

# The Persistence of Gender Differences in Political Interest

*La persistencia de las diferencias de género en el interés por la política*

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## Key words

Gender Differences •  
Political Participation  
• Political Attitudes  
• Political Interest •  
Housework

## Palabras clave

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## Abstract

This article explores the role of individual resources, situational factors, and the socialization process in the persistence of a gender gap in political dispositions, principally in political interest. We pay special attention to situational factors, especially those related to the time devoted to housework and caring responsibilities. Despite the growing participation of women in the labor market and increasingly comparable levels of male and female educational attainment, the enduring unequal sexual division of household tasks reduces women's time availability as well as the pool of skills, resources and social networks which could foster their political engagement, thus helping to sustain the gender gap in political interest.

## Resumen

Este artículo explora el rol de los recursos individuales, los factores situacionales y el proceso de socialización en la persistencia de las diferencias de género en las actitudes políticas, principalmente en el interés por la política. Prestamos especial atención a los factores situacionales, sobre todo aquellos que tienen que ver con el tiempo dedicado a las responsabilidades domésticas y de cuidado. A pesar de la creciente participación de la mujer en el mercado de trabajo y la progresiva equiparación en el nivel educativo de hombres y mujeres, la persistente desigualdad en la división sexual del trabajo doméstico reduce el tiempo libre de las mujeres así como las habilidades, recursos y conexiones sociales que podrían fomentar su implicación política, contribuyendo a mantener las diferencias de género en el interés por la política.

## INTRODUCTION

Gender differences in political engagement have been notably reduced in recent decades across advanced industrial democracies thanks to the increasing participation of women in the labor market, the progressive convergence of men's and women's educational attainment, and the corresponding generational replacement. However, despite encompassing changes, the gender gap still

persists and only narrows at a very slow pace (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

Several explanations have been put forward since the 1960s. On the one hand, the structural explanation argues that women usually possess fewer socioeconomic resources to be politically engaged than men do. On the other hand, the situational explanation claims that women bear the lion's share of family responsibilities, which prevents

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their full participation in politics. And, finally, the sex-role explanation maintains that women's socialization tends to focus on a politically more passive role than men's (see Burns *et al.*, 2001, for an extensive literature review).

This article aims to assess the validity of each of the three main existing approaches accounting for the gender gap in political attitudes by refining the explanations previously tested. The analysis focuses on the Catalan case, and therefore the Spanish case by extension. We use a survey carried out in 2009 by the *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* (CEO), that, apart from the usual socioeconomic and attitudinal variables, includes various questions related to situational factors and other proxy indicators to capture the effects of socialization. Having these sets of variables together with political attitudes is quite unusual in the field of political dispositions surveys, and it allows us to explore the specific contribution of each of the approaches developed in the literature.

Although this article examines the different modes of political participation in an exploratory fashion, the analysis mainly concentrates on interest in politics, one of the features which allow us to identify the degree of political sophistication of the citizenry and evaluate its possible correlation to other forms of political participation (Vassallo, 2006: 416). Although men's and women's electoral behavior has progressively become similar regarding both turnout and vote choice (Cantijoch and Tormos, 2005; García-Escribano and Frutos, 1999; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Topf, 1995), remarkable differences still persist concerning political knowledge and interest in politics, for which no conclusive explanation has been provided (Lovenduski, 1986: 120-124; Hayes and Bean, 1993; Van Deth, 2000; Vassallo, 2006; Verba *et al.*, 1997: 1051). The persistence of significant differences in political engagement requires further investigation, given that it entails for liberal democracies a challenge

to the demands for political equality (Van Deth, 2000: 265; Burns *et al.*, 2001: 24). Moreover, with few exceptions (see Morales, 1999; Morán and Benedicto, 1995), these gender differences have hardly been researched in the Spanish case.

Interest in politics has a fundamental relevance for citizens' involvement in politics, being an important pre-requisite of democratic politics at the normative level. This civic attitude is a key determinant of other related political attitudes which influence individuals' predispositions to participate (Verba and Nie, 1972). Indeed, it is much more likely for a citizen who is interested in politics to assume an active role in politics, express opinions about political issues, and become exposed to political information (Dalton, 1988; Verba *et al.*, 1980). Interest in politics also has a positive influence on the formation, stability and coherence of political opinions, as well as on the expression of demands to public authorities and institutions (Converse, 1970; Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948; Martín, 2004; Nie and Andersen, 1974; Van Deth, 1990; Van Deth and Eloff, 2000). Moreover, interest in politics can be relevant for the relationship between citizens and representatives, making the former more capable of holding the latter accountable (Converse, 1962; Mutz *et al.*, 1996). Finally, interest in politics is considered to have more influence on political participation than political efficacy and political trust (Norris, 1999; Verba *et al.*, 1995).

In this article we suggest that situational factors are particularly relevant for women's interest in politics, especially the number of hours devoted to housework and care. On the one hand, a higher dedication of women to these tasks decreases their time availability. On the other hand, these types of tasks force women to turn their attention to the private sphere and do not promote the development of abilities, resources or social connections that facilitate political involvement. The rest of the article is structured as follows. Section one reviews the literature and pre-

sents our hypotheses. The second section describes the data and methods used. Section three provides empirical evidence on the private roots of political engagement. The fourth section assesses what combination of structural, situational and sex-role factors accounts for the enduring gender gap in political interest. The final section discusses the main findings and offers some conclusions.

## ACCOUNTING FOR THE PERSISTING GENDER GAP

The gender gap in political engagement has been addressed by three main explanations. First, the structural approach argues that different access to resources explains why some people are more likely to be politically active. Education is considered one of the most relevant socio-demographic predictors of interest in politics (Bennett and Bennett, 1989; Martín, 2004). Those with a higher educational level are better equipped to obtain and process political information. They also face fewer obstacles to get jobs with responsibility and power, which makes them more likely to influence the political process (Van Deth and Elff, 2000) and even to develop political ambitions to run for public office (Fox and Lawless, 2004: 266). Women resource deficit – be it income, educational attainment or occupational status – brings fewer women into political life (Schlozman *et al.*, 1994). As Verba *et al.* note (1997: 1053): «The absence of activity from members of a resource-deprived group may indicate that they *can't* participate, rather than they *don't* want to» (italics from the original text).

Second, the situational explanation emphasizes that the family responsibilities women bear (as wives, carers and homemakers) inhibit their political engagement (Welch, 1977). Gender substantively relates the reproductive sphere to the productive sphere, that is, women's and men's participation in one sphere affects their participation

in the other. To be precise, the activities performed in the reproductive domain sustain and subsidise the productive activities (Treas and Drobnic, 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987: 127). As Phillips (1991: 96) argues, «women are prevented from participating in public life because of the way their private lives are run. The division of labor between women and men constitutes for most women a double burden of work.» Complementarily, the way in which women interact and share gender roles, principally after childbirth, reinforces the effect of the actual division of labor within the family (Schlozman *et al.*, 1994). The existing distribution of domestic tasks also increases the costs of job-specialization for women, yielding a sex gap in wages (Polavieja, 2008). This, in turn, affects the resources available to women given that «marketable skills are at least partly a (negative) function of time spent on household labor» (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006: 6).

Finally, the socialization process in gender roles establishes different beliefs and attitudes about politics (Jennings, 1983; Jennings and Niemi, 1971; Rapoport, 1985; Sapiro, 2004; Verba *et al.*, 1997). Societies transmit gender roles to the new cohorts which will determine the political expectations of teenagers (Hooghe, 2004). Enduring effects of sex-role socialization might bring forward an «unconscious ideology of male dominance» in the political arena (Bem and Bem, 1970). This negatively affects women's subjective political competence in their adult years, making them not only less interested in politics but also less likely to consider themselves qualified to run for elective office (Fox and Lawless, 2011). Furthermore, some implicit lessons, such as men being the overwhelming majority of leading political figures, deprives female constituents of female role models, which may also contribute to establishing gender differences in political engagement during adulthood (Astelarra, 1990; Campbell and Worlbrecht, 2006; Koch, 1997; Verba *et al.*, 1997: 1064; Young, 2000). In this vein, shifts

in the attitudes of female voters following the election of more women to political office have been documented. The inclusion of women in political institutions sends important signals to female citizens that lead them to become more politically involved, or at least to feel more politically efficacious (Childs, 2004; High-Pippert and Comer, 1998). Therefore, women's presence in political institutions might help to break traditional associations between men and the public sphere and, subsequently, to enhance women's political engagement (Atkeson, 2003).

These three explanations are not mutually exclusive but rather they complement each other, that is, the gender gap is the result of the interplay of various elements, none of which can be considered the single relevant factor on its own (Burns *et al.*, 2001; Morales, 1999). All in all, in this article we will particularly focus on the situational factors, specifically those related to domestic responsibilities, given that, even in advanced industrial democracies, women still assume the larger share of unpaid housework, irrespective of both members of the couple working full time outside the home (Batalova and Cohen, 2002; Knudsen and Waerness, 2008; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010). Although a reduction in the number of hours women devote to unpaid housework has recently been observed, this trend is not due to men's greater involvement in these tasks but rather to families hiring these services in the market (Gershuna, 2000). Therefore, the sexual division of domestic work has not been sufficiently adjusted to the rapid changes in family and labor roles women have experienced during recent decades (Hochschild, 1989).

Although the traditional patriarchal family has been substituted by other family types, men have maintained their roles, whereas women, who substantially participate in the labor force, have not abandoned their responsibilities regarding domestic and caring tasks. In fact, they have assumed a double burden of work – known as the «double pre-

sence regime» both in the family and in the labor market (Balbo, 1978; Phillips, 1991; Carrasco and Recio, 2001: 278; Torns *et al.*, 2007). The unequal distribution between men and women of the total burden of work generates a higher availability of spare time for men in comparison to women (Durán, 1991, 2006), and the lower availability of time among women due to housework requirements negatively affects their potential interest and involvement in politics (Norris and Inglehart, 2006: 78).

The availability of free time, and eventually the time which would be dedicated to public affairs, is determined by the sum of paid work outside the household (labor market) and unpaid work within the household (housework and caring tasks). In this regard, one can argue that time availability could affect men and women in the same way: women devote, on average, more hours to unpaid work within the household, while men generally work more hours outside the household. In other words, the distribution of spare time, in principle, would be more or less similar for both sexes. If that is the case, the less time available, the less interested citizens (either men or women) will be in public affairs. However, it can be argued that the resources associated with both types of work are different. Time spent in the labor market helps people to acquire skills, knowledge, social connections and information about politics which facilitate their political involvement. Conversely, time spent in unpaid housework concentrates individual efforts on the private sphere, the household, thus developing more passive attitudes concerning public affairs.

In fact, control over time and the environmental context to which time is devoted affect both the available resources and the motivation to use them in politics (Burns *et al.*, 1997: 375). Particularly, the hypothesis we maintain claims that people undertaking more hours of housework and care will have less interest in politics. Therefore, it is

not the total burden of work what reduces the political involvement of women with respect to men, but rather the amount of time devoted to housework and care tasks. Thus, political participation is to a great extent anchored in private life, what Burns *et al.* (2001) defined as the «private roots of political action».

## DATA AND METHODS

The basis for our empirical analysis is a face-to-face survey conducted in February 2009 by the *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* of the Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO). The sample is representative of the Catalan population aged 18-65 ( $N=1,483$ ). Stratified sampling was implemented (by province and town size) and respondents were randomly selected by applying age and sex quotas. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.59$  per cent, for a 95 per cent confidence interval ( $p = q = 0.5$ )<sup>1</sup>.

The survey contained numerous gender-linked questions, as it aimed to reveal the differences between men and women in the household, as well as in the social, economic and political realms. It should be noted that, to avoid inclining the respondent towards a particular disposition (both to answer the survey and to do so in the socially desired way), the survey was introduced by interviewers as one which dealt with family and work issues.

The survey includes socioeconomic, situational and attitudinal variables, as well as some proxy variables for socialization. This combination makes the survey a very useful instrument to identify the effect of the various explanations accounting for the gender gap. After examining the frequency of participation by women and men in various forms of

political engagement and exploring the differences in political attitudes, we will focus our analysis on interest in politics. Interest in politics is measured with a simple self-placement question of «subjective political interest», as has been done since the 40s by the bulk of electoral behavior studies (Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1948: 24).

Political interest, our dependent variable, has an ordinal distribution (1 «not interested at all», 2 «not very interested», 3 «quite interested», 4 «very interested») for which it is advisable to use an ordinal logistic regression. Independent variables informing on respondents' socio-economic resources include sex, age, education<sup>2</sup> and subjective social class<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to the variables related to the socialization process, we have included (i) religious practice (being a practicing Catholic) as an indicator to capture the influence of traditional values – i.e. religious women may tend to assume a higher burden of work and care less about politics as a consequence of their identification with traditional gender roles (see Burns *et al.*, 2001: 17; Walter and Davie, 1998); (ii) living in a town with a female mayor (according to the results of the 2007 local elections), with a view to checking whether women's access to important political positions influences political attitudes<sup>4</sup>; and having/having had a mother who was/is a housekeeper, used as a proxy of parental socialization. The political disposition variables

<sup>1</sup> Study 520 (2009). The adjusted response rate was 50.3 per cent, using the AAPOR method (2008) for calculating the distribution of responses: complete/eligible + estimated eligible among a sample of unknown eligible individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Having confirmed that age and education have a monotonic linear relation to interest in politics, both variables have been left in their original interval and ordinal forms, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked to locate themselves on a list of social class positions: lower class, lower-middle class, middle-class, upper-middle class and upper class.

<sup>4</sup> This variable is supposed to better grasp the effect of women's visibility in politics than the number of (female) deputies who belong to the constituency (province) of the respondent, given that deputies are elected through closed party lists and voters do not tend to know their representatives except for the head of the party list.

included in our analyses are internal and external political efficacy<sup>5</sup>, and ideological self-placement (1-10 scale).

Regarding situational factors, we have considered: (i) living with a partner; (ii) having children under the age of 12; (iii) labor market participation (present and past); and (iv) weekly hours devoted to household and caring tasks (including the sick and the elderly)<sup>6</sup>, a variable which tends to be missing from surveys on political attitudes. With respect to caring tasks, respondents were asked to report the number of hours dedicated to caring for the elderly and/or dependant relatives, excluding childrearing. Although it may seem that this variable underestimates the total amount of unpaid work, most studies actually discard childrearing as the nature and predictors of this type of work are different (Coltrane and Adams, 2001; Bartley *et al.*, 2005; Bianchi and Raley, 2005; Davis *et al.*, 2007; Knudsen and Wærness, 2008). On the other hand, if our claim regarding the constraining effects of the higher amount of household and caring work carried out by women on interest in politics is confirmed, the fact that our survey does not include people over 65 years of age would in fact be a more robust test of our results given that generational differences are less prevalent in our sample (in terms of educational level, political culture or a more traditional conception of gender roles).

<sup>5</sup> The exact wording for internal political efficacy was «Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I find it difficult to understand what is going on» (1 «fairly disagree», 0 «fairly agree»), and for external political efficacy «People can influence politicians» (1 «fairly agree», 0 «fairly disagree»). Both variables have been recoded to have value 1 for high efficacy (internal or external) and 0 for low efficacy (internal or external).

<sup>6</sup> Although it is reasonable to suspect that reports on household work might be inflated (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006: 7), over-reporting affects men more than women. When direct responses are compared to time diaries, husbands over-report 2.2 times more than wives do (Press and Townsley, 1998: 193).

## GENDER AND THE PRIVATE ROOTS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The place women occupy in the family and the productive sector, the so-called sexual division of labor, produces serious constraints for their involvement in political organizations and public institutions, even affecting their political engagement (Astelarra, 1990). Gendered socialization processes both in childhood and adulthood, along with dissimilar roles performed in the workplace and the family, shape men's and women's political attitudes and contribute to determining their access to the resources which facilitate political engagement. Women are socialized for the private domain and its values, where religion has played a predominant role (Inglehart and Norris, 2003).

This has also generated effects on voting, with women traditionally having identified with and voted to a greater extent than men for right-wing parties (Duverger, 1955; Lipset, 1960; Pérez-Fuentes, 1990). Nonetheless, in recent decades, women have become more left-wing than men, particularly women belonging to the younger generations, installing a «modern gender gap» (Norris, 1999; Inglehart and Norris, 2000). It is precisely the fact that left-wing parties tend to deliver social policies which lift the family burden that makes women in the workforce more inclined to vote for them (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006: 12).

Although several surveys show that both female and male respondents prefer an egalitarian family model in which work inside and outside the home is equally distributed (see Cea D'Ancona, 2007: 208), women overwhelmingly take responsibility for most of the housework and caring for relatives. A study carried out in Spain in 2004 showed that 45.1 per cent of women do all the housework on their own, whereas only 7.1 per cent of men find themselves in the same situation; 40 per cent of employed women are also solely responsible for looking after their under-12 chil-

**TABLE 1.** *Weekly hours devoted to work*

		Men	Women	
Paid work (labor market)	Mean	35.99	30.62	***
	Standard deviation	15.82	17.55	
	<i>N</i>	730	702	
Unpaid work (housework and care)	Mean	10.84	19.28	***
	Standard deviation	9.10	12.45	
	<i>N</i>	739	713	
Total work (sum of paid and unpaid work)	Mean	46.95	49.90	***
	Standard deviation	19.24	22.80	
	<i>N</i>	715	690	

Statistical significance: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

dren (men do so in 3.1 per cent of cases). Finally, 42 per cent of salaried women take care of the elderly on their own and just 9.8 per cent of women share this responsibility with their partner (Chicano, 2004: 102-103). In fact, Spain is one of the European countries where the gender gap in terms of time devoted to domestic work is wider (Aliaga, 2006: 8). Our survey confirms this gender bias in the distribution of housework and care, as can be observed in Table 1. Female respondents reported devoting 19.3 hours per week to unpaid domestic work and caring tasks, as compared with only 10.8 in the case of men<sup>7</sup>. Although men assume more hours of paid work than women (35.9 to

30.6), women's total burden of work, once both types of work are added up, is even higher (49.9 hours per week for women, and 46.9 hours for men). The difference is statistically significant at the maximum level.

The interaction of organizational-participatory time and family time makes women «juggle» their timetable with multiple tasks (Lewis and Weigert, 1992), especially during certain stages of their life course. For instance, Verge (2009: 58) shows that youth organizations of political parties have a balanced sex composition in their rank and file. However, when affiliates come of age and have to transfer their membership to political parties, the gender gap progressively increases. Whereas male and female membership is almost the same in the youngest group – those under the age of 25 –, the presence of women dramatically decreases in the 26-40 age group. Not surprisingly, it is at this stage of women's life cycle, as we have already discussed, when maternity, full participation in the labor market and the rise of family responsibilities derived from the caring for the elderly coincide (Baxter, Hewitt and Haynes, 2008). In the same vein, Lawless and Fox (2004: 7), for the case of the USA, found that

<sup>7</sup> We have tested whether the life-cycle process affects female and male respondents differently. Men between 35 and 49 years of age devote more hours to housework than younger ones, but males aged between 50 and 65 invest less time than the preceding age group. In contrast, in the case of women, each age group assumes a higher burden than the previous one. Although generational factors could, to some extent, explain these differences, it should be noted that, in recent decades, maternal grandmothers have increased their dedication to the care of grandchildren (Gray, 2005) and older or dependant relatives, irrespective of whether the women works outside the house (Moen *et al.*, 1994).

**TABLE 2.** *Political participation (%)*

	Men	Women	
<i>Participation in organizations and social movements</i>	10.6	8.7	n.s.
<i>Conventional participation</i>			
Has voted (2006 Catalan regional elections) <sup>a</sup>	70.4	71.3	n.s.
Has attended political meetings	1.9	1.1	n.s.
<i>Unconventional participation</i>			
Has signed a petition	4.4	4.7	n.s.
Has participated in protest marches	2.5	2.2	n.s.
Has taken part in a strike	0.8	0.7	n.s.
Has addressed mass media to denounce a problem	1.3	0.4	*
Has bought/stopped buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	6.4	8.8	*
	N=755	N=727	

Significance: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.10$ .

n.s.: Not significant.

<sup>a</sup> Overall turnout was actually lower (56 per cent), but it is known that respondents very often misrepresent their attitudes, behaviour and preferences for reasons related to perceived social desirability. See among others Karp and Brockington (2005) and Zaller and Feldman (1992).

while just one third of those women who are responsible for the majority of household tasks have ever considered running as candidates for public office, the percentage increases to 48 when the bulk of housework is carried out by their partners. In the case of men, the division of household work does not have any impact on their decision.

To what extent do gender differences in political participation and attitudes still persist? As for conventional participation, differences have been drastically reduced in recent decades. There is only a tiny gender gap in political activism (especially regarding party membership), but it happens to be negligible in electoral turnout (Topf, 1995; Schlozman *et al.*, 1994; Verba *et al.*, 1997). The gender gap is slightly greater, albeit decreasing, in unconventional participation (Gundelach, 1995; Ferrer, 2006; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010). Table 2 presents evidence in this direction for the Catalan case. Differences between men and women with respect to participation in social organizations are not significant. Regarding conventional participation (activities such as voting or attending

political meetings), women's and men's behavior is indistinguishable. As for unconventional participation, some minor statistically significant differences emerge in boycott activities associated with consumption practices – more frequent among women – and denouncing problems in the mass media – preferred by men. Conversely, gender differences have vanished in other activities such as signing a petition, participating in protest marches, or taking part in strikes<sup>8</sup>.

When it comes to political dispositions, the gender gap still endures. Table 3 shows the gender differences in political efficacy and interest in politics. As usual, the former is divided into internal and external. Internal political efficacy captures the belief in one's own ability to understand what is going on in the political sphere, while external political efficacy measures the individual's perception of

<sup>8</sup> The fact that the sample includes only men and women under 65 years of age could explain why there do not seem to be any significant differences in unconventional participation, as previous research has shown for the Spanish case (see Morales, 1999).



the capacity to influence political affairs and the respondent's confidence in the responsiveness of elected officials. Already highlighted by Angus Campbell *et al.* in 1960, the gender gap in internal political efficacy has remained basically constant through the sweeping changes that have transformed women's lives in recent decades. We can observe a ten-point difference between men's and women's internal efficacy. Women are less self-confident in their political abilities and more inclined to think that politics is too complicated. The gender gap also affects external political efficacy, though it is less pronounced. Women have less confidence in citizens' capacity to influence politicians. The difference between women and men is also significant for interest in politics. On average, women are less motivated and concerned about politics than men<sup>9</sup>.

## THE GENDER GAP IN POLITICAL INTEREST

Next, we proceed to examine interest in politics in greater detail. Following previous studies, we have defined three groups of potential predictors of differences in political interest (individual socioeconomic resources, situational factors, socialization indicators), to which we have added some political disposition variables (internal and external political efficacy, and ideological self-placement). Table 5 presents various ordinal logistic regressions with interest in politics as the dependent variable and a set of independent variables informing on each of the above-mentioned explanations. We have run eight

successive models which alternatively include and exclude variables of each explanation in order to detect when sex ceases to be a significant predictor variable. We have followed a stepwise procedure to better appreciate the causal relationships behind the variables included in the model.

Model 1 exclusively contains sex as a predictor, becoming a benchmark for model comparisons. In this case, it can be observed that being a woman significantly reduces interest in politics. Models 2 through 5 introduce each explanatory set alone, besides the sex variable. This procedure seeks to compare the specific contribution of each set, as well as to identify whether a certain set of factors is particularly responsible for the gender differences. If sex stops being a statistically significant predictor when a set (or a combination of sets) is included, we should understand that it is not sex by itself that is the real cause of the differences in political interest, but the other factor. Moreover, this procedure enables us to guarantee that the results of the regressions are not affected by the sequence in which the sets are introduced.

Model 2 adds socio-economic resources as predictors of political interest. Sex maintains a significant and negative coefficient, meaning women have less interest in politics than men. Consequently, we can assume that the different allocation of resources between sexes is not sufficient to explain the gender gap in interest in politics. As for the rest of the regression, the possession of more resources increases the ordered log-odds of having a greater interest in politics, in tune with previous research. Respondents' subjective social class and, mainly, educational level have a significant and positive impact on interest in politics. Age is also related to interest in politics. A one-year increase in the age of respondents means that the ordered log-odds of having more interest in politics rises by 0.011, holding the other variables constant. Age is linked to in-

<sup>9</sup> Bennett and Bennett (1989: 118-119) provide an answer to the intriguing paradox of women's turnout equaling men's despite political interest having long been considered a key determinant. They argue that political attentiveness is a weaker predictor for women because they are more likely than men to be led to the polling station compelled by citizen duty, i.e. women feel they ought to vote.

terest in politics by means of either life-cycle and generation effects, or by the accumulation of experience (Van Deth and Elff, 2000). The life-cycle explanation predicts greater interest in the middle stages of the life period<sup>10</sup>. The generational explanation focuses on the formative experiences of birth cohorts. Both approaches favor a non-linear effect of age, whereas the accumulation of experience is likely to imply a linear effect. As people grow older, they tend to accumulate more resources, experience being one of them (Glenn and Grimes, 1968; Rosentone and Hansen, 1993; Van Deth and Elff, 2000). We do not distinguish here between life-cycle and generation effects, since we are not performing a longitudinal analysis, although the tests we have run show a linear relationship between age and interest in politics. However, the exclusion of people over 65 from the sample does not allow us to assert whether the linearity would have persisted had the older age group been included.

**TABLE 3.** *Political attitudes (%)*

	Men	Women	
Internal efficacy	58.6	48.6	***
External efficacy	50.3	45.5	*
Interest in politics (Very+quiteinterest)	28.5	22.6	**
	N=755	N=727	

Significance: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10.

In Model 3 we only add to the previous model the set of situational factors, excluding the block of socioeconomic resources. Note that the statistical impact of sex disappears. How does each of the situational variables affect interest in politics? Living with a partner significantly increases the ordered log-odds of having a greater interest in politics by

0.628, a similar coefficient to that of labor market participation (0.594)<sup>11</sup>. Conversely, the number of hours devoted to housework and caring significantly reduces a respondents' interest in politics. Finally, having children under 12 has no statistically significant impact although it behaves in the expected direction – it reduces interest in politics due to the time children consume.

In order to confirm that situational factors alone are capable of removing the effect of sex on interest in politics, we present Models 4 and 5. With these models we seek to prove whether socialization factors (Model 4) or attitudinal variables (Model 5) are also able to erode by themselves the effects of sex on the dependent variable. Apart from a slight reduction in the effect of sex when the attitudinal variables are introduced, in both cases sex continues to be a statistically significant predictor of interest in politics.

If we pay attention to the explanatory capacity of each group of independent variables, we can see that attitudinal variables and socioeconomic resources are the main determinants of interest in politics. The increases in the Nagelkerke pseudo R-squared obtained when we introduce these sets of variables are the highest, and quite alike. Situational factors hold the third position in terms of explanatory power, and socialization variables the last. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, the statistical impact of sex only disappears when situational factors are included in the model; therefore, this last group of variables is crucial to explain the gender gap in interest in politics.

To further explore the causal relationships, we introduce the different sets cumulatively and in a step-by-step fashion. Model

<sup>10</sup> Young people have more distractions from politics and senior citizens suffer from an increasing disconnection from public issues.

<sup>11</sup> Participation in the labor markets has also been measured as the number of hours of paid work, and we obtained equivalent results, not being statistically significant in any case. We chose to report the results of the overall measure of participation in the labor market (present and past), given that it allows us to use a wider sample for our analysis.

**TABLE 4.** *Predicting political interest*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Sex	-0.318*** (0.097)	-0.307*** (0.101)	-0.160 (0.110)	-0.312*** (0.098)	-0.236*** (0.107)	-0.159 (0.114)	-0.153 (0.115)	-0.140 (0.124)
Socio-economic resources		0.363*** (0.048)				0.328*** (0.050)	0.331*** (0.050)	0.347*** (0.055)
		0.026*** (0.004)				0.017*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.006)
		0.383*** (0.079)				0.417*** (0.081)	0.455*** (0.082)	0.136 (0.094)
Situational factors			0.628*** (0.112)			0.491*** (0.125)	0.473*** (0.126)	0.493*** (0.137)
			-0.075 (0.085)			-0.058 (0.090)	-0.049 (0.091)	-0.064 (0.097)
			0.594*** (0.151)			0.536*** (0.164)	0.485*** (0.166)	0.436** (0.181)
			-0.013*** (0.005)			-0.013** (0.005)	-0.013** (0.005)	-0.011* (0.006)
Socialization process				-0.074 (0.137)			-0.164 (0.151)	-0.295* (0.164)
				-0.157 (0.100)			-0.261** (0.113)	-0.314** (0.124)
				0.412*** (0.145)			0.604*** (0.161)	0.605*** (0.175)
Attitudinal variables					1.352*** (0.115)			1.195*** (0.128)
					0.281*** (0.108)			0.330*** (0.117)
					-0.102*** (0.035)			-0.119*** (0.038)
Thresholds	Cut 1 (0.075)	2.412*** (0.319)	-0.272* (0.152)	-0.954*** (0.090)	-0.735*** (0.188)	2.557*** (0.345)	2.777*** (0.354)	1.998** (0.427)
	Cut 2 (0.075)	4.396*** (0.335)	1.665*** (0.159)	0.903*** (0.090)	1.398*** (0.193)	4.603*** (0.363)	4.851*** (0.372)	4.342*** (0.443)
	Cut 3 (0.166)	7.019*** (0.379)	4.188*** (0.220)	3.420*** (0.174)	4.006*** (0.244)	7.223*** (0.405)	7.485*** (0.416)	7.103*** (0.484)
	Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>	0.008	0.105	0.060	0.017	0.154	0.133	0.252
	-2 Log-Likelihood	36.771	2,275.533	1,437.040	205.529	791.535	2,865.297	2,862.141
	Chi <sup>2</sup>	10.732***	138.283***	76.362***	22.249***	189.119***	167.941***	189.485***
	Observations	N=1,455	N=1,384	N=1,378	N=1,455	N=1,264	N=1,313	N=1,313
								N=1,155

Dependent variable: Interest in politics (range 1 «not interested at all» to 4 «very interested»).

Estimation method: Ordinal logit regression. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10.

6 includes sex along with socioeconomic resources and situational factors. The results do not alter the effects of the variables previously introduced separately in blocks. Model 7 includes the group of indicators related to the socialization process, adding them to the effects of situational factors and socioeconomic resources. This step does not substantially modify the impact of the variables already included in Model 6. Living in a town governed by a female mayor increases the ordered log-odds of being more interested in politics. Having a mother who has been/is a housekeeper has the opposite effect and decreases interest in politics. Being a practicing Catholic only has a slightly significant negative effect on interest in politics.

The final model (Model 8) simultaneously includes the group of political attitudes closely linked to political interest. In this last step, the pseudo R-squared increases considerably, but the significance and direction of the rest of the variables included in the model remain almost unaltered. As expected, internal political efficacy is positively and strongly related to interest in politics. In fact, both are sometimes considered to go hand in hand as indicators of political involvement (Verba *et al.*, 1995). The effect of external efficacy is also positive but less intense. Ideological self-placement has a significant impact too: those leaning to the left are more prone to express higher levels of interest in politics.

In order to determine the potential heterogeneity in the effects of the model, that is, the fact that our explanatory variables might affect men and women differently, we have proceeded following a two-step strategy. First, we have run two separate ordinal logit regressions for each sub-sample of men and women and, second, following Williams (2009), we have performed heterogeneous choice models for the whole sample to test whether any of the coefficients differ by gender, while allowing us to con-

trol for potential heteroskedasticity in this grouping variable.

Table 5 shows the results of the two separated regression models by sex. We could be tempted to comment directly on the differences between coefficients, but we should only pay attention to those which are statistically significant. The last column presents a test of significance for the differences between coefficients (the Wald Chi-square test and their *p* values). The only statistically significant differences are found for education and number of hours devoted to household and caring tasks. On the one hand, education affects men more than it affects women, so that an increase in the educational level of men raises their interest in politics almost twice as much as it does for women. On the other hand, increasing the time dedicated to household and caring tasks significantly reduces women's interest in politics, while it does not affect men's interest.

However, comparing coefficients across groups by using logistic regression may be misleading due to residual variation (Allison, 1999). If residual variances differ across groups (in our case men and women) the standardization will also differ, rendering the comparison of coefficients inappropriate. Therefore, we have applied heterogeneous choice models to test for the interactive effects of gender while simultaneously controlling for the unobserved heterogeneity of the two groups. This allows us to observe the effects of group characteristics, which would be overlooked in mis-specified models (see Williams, 2009). Table 6 presents two models estimated using the «ordinal generalized linear models» function (oglm)<sup>12</sup>. The first model only includes the independent variables without interaction terms and a parameter for the variance of sex. The second model adds to the parameters of the previous model the interactions of sex with

<sup>12</sup> See Williams (2009).

**TABLE 5.** Predictors of interest in politics by sex

		Women	Men	Ratio of coefficients	Chi <sup>2</sup> for Difference (1)
Socioeconomic resources	Educational level	0.211*** (0.080)	0.454*** (0.079)	0.47	4.675**
	Age	0.019** (0.008)	0.025** (0.008)	0.74	0.333
	Subjective social class	0.260* (0.139)	0.059 (0.130)	4.44	1.128
Situational factors	Lives with partner	0.363** (0.185)	0.633** (0.207)	0.57	0.940
	Children under 12	0.047 (0.150)	-0.138 (0.132)	-0.34	0.859
	Labor market participation (present/past)	0.314 (0.224)	0.698** (0.318)	0.45	0.975
	Household & caring (weekly hours)	-0.021*** (0.008)	0.003 (0.009)	-7.00	3.894**
Socialization process	Catholic (practicing)	-0.379* (0.226)	-0.257 (0.242)	1.48	0.137
	Mother housekeeper	-0.167 (0.182)	-0.436** (0.173)	0.38	1.153
	Female mayor	0.716*** (0.258)	0.524** (0.242)	1.37	0.294
Attitudinal variables	Internal efficacy	1.247*** (0.182)	1.152*** (0.185)	1.08	0.135
	External efficacy	0.300* (0.168)	0.340* (0.167)	0.88	0.028
	Ideological self-placement (1-10)	-0.110* (0.057)	-0.128** (0.051)	0.86	0.054
Thresholds	Cut 1	2.598** (0.601)	1.585*** (0.613)		
	Cut 2	5.001*** (0.628)	3.905*** (0.633)		
	Cut 3	7.772*** (0.682)	6.722*** (0.701)		
	Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.234	0.273		
	-2 Log-Likelihood	1,174.785	1,223.104		
	Chi <sup>2</sup>	134.913***	166.568***		
	Observations	N=569	N=585		

Dependent variable: Interest in politics (range 1 «not interested at all» to 4 «very interested»).

Estimation method: ordinal logit. Standard errors in parentheses.

Significance: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.10.

(1) The formula of the Wald Chi-Squared test for the difference in coefficients is the following:

$$Wald = \frac{(b_1 - b_2)^2}{(se(b_1))^2 + (se(b_2))^2}$$

**TABLE 6.** *Heterogeneous choice models predicting political interest*

		Model 1		Model 2	
		Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Predictors	Sex	-0.097	0.129	1.176	0.877
	Educational level	-0.340***	0.059	0.432***	0.081
	Age	0.024***	0.006	0.025***	0.008
	Subjective social class	0.162*	0.097	0.110	0.131
	Lives with partner	0.545	0.143	0.725***	0.210
	Children under 12	-0.049**	0.101	-0.127	0.132
	Labor market participation	0.435**	0.188	0.633**	0.322
	Household & care	-0.014*	0.006	0.002	0.010
	Catholic (practicing)	-0.291***	0.170	-0.268	0.247
	Mother housekeeper	-0.353***	0.129	-0.461***	0.176
	Female mayor	0.614***	0.179	0.589**	0.243
	Internal efficacy	1.156***	0.137	1.106***	0.187
	External efficacy	0.422***	0.121	0.405**	0.168
	Ideological self-placement	-0.089**	0.039	-0.092*	0.052
Predictor's interaction with sex	Sex * Educational level			-0.233**	0.115
	Sex * Age			-0.003	0.011
	Sex * Subjective social class			0.145	0.196
	Sex * Lives with partner			-0.342	0.283
	Sex * Children under 12			0.198	0.207
	Sex * Labor market participation			-0.295	0.396
	Sex * Household & care			-0.028**	0.013
	Sex * Catholic (practicing)			-0.113	0.340
	Sex * Mother housekeeper			0.243	0.258
	Sex * Female mayor			0.046	0.357
	Sex * Internal efficacy			0.107	0.258
	Sex * External efficacy			0.004	0.241
	Sex * Ideological self-placement			0.003	0.078
	Thresholds	Cut 1	2.189***	0.447	2.776***
Cut 2		4.567***	0.486	5.161***	0.627
Cut 3		7.453***	0.558	8.059***	0.684
Variance	Sex	0.041	0.067	0.031	0.067
-2 Log-Likelihood		-1,188.274		-1,181.299	
LR Chi <sup>2</sup>		287.12***		301.07***	
Observations		N=1.136		N=1.136	

Dependent variable: Interest in politics (range 1 «not interested at all» to 4 «very interested»).

Estimation method: ordinal logistic regression. SE: Standard Errors.

Significance: \*\*\*p < 0.01; \*\*p < 0.05; \*p < 0.10.

the rest of independent variables. The variance coefficient for sex is not significant in either model, showing no signs of heteroskedasticity associated with this grouping variable. Once potential differences in residual variation are controlled, the only interactions which have a significant effect are

sex with hours of household tasks and sex with education. Therefore, the apparent differences in coefficients in Table 6 were actually reflecting true differences in causal effects, as they cannot be explained by differences in the degree of residual variation between men and women.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has explored the role of individual resources, situational factors and the socialization process in the endurance of a gender gap in political engagement. We were interested in testing the effects of situational factors, especially those related to the unequal gender distribution of housework and caring tasks (of the elderly and/or dependent relatives). The gender gap has disappeared in conventional political participation, as previous studies have shown, but differences still endure in some forms of unconventional political participation and, particularly, in those attitudes which facilitate political involvement, such as political efficacy and interest in politics. Overall, socioeconomic resources and political attitudes are the main predictors of interest in politics. However, sex only ceases to be statistically significant when situational factors are included, therefore, this last group of variables is key to explaining the gender gap in interest in politics.

The set of situational factors we have focused on includes a variable which is usually absent from empirical analysis, that of the distribution of domestic and caring tasks. Our main hypothesis has been confirmed: the more hours women devote to these types of tasks, the less interest in politics they show. Given that women still assume the main burden of unpaid domestic work, their available time is reduced, and so is their political engagement. Conversely, men's interest in politics is not affected by their amount of spare time. Simultaneously, the amount of time women invest in unpaid work shifts their attention toward private concerns and away from public issues, thus diminishing their interest in politics. In a nutshell, the gender gap in political engagement is a clear example of how the democratic deficit starts at home, hindering the achievement of full political equality.

Regarding those variables derived from the socialization process available in our survey, although their explanatory capacity is

the lowest amongst all the sets of variables included in the analysis, we must highlight the positive influence on both men's and women's political interest of living in a town governed by a female mayor, confirming the findings of previous research. In short, the feminization of institutions holds great potential to instil change in the perception of politics as a predominantly masculine activity and to boost women's interest in politics.

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