Men				
Mean	0.74	0.54	0.39	0.33
Std. deviation	1.00	0.79	0.68	0.60
N	564	757	836	335
Accession period to the EU (2000–2003): Women				
Mean	1.20	0.88	0.67	0.44
Std. deviation	1.26	0.97	0.94	0.75
N	940	480	948	412
Women/Men	1.62	1.63	1.72	1.33
After accession to the EU and EU presidency (2004–2008): Men				
Mean	0.86	0.67	0.63	0.50
Std. deviation	1.16	0.96	0.95	0.90
N	382	567	699	322
After accession to the EU and EU presidency (2004–2008): Women				
Mean	1.28	0.96	0.88	0.73
Std. deviation	1.38	1.23	1.17	0.96
N	661	417	782	416
Women/Men	1.49	1.43	1.40	1.46
Economic, financial and political crises (2009–2013): Men				
Mean	0.87	0.71	0.58	0.45
Std. deviation	1.23	1.01	0.87	0.75
N	371	655	634	455
Economic, financial and political crises (2009–2013): Women				
Mean	1.24	0.84	0.73	0.67
Std. deviation	1.45	0.99	0.97	0.92
N	680	548	652	725
Women/Men	1.43	1.18	1.26	1.49

Source: My elaboration on SPOS data.

are at the greatest risk of poverty in Slovenia. At the same time, the higher level of nonresponses among the older cohort may be an indicator of time change. With the emancipation of women and women being more present in public life, the level of nonresponses may have decreased.

In the second stage of the analysis, we performed a simple linear regression model to determine which factors explain the gender gap in opinionation. As predictors, we included gender, age, education, size of place of living, marital status and religiosity. Due to the problem of multicollinearity, we prepared three different models where each included one of the following time variables: period, year of the survey and presence of an election in the year of the survey.<sup>12</sup> The results are presented in [Table 4](#). As can be seen, all independent

<sup>12</sup> Elections in the period from 2000 to 2013 were in the following years: in 2000 parliamentary elections, in 2002 presidential elections, in 2004 parliamentary election and elections for European parliament, in 2006 local elections, in 2007 presidential elections, in 2008 parliamentary elections, in 2009 election for European parliament, in 2010 local elections, in 2011 parliamentary elections and in 2012 presidential elections.

Table 3

**Mean Values of Index of Nonresponse Based on Gender and Age**

	—25 years	26–30 years	31–40 years	41–50 years	51–60 years	61—years
Accession period to the EU (2000–2003): Men						
Mean	0.42	0.72	0.54	0.47	0.37	0.54
Std. deviation	0.72	0.93	0.81	0.79	0.62	0.85
N	67	252	449	494	479	756
Accession period to the EU (2000–2003): Women						
Mean	0.80	0.85	0.78	0.73	0.68	1.06
Std. deviation	1.08	1.03	0.98	0.92	0.89	1.28
N	80	273	464	509	541	923
Women/Men	1.90	1.18	1.44	1.55	1.84	1.96
After accession to the EU and EU presidency (2004–2008): Men						
Mean	0.63	0.67	0.74	0.70	0.64	0.66
Std. deviation	0.88	0.97	1.06	0.98	1.01	1.05
N	241	199	368	347	375	459
After accession to the EU and EU presidency (2004–2008): Women						
Mean	1.13	0.97	0.91	0.88	0.81	1.19
Std. deviation	1.52	1.06	1.09	1.11	1.03	1.42
N	252	172	360	439	401	671
Women/Men	1.79	1.45	1.23	1.26	1.27	1.80
Economic, financial and political crises (2009–2013): Men						
Mean	0.77	0.58	0.73	0.63	0.54	0.61
Std. deviation	1.06	0.98	1.08	0.91	0.76	1.01
N	283	180	350	362	418	528
Economic, financial and political crises (2009–2013): Women						
Mean	0.91	0.76	0.77	0.81	0.89	0.96
Std. deviation	1.24	1.04	1.05	1.02	1.00	1.27
N	309	183	366	459	503	791
Women/Men	1.18	1.31	1.05	1.29	1.65	1.57

Source: My elaboration on SPOS data.

variables with the exception of age are significant predictors of the level of nonresponses. The highest explanatory power is level of education, where the higher the level of education, the lower the number of nonresponses. Gender is also an important predictor, where, in line with our analysis, men express fewer nonresponses. When we look at the period, we may notice that both the period and year of the survey show that with each year or period, the level of nonresponses is increasing, but the presence of elections contributes to a lower level of nonresponses. A possible explanation for this is that elections represent a period when more political information is available to citizens, so it is easier for them to form an opinion.

As our research question is focused more on the gender gap, we also performed a linear regression model separately for men and women (see [Table 5](#)). What we may notice is that the explanatory power of education is higher for women than for men. In other words, with a higher level of education, the number of nonresponses decreases more for women than for men. It seems that women need a higher level of objective knowledge to have

Table 4

**Predictors of Level of Nonresponses—Linear Regression With Regression Coefficients (B)  
and Standardised Regression Coefficients (Beta)\***

	Model 1			Model 2			Model3		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	1.194	0.048		1.205	0.046		1.371	0.043	
Gender	-0.285	0.018	-0.136*	-0.285	0.018	-0.136*	-0.287	0.018	-0.136*
Education	-0.085	0.005	-0.156*	-0.085	0.005	-0.157*	-0.085	0.005	-0.157*
Age	0.001	0.001	0.024	0.001	0.001	0.024	0.001	0.001	0.020
Size of place of living	-0.026	0.005	-0.045*	-0.026	0.005	-0.045*	-0.027	0.005	-0.047*
Marital status	-0.151	0.019	-0.072	-0.150	0.019	-0.072*	-0.152	0.019	-0.072*
Religiosity	0.109	0.018	0.052*	0.108	0.018	0.052*	0.093	0.018	0.044*
Time period	0.041	0.011	0.033*						
Year of the survey				0.010	0.002	0.037*			
Elections							-0.112	0.018	-0.052*
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.065 F = 131.303* N = 13,205			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.065 F = 131.839* N = 13,205			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.067 F = 134,671* N = 13,205		

Source: My elaboration on SPOS data.

\*p < 0.001

a high enough level of subjective knowledge to express an opinion (Rapoport 1982; Fraile 2014). In addition, some other predictors have more explanatory power for women than for men. The size of place of living and marital status are significant predictors of the level of nonresponses for women but not for men, while the period is a significant predictor for men but not for women. The latter may mean that the gender gap decreased during economic, financial and political crises due to the higher level of nonresponses among men. The crises seem to have an effect on men but not on women. High disappointment in current Slovenian politics apparently contributed to lower levels of expressed opinions only among men. We must also note that the explanatory power of our regression models is rather low.

### Conclusion

Nonresponses are usually excluded from analyses. However, we decided to take an innovative approach and analysed nonresponses to assess the gender gap in opinionation and possible changes to the gender gap over three periods. Different analyses have shown that women choose nonresponses more often than men do when it comes to political questions. A survey performed in the 80s in Slovenia (Ferligoj et al. 1989) demonstrated that economic, financial and political crises could have a negative effect on the socioeconomic position of women, which is evidenced by the increased gender gap in expressed opinions. After 25 years of Slovenian independence, we wanted to look again at the gender gap in opinionation. We analysed three periods. The first is the period before accession to the EU; the second is the period after accession to the EU and the presidency of the Council of

Table 5

**Predictors of Level of Nonresponses—Linear Regression With Regression Coefficients (B)  
and Standardised Regression Coefficients (Beta) for Men and Women**

	Women			Men		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error	Beta
(Constant)	1.291	0.072		0.818	0.059	
Education	-0.094	0.007	-0.168*	-0.068	0.007	-0.138*
Age	0.002	0.001	0.033	-0.001	0.001	-0.016
Size of place of living	-0.041	0.008	-0.066*	-0.009	0.007	-0.017
Marital status	-0.190	0.027	-0.083*	-0.068	0.027	-0.038
Religiosity	0.127	0.027	0.055*	0.088	0.024	0.049*
Time period	0.024	0.016	0.018	0.063	0.014	0.058*
	R <sup>2</sup> = 0.056 F = 70.877* N = 7,117			R <sup>2</sup> = 0.030 F = 31.179* N = 6,088		

Source: My elaboration on SPOS data.

\*p &lt; 0.001

the EU, which was also a period of economic growth and stability; and the third period is a period of economic, financial and political crises. In contrast to our assumption, the gap in nonresponses between men and women was lower during the third period, during the crises. This is a period of high discontent among citizens with the current political situation and a period of an absence of trust in political institutions. This time apparently the crises did not reflect women's opinionation. It is possible that with the emancipation of women and their increased level of education (objective knowledge), the difference in expressed opinions between men and women is finally decreasing in Slovenia.<sup>13</sup> However, it also seems that men were more affected by a high level of discontent and dissatisfaction with the government, the political and economic elite and the economic position of Slovenia, and they were less likely to express their opinions. During this period (not like in the 80s), the economic, financial and political crises motivated women to lend their voices to public debate. Consequently, the gender gap in opinionation is decreasing. However, the level of objective knowledge remains important in determining the level of subjective knowledge among women. Education and some other predictors, such as marital status and size of place of living, explained more the level of nonresponses for women than for men.

Expressing an opinion as an anonymous respondent in a public survey is less demanding than an open expression of one's opinion. Nevertheless, we remain optimistic that a decrease in the gender gap regarding opinionation can lead to a general decrease in the gender

<sup>13</sup> The level of employment of women in Slovenia has been relatively high from independence onwards. In 1991, 52.15% of women older than 15 years were employed in comparison to 65.50% of men, while in 2013, 40.10% of women were employed in comparison to 50.70% of men. The gender gap is most evident when it comes to the young generation, where at age 25, 53% of men were employed in comparison to 35% of women. Women are also more likely to have less secure employment. The level of education is high for women, but in 1991, men still outnumbered women among those who finished high school, faculty or academy, while in 2013, women already outnumbered men among those who finished college and university. However, there are still more men with a finished PhD level and the average monthly salary of women is still 5.3% lower than the average salary of men (Statistical office RS 2014; Vrabič Kek et al. 2016). Although the emancipation of women in Slovenia has been high all these years, we can also notice progress, especially when it comes to the better inclusion of women in high and public positions.

gap regarding political communication and is a predictor of a higher level of political participation among women in the near future.

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