THE LINK BETWEEN POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND POLITICAL INTEREST OF WOMEN
Evidence from 42 European Countries

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Abstract
Political interest of women is a key variable in explaining gender differences in political behaviour and it is affected by the political context: Deliberation brought forward by the political socialisation theory emphasizes the impact of a society’s political culture, while recent findings from the US context indicate that political under-representation of women is central in explaining women’s lower levels of political interest. Yet, empirical evidence supporting these ideas is rare: cross-national research is still in its infancy and findings from Europe are missing. This paper addresses this gap by presenting a theoretical framework for cross-national research and exploring the effect of political culture and descriptive political representation on women’s political interest for 42 European countries using data of the EVS.

The results show that the genderedness of political culture and descriptive representation have indeed an impact on female political interest, although for the latter differentiation is needed: I find that only the composition of highly visible areas of the political realm has an effect on women’s perception of politics. My analyses also show that it is vital to account for the confounding of both explanatory variables to avoid overestimation of the effects. Finally, I present some broad indications that the effects of the culture and representation might differ across different contexts.

Keywords: Political interest; gender gap; women and politics; descriptive representation; symbolic representation; quantitative research; multilevel analysis
INTRODUCTION

While other distinct gender differences in political attitudes and behaviour have dissolved as societies have progressed, the notion of a ‘gender gap’ in political interest remains as topical as ever.

In a recent analysis of the World Value Survey data Kittilson and Schwind-Bayer (2012) find significant differences in the average political interest of men and women in 36 of the 39 included countries, and thus confirm again what has been well-known a plethora of studies of before (cf. Lazarsfeld et al. 1948; Campbell et al. 1960; Bennett and Bennett 1989; Verba et al. 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2003; van Deth 2004; Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; Barnes and Burchard 2012). This gap comes with serious consequences, as political interest is commonly associated with higher political knowledge (Verba et al. 1995; Eveland and Scheufele 2000), more stable and coherent political orientations (Klingemann 1979a; van Deth 1990) and participation in unconventional (Klingeman 1979b) and conventional forms of political activism (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010; – but for the question of causality, see: Verba et al. 1995; Denny and Doyle 2008). In short, the gender gap in interest facilitates many of the disadvantages women face in their political life.

Yet, the gender gap in political interest is comparatively underexplored. Despite an array of literature available examining the roots of the gender gap empirical findings remain rather unsatisfactory. The various explanations refer commonly to situational, structural and socialisation-relates gender inequalities and typically fail in their endeavour to fully explain gender differences (cf. Verba et al. 1997; Campbell and Winters 2008; Karp and Banducci 2008). This might well be the result of the consistent micro-level focus of empirical studies. In contrast to the strong theory arguing for the impact of characteristics of the political sphere within the framework of the political socialisation theory, empirical studies have only recently grappled with contextual effects.

Of these context characteristics, one has enjoyed scholarly attention in particular: women’s representation in politics (High-Pippert and Corner 1998; Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Dolan 2006). Employing Pitkin’s (1972) theoretical framework of political representation, a ‘symbolic effect’ on political interest is assumed. According to this argument, the descriptive representation of women operates as a symbol for the genderedness of the political sphere. If that sphere is marked by a very unequal gender distribution, women might feel excluded or
discouraged to engage, and be ultimately be less interested in political matters. However, as empirical support for this argument comes mainly from the US context, it is not clear, whether the promising findings can be generalised to other political contexts. And the few existing cross-national studies concern Latin America or suffer from not adapting to the cross-cultural setting and not controlling for other factors that might affect the relationship (Koch 1997; Verba et al 1997; High-Pippert and Corner 1998; Burns et al. 2001; Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Dolan 2006; Norris and Krook 2009; Reingold and Harrell 2010).

Indeed, one of the main shortcomings of contextual empirical studies is the disregard of one factor that might affect both, the representation of women in politics and women’s political interest that is the political gender ideology (or gendered political culture) in a society. Empirical research has identified gender ideology as one of the main factors explaining women’s political representation (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Despite strong theory following the rationale of political socialisation theory arguing that the lower political interest of women might be the result of socialisation into a politically passive role, empirical research has avoided to analyse such an effect. The lack of a comprehensive operationalisation has been suggested as one reason for the missing research on this effect (Paxton and Kunovich 2003). However, cross-national research on political interest in general and the effect of women’s representation in particular has ultimately to account for a cultural effect to avoid problems of confounding and thus, overestimation.

This study aims to address these gaps in the literature in two regards. First of all, I want to present a theoretical model for a contextual explanation of women’s political interest and thus, the gender gap in interest. By doing this, I am to enhance the understanding of the links and interdependency between a gendered political culture and women’s political representation. I will also emphasise the importance of the context, when theorising the effects of women’s representation. In the second part of this article, I will then test my hypotheses for the European context using a multilevel analysis (MLA) with data from 42 countries of the fourth wave of the European Value Study (EVS). As the analysis shows, both factors, women’s representation and the gendered culture contribute to the explanation of women’s (and to a lesser extend: men’s) political interest. However, the context-sensitivity of these effects cannot be proven with certainty and calls for further research.
THE EFFECT OF A GENDERED POLITICAL SPHERE ON THE GENDER GAP OF POLITICAL INTEREST

Limitations of existing explanations of political interest

The lion’s share of existing literature grappling with the origins of gender differences in political interest have focused exclusively on characteristics of the individual. As this research has derived much of its understanding from research into gender differences in other areas of the political realm, it is hardly surprising that much attention has been turned towards structural, situational and socialisation-related gender inequalities\(^1\), otherwise known from the political participation literature (Verba et al. 1971; Welch 1977; Sapiro 1982; Verba et al. 1997; Burns 2001; Westle 2001; Mayer and Schmidt 2004; Campbell and Winters 2008; Mestre and Marín 2012; Coffé 2013).

Yet fruitful as these explanations have been in facilitating our understanding of the gendered nature of political interest, the restriction to the micro-level comes with some severe shortcomings. I would like to draw attention to three points in particular: First of all, the available explanations are not very good. Even when tested together, the micro-level explanations hardly account for 20 percent of the variance of political interest (cf. Verba et al. 1997; Mestre and Marín 2012). More importantly, the models generally fail to fully explain gender differences\(^2\) (cf. Verba et al. 1997; Campbell and Winters 2008; Karp and Banducci 2008). Secondly, when taking a comparative perspective, we also find that substantive cross-national variations in overall interest levels cannot be explained by different distributions of the micro-level characteristics (Inglehart 1990; Verba et al. 1997; van Deth and Elff 2004, p.486). Gabriel and van Deth (1996) attribute these variations to a strong effect of country characteristics unaccounted for in micro-level models (p.394). Although there are no equivalent studies on the gender gap available, literature does find the gender gap to vary notably across countries (Inglehart 1981, Burns et al. 2001; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012). Hence, the assumption that context-effects play a role might not be too far-fetched. This is especially true, if we understand gender (and

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\(^1\) The use of this tripartite dates back to Welch’s (1977) seminal article and can be found throughout literature. Although often regarded as competing explanations, they are conceptually and in their manifestations interrelated. Mestre and Marín (2012) offer an extensive overview of arguments and findings.

\(^2\) This means, that gender has still a statistically significant effect on political interest after controlling for the structural/situational/socialisation factors.
gender differences) as a systemic property, whose meaning and consequences are derived from the societal context.

Lastly, on a very similar note, other areas of research have already established the importance of the cultural and political context in shaping people’s political orientations (most famously Almond and Verba 1963; also: Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Norris 2003). I see therefore very little reason for disregarding the political environment in the analysis of political interest.

Emphasizing especially the two latter points, a growing body of literature is calling to look beyond characteristics of the individual and to include country-level factors in the analysis (e.g. van Deth and Elff 2004; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012; Coffé 2013). While a number of various country-level factors have been suggested for political interest in general, such as economic development (van Deth and Elff 2004), electoral institutions (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012) or religious heritage (Inglehart 1981), not all of them are equally relevant to the explanation of the gender gap. In order to explain gender differences in political interest, a contextual factor must affect women and men in a different manner. In the following section, I want to present two (closely interlinked) approaches, which provide the strongest logical argument for such a gendered effect, both referring to the genderedness of the political sphere.

The effect of a gendered political culture

The broader of the two approaches refers to the influence of an inherently sexist political culture. In its wider definition, ‘political culture’ does not only encompass a set of attitudes, values and norms of citizen towards the political system, but also towards each other as political beings (Watts 2007). This includes shared conceptions about for whom it is or it is not ‘adequate’ to be interested in politics. As these conceptions are ultimately marked by the sexist cultural heritage of most societies – that is the traditional separation of the private (female) and public (male) sphere, where only men were accepted members of the political domain – they will evidently affect men and women in a different manner (Westle 2001; Waylen 2012).

This effect can be understood within the theoretical framework of the political socialisation approach. In fact, it is merely a shift of the focus away from family as

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3 Indeed, much of the theoretical work on the political socialisation approach has discussed the effect of the political culture. But despite strong theoretical suggestions, empirical studies have merely used manifestations within the individual as indicators.
“prime agent of socialization” (Jennings 2007, p.6) towards the socialising power of the collective political culture⁴. The idea is, that citizen continuously perceive signals about the marginalisation of women in (formal) politics, and in a process of social learning, they incorporate them as the political norm that (formal/electoral) politics is ‘a men’s world’ and accommodate their own political identities accordingly (Atkeson 2003; Reingold and Harrell 2010). Consequently, such a norm will reinforce political interest as normative desired for men, as they are expected to care about politics; for women, it discourages it as inadequate or undesired (Sapiro 1981; Westle 2001; Waylen 2012).

Consistent with this argumentation, I expect that the degree to which a political culture is still marked by gendered norms (Norris [1985] refers to this as ‘political egalitarianism’) has an effect on the differences in political interest of men and women. In other words, the gender gap might vary according to the ‘genderedness’ of the political culture in a society:

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\text{The more gender-egalitarian a political culture in a society is, the smaller should be the gender gap in political interest.}
\]

However, it should be noted that despite its theoretical appeal, the concept of ‘political culture’ has rightly been criticised as being fuzzy and imprecise (cf. Formisano 2001; Wedeen 2002), while it is also hard to capture it empirically. This might be especially true for its degree of ‘genderedness’⁵. Thus, it is barely surprising, that empirical, cross-national studies are essentially absent from the political interest literature.

\textit{The effect of women’s political representation}

Acknowledging these drawbacks, I want to present a second approach, which is directly linked to a gendered political culture. But rather than grappling with norms and attitudes towards women’s role in the political world as such, it is concerned with one

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⁴ Such a view challenges assumptions about the stability of political interest after primary socialisation by the family. Although some scholars assume political interest to be formed early in life and to remain stable thereafter (cf. Sapiro 1982; Jennings 2007; Prior 2010), there is also evidence that “political orientations and behaviour develop and increase during the lifelong socialisation process” (Hadjar and Schlapbach 2009, p. 274).

⁵ There are some items available, which tap more directly into some sort of sexist political ideology, for example the agreement to statements such as: “Most men are better suited for politics than are most women” in the British election study (Clarke et al. 2006) or “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” in the World Value Survey 2014 (World Value Survey 2015).
kind of a manifestation of that culture, i.e. the actual role women play in politics: _the political representation of women_.

The underlying idea of this explanation traces back to Pitkin’s (1967) seminal conceptualization of representation, where she refers to the “affective responses” (p.110) towards political symbols as ‘symbolic representation’. Symbolic representation is ultimately concerned about the symbolizing effect of representation on perceptions and attitudes. In simplified terms, the argument is, that the existence of representatives, who are similar to oneself (descriptive representation) signifies “that the political arena represents them and is receptive to their part” (Barnes and Burchard 2012, p.770). This ‘similarity’ can be based on various characteristics (including those, which are not immediately observable, and a combination of characteristics). However, gender is not only an instantly recognisable property of the representatives, but also one of the most salient elements of one’s own identity (Richard 2014) – and, as Sapiro (1981) remarks, a politically relevant element. Gender might therefore play a pronounced role.

Advocates of the symbolic representation of women can certainly build on plenty of evidence supporting their case: a more gender-equal political sphere leads for example to more positive evaluations of democracy, elections and the government (Mansbridge 1999; Karp and Banducci 2008, p.113; Schwindt-Bayer 2009, p.166) and helps to breakdown stereotypes about the belief of women’s ability to govern (Alexander 2012). However, how political representation translates specifically into political interest of women (and men) might be not directly apparent. Taking a closer look, the literature offers three lines of argumentation for a link between the two.

The first one disregards the symbolic power of the gender (im-)balance in politics and relates to a possible _substantive impact_ of a higher proportion of women in politics. According to this argumentation, a higher share of women will increase the attention on ‘women’s issues’ in policy (substantive representation), change the way of campaigning and advance the effort made to win female voters, which in turn should facilitate their interest in politics (Larson 2001; Atkeson 2003; Karp and Banducci 2008).

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6 I want to acknowledge that Pitkin herself (1967) and others (for example Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005) have opposed to an isolated view on the different dimension of representation and that an encompassing understanding of her conceptualisation requires a unified perspective. This is, however, not in the focus of this article. For an encompassing and insightful discussion of Pitkin’s conceptualisation, please see Childs (2008).

7 Interestingly enough, this seems to hold for both, men and women equally, which might point towards a positive effect of a general perception of fairness and democratic legitimacy of the political system.
While there is indeed rich evidence that women politicians behave differently from their male counterparts (see Koning 2009 for an overview), there is still a debate on whether women as a group are really concerned about other issues than men\(^8\) and what these ‘women’s issues’ would be\(^9\), hence this explanation is not fully convincing.

A second explanation is concerned with women’s feeling of inclusion in the political sphere (Mansbridge 1999; Norris and Krook 2009). A number of scholars have argued that the absence of someone, who ‘stands for’ oneself in the political system, might make people feel less recognised by and less included in the political system (Philipps 1998; Mansbridge 1999; Karp and Banducci 2008; Norris and Krook 2009). Empirical studies from the US (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007) and the Netherlands (Koning 2009) have presented associations between the proportion of women in state legislature and feelings of inclusion and perceived responsiveness of the political system of women. Yet, it remains to be tested to which extend notions of inclusion encourage women’s engagement with politics.

I ascribe therefore the most explanatory potential to the third possible link between the gender composition of the political sphere and women’s political interest, referring directly to the symbolising effect (Verba et al 1997; Burns et al. 2001; Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Reingold and Harrell 2010). The proportion of women in politics can, according to this explanation, be understood as a symbol for the genderedness of the politics. This might, on the one hand, exert a psychological influence on women. Scholars of the ‘contextual cue theory’ have brought forward the argument that a “government of white men creates a psychological and systematic participation barrier” (Atkeson 2003, p.1041) for descriptively underrepresented groups (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). It does, on the other hand, also allow for an argumentation analogous to the political culture approach: As a symbol, it could be a powerful means of fostering the belief that politics is a male sphere. Sapiro (1981) puts it in a nutshell: “Women and men continue to think of politics as a male domain because the empirical truth at this moment is that politics is a male domain” (p.712, emphasis in original). An increased share of women in politics might be able to challenge the maleness of the political sphere.

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\(^8\) This idea is also problematic in another regard: It assumes that all women, irrespective from their position and circumstances, share the same problems and interests.

\(^9\) Scholars typically argue that ‘women’s interests’ refers to issues concerned with their typically different situation, i.e. domestic and reproduction concerns (cf. Sapiro 1981; Schlozman et al. 1995).
While there are important differences between these three lines of argumentation concerning the presumptions they make, they can all be ultimately boiled down to the same expectation about the effect of women’s representation on women’s political interest: The higher the proportion of women in the political sphere is, the higher should be women’s political interest\textsuperscript{10}. As a consequence, I expect a mediate effect on the gender gap:

\begin{quote}
The more balanced the gender proportion in the political sphere, the smaller should be the gender gap in political interest.
\end{quote}

Although normative theorists have been critical of descriptive representation (Mansbridge [1999] and Celis et al. [2013] provide an elaborate discussion), findings from the American context generally support this expectation: A number of empirical studies strongly indicate that increased presence of female political candidates can boost political involvement and discussion among women (Verba et al 1997; High-Pippert and Corner 1998; Burns et al. 2001; Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006; Reingold and Harrell 2010; however also see Koch [1997] and Dolan [2006]. See Lawless [2004] for a rather modest effect of female office holders). Of these studies, Campbell and Wolbrecht (2006) is particularly interesting, as the authors suggest that the effect could be conditional on the visibility of the candidate, either through the media or through the importance of the office pursued. This makes, however, only sense for the last two of the presented explanations.

\begin{quote}
The effect of women’s political representation on women’s political interest might be conditional on the politicians’ visibility.
\end{quote}

The findings are undoubtedly promising, but it should be noted that most of these studies are restricted to the US context and might not be generalizable to other political contexts. Cross-national studies are necessary in order to find out, whether this effect holds for other contexts.

\textsuperscript{10} Two remarks are worth making: Firstly, there might well be a saturation effect, meaning that after raising the proportion of women to a certain point, no additional gain of interest should be expected. Secondly, although it has not been explicitly articulated by these approaches, their logic should also hold the other way round: A highly female dominated political sphere should (ceteris paribus) dampen men’s political interest for the same reasons.
Interdependency of gendered political culture and women’s political representation

A problem arising from taking a cross-national approach is that other country characteristics might shape or even obscure the direct effect of political representation on political interest\textsuperscript{11}. In this context, I want to emphasise especially the interdependence of the two approaches discussed: women’s political representation and the genderedness of the political culture.

The dominating gender ideology and the proportion of women in politics in a country are strongly associated. Women’s representation can be understood as a result (or a manifestation) of a gendered culture, as “cultural ideas about women can affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process” (Paxton et al. 2007, p. 271). In a cross-national study of 46 countries, Paxton and Kunovich (2003) find that the ideology towards women in politics is indeed the strongest predictor for the share of women in parliament (p.98)\textsuperscript{12}. Similarly, Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) find a strong effect of ‘feminist attitudes’ on the percentage of women in parliament (p.420). The influence could well be reciprocal, meaning, that women’s representation can influence norms or attitudes towards women: “The lack of a significant proportion of women in state legislatures and in the Congress, is (...) both a consequence and a cause of the continuance of traditional gender roles” (Krauss 1974, p.1711, emphasis added).

This association between gendered culture and women’s representation can be neglected when taking a national perspective\textsuperscript{13}, but has implications especially for cross-national analyses: If either one factor is omitted from the analysis, it is not possible to disentangle the effects and determine how much the included factor contributes independently; or to identify whether a found effect might be outright spurious\textsuperscript{14}. Consequently, I argue it is crucial to include both, degree of egalitarianism of the political culture and women’s representation in the analysis.

\textsuperscript{11} One way of limiting this problem is to confine this study to European democracies. While I acknowledge the diversity of the included countries, they share some important features, as they have a common history and a similar cultural background. For a discussion of the restriction on democracies, see Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005, pp.414-415).

\textsuperscript{12} Inglehart and Norris (2003) come to the same conclusion using the same data.

\textsuperscript{13} This is because it the culture can be assumed to be constant.

\textsuperscript{14} This is indeed the biggest point of criticism on the otherwise insightful cross-national study on the effect of women’s political representation on political engagement by Norris and Krook (2009). The analysis is based on the diverse range of countries included in the World Value Survey. Yet, while the authors control for the experience with democratization on the country-level, and gender attitudes on the individual level, they do not account for a country’s general culture towards women. It is
In addition, considering both factors might also prove valuable from theoretical grounds. When women’s political representation is mainly the result (and the expression) of a gendered political culture, the symbolic cue it sends be will most likely in line with other signals about the genderedness of the political sphere. In this case, the *additional* effect of women’s representation might be rather small.\(^{15}\)

However, in other instances, the signal might be at odds with remaining cues from the political culture. This can be the case, when there are other influences on women’s presence in politics, independent from the culture. It is, for instance, almost conventional wisdom that proportional representation fosters more gender-balanced electoral outcomes (cf. Paxton et al. 2007; Roberts et al. 2013). Moreover, with gender quotas, some countries have a purposely implemented tool for increasing the share of women in politics, with varying success (for example: Tripp and Kang 2008; Krook 2009; Paola et al. 2010). If these factors are at play, women’s presence in politics is not necessarily in line with the general political culture towards women— and might be therefore more salient. In other words, women might notice the gender distribution in politics more distinctively, when it is at odds with all the other signals they get, and, as a consequence, it might have a stronger (independent) effect.\(^{16}\): This should hold for both combinations:

- The positive effect of a gender-balanced political sphere on women’s political interest should be stronger, if the political culture is less gender egalitarian.
- The negative effect of a gender-unbalanced political sphere on women’s political interest should be stronger, if the political culture is more gender egalitarian.

**The effect of gender quotas**

With regard to the awareness towards or salience of women’s political presence, another aspect could play a role: *Gender quotas*. The impact of gender quotas on different aspects of representation in various contexts has been subject of an insightful discussion in one of the fastest expanding subfields of the research of women and politics (Krook 2009; Franceschet et al. 2012), which I cannot reproduce within the

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\(^{15}\) This of course assumes that we follow the *inclusion or symbolising* rational – the interplay with the political culture following the argumentation of a *substantive* impact would be more complex.

\(^{16}\) To the author’s knowledge, there is no research directly supporting this notion, but the literature has stressed the importance of the *visibility* of women’s presence in politics (cf. Campbell and Wollbrecht 2006).
scope of this article. As mentioned before, a general consensus seems to be that gender quotas can, under certain circumstances, play an important role in increasing women’s descriptive presentation (cf. Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2010; Paola et al. 2010). Evidently, this might have an indirect effect on political interest.

However, I rather want to draw attention to the symbolic effect of gender quotas, which can be seen as twofold. First of all, gender quotas emphasize the gender imbalance in the political sphere (Meier 2012). They problematise the lack of women in politics and might increase the awareness of the gender (im)balance in politics or societal discourses about women’s representation17. But more importantly gender quotas should also be regarded as political symbols themselves. It has been argued that quotas signify the importance ascribed to the goal of increasing women’s presence in politics and the value a government places on gender equality (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012; Meier 2012). Zetterberg (2009) suggests that “the introduction of gender quotas is an explicit recognition that public space and politics are for both men and women” (p.717) and might, as such, change how women perceive their political roles and identities. Thus, it might ultimately affect women’s political interest.

The implementation of gender quotas should reduce the gender gap in political interest by increasing women’s interest.

However, it should be also noted that empirical evidence of the effect on political interest (and attitudes more general) has been inconclusive so far. Zetterberg (2009) finds (for Latin America) little support for an effect on political interest. Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer (2012), by contrast, do find an effect on the gender gap, albeit this seems to be rather the result from a dampening effect on men’s interest than the empowerment of women. In line with other works on the impact and evaluation of quotas, we might well expect a different opposing on men than on women (Meier 2008; Paola et al. 2010; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012).

The implementation of gender quotas might also reduce the gender gap in political interest by undermining men’s interest.

17 Strictly speaking, this effect should be not restricted to countries where quotas have been actually implemented, but it would extend to those, where quotas have been subject to political/societal discussion without any effect on the electoral rules (yet).
Table 1: Overview of theorised effects

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<th>Gendered Political Culture</th>
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DATA AND METHOD

Data

My main data source is the fourth (and most recent) wave of the European Value Study (EVS) of 2008. The EVS is a cross-national, nationally representative study of individuals from 47 European countries and regions (n=67,786) on the distribution of values and attitudes towards politics and society in Europe. The EVS is well suited for the intended analysis, as it contains items on a broad range of subjects, including a number of detailed questions on the political interest and the socio-demographic and situational characteristics required as micro-level controls (EVS 2008; EVS 2010a). What is more, it stands out against other cross-national European datasets (such as the European Socials Survey) in terms of the variety of countries included. A diverse range of countries is an advantage, because we can expect that the countries vary in concerning the gender gap of political interest, and more importantly the genderedness of the political culture and women’s representation in politics.
However, as these characteristics are not included in the EVS dataset, they were subsequently added from external sources. I have obtained details on women’s share in politics from the UN Development Programme Human Development Report (UNDP 2009) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2014), whereas information on gender quotas were derived from the ‘quota project’ (2014) and from an article by Schwindt-Bayer (2009). Unless stated otherwise, these country-level characteristics concern the year of the EVS survey (2008).

Some minor cleaning of the data had to be done to ensure the quality of the analyses. In order to harmonise the data with the available macro-level data, respondents from Great Britain and Northern Ireland were pooled together and observations from Northern Cyprus and Kosovo were deleted from the dataset. Because of serious doubts on the quality of the Romanian and Azerbaijan data\(^{18}\), these observations had to be excluded as well. After deleting another twelve cases in which the gender variable was coded missing, 62,679 respondents (92.5%) from 42 European countries remained and this forms the data basis for the analysis.

**Modelling**

A two-stage sampling approach of individuals (level-1) within countries (level-2), as applied for the EVS data, leads to dependent observations on the individual-level, which can result in serious errors, such as ecologic fallacies, biased standard errors and significance tests; thus, misleading or erroneous conclusions, if not treated adequately (Snijders and Bosker 2012). Although approaches like fitting separate OLS regressions for every country, fixed effect models or standard regression models with robust standard errors can adjust for dependencies and address these problems, they are not always practical. But more importantly, they do not allow exploring the effect of higher level characteristics on the individuals (Bartholomew et al. 2002). As my interest is to explain how the gendered political culture, women’s presence in politics and gender quotas (i.e. country-level characteristics) shape political interest of the individual, a multilevel analysis (MLA) is conducted instead\(^{19}\). Multi-level analyses are becoming increasingly popular among comparative researchers precisely because

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\(^{18}\) In the process of creating a scale of political interest implausible low correlations between different indicators of the concept were found. As the correlations of the same items were consistently high for all other countries, I interpreted this as an indication for the poor quality of the data.

\(^{19}\) The multilevel analysis has been conducted using the `xtmixed` procedure with maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) in the statistical software package Stata.
they allow the estimation of macro-level effects. Another advantage is that they provide measures of the explained variance for both levels of analysis and thus, makes it possible to assess the explanatory power of the model. There is no universal agreement in the literature on the number of clusters (i.e. countries) needed in order to correctly estimate a multilevel model, but following a general rule of thumb, the 42 countries in the analysis should be sufficient (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008; Langer 2010). However, the selection of countries is not a random sample, so the inference to a wider population of countries is not possible and it should be noted that significance tests of the level-2 coefficients are, at best, problematic (Langer 2010).

Previous research has found the mean levels of interest to vary across countries (van Deth 2004; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012), which is reflected in the random intercept of the model. As I want to control for existing individual-level explanations, control variables on the micro-level are included in the model (but will not be discussed). The dependent variable, political interest, has a metrical level of measurement (see below), so the model to be specified takes the following form:

\[ y_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1ij} + \ldots + \beta_n x_{ni} + \gamma_1 z_{1j} + \ldots + \gamma_m z_{mj} + u_{0j} + \epsilon_{ij} \]  

As my main aim of the analysis is to explain gender differences in political interest, I fit two separate models for men and women. This allows me to compare and contrast effects on men and women and thus, hopefully gain some insight into the roots of the gender gap.

**Operationalization of political interest**

The dependent variable in the analysis is ‘political interest’. Political interest has been conceptualised and consequently operationalised in different ways in social research\(^{21}\); however, most commonly used is the simple self-assessment of the respondent. Its appeal lies, without question, in the simplicity and the fact that it has been used widely. However, methodological concern can be voiced about the use of

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\(^{20}\) Where \(j\) is the index for the countries and \(i\) is the index for the individuals within the countries. Accordingly the \(\beta\)’s stand for the coefficients of individual-level variables, while the \(\gamma\)’s stand for the coefficients of the country-level variables. \(Y_j\) stands for political interest, \(\beta_0\) is the overall mean; \(u_j\) denotes the random intercept of country \(j\) and \(\epsilon_{ij}\) is the level-1 residual for individual \(i\) in country \(j\).

\(^{21}\) With regard to the conceptualisation, the controversial point is mainly whether interest includes a behavioural element, as in the definition of interest as the **attention** paid to politics (cf. Sigel and Hoskin 1981), or not (for a more detailed discussion, see: Gabriel and van Deth [1996]). Although preference should be given to the purer conceptualisation, some methodological issues led to the inclusion of a behavioural element in the concept of political interest in this analysis.
this measure. For one thing, self-reported interest might reflect a social desirability bias, which could be correlated with education and social status, because highly educated groups might regard it as their citizen duty to be interested in politics (van Deth 1990). Furthermore, scholars have pointed out that self-reported interest is very sensitive to the context of the questionnaire (Bishop et al. 1984). More generally, single-item measures are more vulnerable to measurement errors than multi-item measurements, making them more unreliable.

The best way to approach these concerns is to use multiple items to measure political interest, and create a scale. The EVS dataset offers, beside the simple self-assessment question, three further items that can be used to capture political interest. The frequency of political discussion, for example, has been discussed by literature as a ‘behavioural manifestation of interest’ (cf. Gabriel and van Deth 1996). It is widely used as an indicator for political interest and is included in the EVS dataset. In the same way, also the attention paid to political news on the media and the importance the respondent ascribes to politics have been used to tap into political interest (cf. van Deth 1990, 2004; Verba et al. 1997). These two are also included in the EVS questionnaire (see the Appendix A).

These four items were used to generate a simple additive scale of political interest (a 13-point scale from 0 to 12, with 0 standing for ‘no interest at all’ and 12 denoting the highest interest possible). Tests for the reliability and dimensionality have been conducted in order to ensure its quality. A principal component analysis has confirmed that the scale captures a one-dimensional concept. Moreover, the scale proves to be reliable, with a satisfactory overall Cronbach’s alpha value of .76 (for four items)\(^\text{22}\). Finally, regarding the cross-national comparability of the concept, political interest is widely assumed to be unproblematic (van Deth 1990; Inglehart and Norris 2003). Even political events, such as upcoming elections, are not found to affect the political interest in a country (Slovak 2009).

\(^{22}\) The reliability has also been tested for each country separately. With the exception of Lithuania, Portugal and Russia (for which Cronbach’s alpha is slightly under .70), the satisfactory result holds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Descriptives of political interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operationalization of independent variables

As discussed above, *gendered political culture* is a fuzzy concept, which is hard to capture empirically. The existing country-level indicators at free disposal capturing gender equality are hardly suited for this analysis. For example, the ‘gender-related development index’ of the UNDP is composed of measures like the gender differences in literacy rates or life expectancy, which gives barely any evidence about political attitudes. The ‘gender empowerment index’ by contrast, seems informative at the first glance, but it includes the share of women MPs – thus is not suitable (UNDP 2009).

Another approach is to aggregate the individual level data of the EVS (cf. Zetterberg 2009). However, this is not unproblematic analytically (Snijders and Bosker 2012) and an argument can be made that a cultural climate has its own dynamic and is more than ‘a sum of its parts’. What is more, while there are survey items on attitudes towards women in the political sphere available in other surveys (cf. Clarke et al. 2006; World Value Survey 2015), none of these is included in the EVS. However, the dataset includes a number of variables on the attitude towards the roles of men and women more generally, of which two directly address the *attitude towards the separation of the public and the private sphere* (see Appendix A for the exact wording). Admittedly, these can be only a very crude proxy for our concept of interest and they are far from ideal, but hopefully they capture at least some sort of gendered (political) culture. The two items were merged into an additive scale and the country mean was created as an indirect measurement of the cultural attitudes.

Additionally, in order to include a more objective measurement, I follow Inglehart’s (1981) approach and resort to the *length of female suffrage* as a second measure. The period of time, for which women have had the right to vote can be seen as both evidence of the cultural sentiments towards women’s place in politics and as an

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23 See Appendix B for the manifestations of the macro-level variables by country.

24 The questions address attitudes towards women in employment and women and men at home. Although employment and politics are distinct areas they are both situated in the public sphere. These two items were chosen on methodological as well as theoretical grounds. For one thing, out of the item battery all items referring to the welfare of children and the women’s contribution to the household income were excluded, as they might in part simply reflect the country’s and the family’s situation with regards to economy and childcare provision. Secondly, for the remaining items, a factor analysis has shown that these two measure the same concept. Yet, the robustness of the results have been checked with different operationalisations (see discussion in the ‘results’ section).

25 Again, dimensionality and reliability of the scale have been tested with generally sufficient results. However, the scale seems to work less well in the Scandinavian countries, which could lead to a serious bias and should be kept in mind, when analyzing the results.

26 To be sure, her main focus was on the political denomination of the country, but she does make a clear case for the length of female suffrage as an indicator as well (cf. Inglehart 1981).
indication of women’s integration in the political world. Although this indicator is rather crude as well, it has the clear advantage of being easily quantifiable and it has an obvious direction of effect: As a simple linear effect (with possibly diminishing returns after some period) of the length of female suffrage is expected, so simply the number of years since women ultimately gained the right to vote is included, which is readily available in the human development report (UNDP 2009).

Turning to the second contextual explanation, the *gender composition of the political sphere* is easier to measure. For simplicity’s sake and to ensure comparability over the different countries, I decided to concentrate on the gender composition of the countries' lower (or single) chamber of parliament and the government\(^\text{27}\). The first item I use simply captures the percentage women make up in parliament. This share varies widely between the countries, ranging from six percent in Georgia to a nearly gender-balanced parliament (47 percent) in Sweden (Inter-parliamentary Union 2009). However, as it has also been argued that the visibility of the politicians acts as an important precondition for the symbolic effect of women in politics (cf. Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006), I also include the share of female minister. Members of parliament, especially back-benchers, might not be always visible to the public, whereas ministers can be expected to appear regularly in the media. In terms of country differences, the share of female ministers is even more variable than the proportion of female MPs. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the government of the time was all male – in the Finnish cabinet, as a contrast, female ministers have outnumbered men by fourteen to ten (Inter-parliamentary Union 2014).

Lastly, for *gender quotas*, I use a dichotomous measure of whether or not there are any legal gender quotas are implemented on the parliamentary level. This focus on gender quotes in parliament is indeed very restricted, as gender quotas come in very different shapes and sizes, but it does make sense from an analytical point of view. The interest is on the symbolic effect on women, rather than on any substantive changes, and as parliamentary quotas can be expected to be more controversial, thus they should get more societal attention and might have a clearer effect. However, it should be notes, that of the countries included in this analysis only five (Armenia,

\(^{27}\) This might require an explanation: While most of the American literature seems to favour focusing on female *candidates*, this proves impossible for cross-country analyses at one set point of time for obvious reasons. Similarly, an approach of determining visible female *party members* would be highly impractical. By contrast, members of parliament and ministers are functionally equivalent in all countries and easy to measure.
Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, France, Serbia) had implemented such quotas at the time of data collection.

**RESULTS**

The gender gap in political interest

The first and probably most straight-forward finding is that there is indeed a substantive gender gap of political interest. Comparing the mean values of men and women on the 13-point scale of political interest, a statistically significant difference is found in 40 of the 42 included countries. Also in accordance with findings of previous research, the size of this gap varies widely across countries: In Cyprus, women score on average nearly two points lower on the 13-point political-interest-scale than men, in the UK the difference is around one point, while in Norway and Latvia women are just as interested as men. The different sizes of the gender differences, as shown in in Figure 1, are intriguing, because they do not follow an easily detectable regional pattern. For example, Norway, Sweden and Denmark score relatively low on the size of the gender gap, as expectable with regard to the general commitment to gender equality of the Scandinavian countries. However, Finland’s difference of nearly 1.2 points is relatively high and in the third quartile of the gender gaps. These findings also suggest that an OLS regression would be indeed the wrong approach for explaining political interest, as the countries evidently differ in their mean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Descriptives of the independent variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gendered Political Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes on separation of spheres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of female suffrage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Quota</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
levels of interest. The empty models (or null models\textsuperscript{28}) for women and men (not shown) confirm this impression: The Intraclass-Correlation-Coefficients (ICCs) are 0.11 and 0.07 respectively, meaning that about 11 percent of the variance between women and about 7 percent of the variance between men is due to variation between countries, thus, multilevel modelling is the more appropriate approach.

\textit{The effects of a gendered political culture and women’s representation}

The effects, the gendered political culture and women’s political representation have on women’s and men’s political interest (and therefore indirectly on the gender gap), are displayed in Table 4. Firstly, the effects are estimated individually without controls in Models 1 and 2 (Table 4), before I include them jointly in Model 3. At first glance, the results seem rather disappointing, as the majority of the contextual variables have no significant effect by conventional levels of significance. However, as previously stated, caution is required with regard to the significance-tests of level-2

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{The ‘Gender gap’ in political interest. Differences of the mean interest level (on a scale from 0 to 12) of men and women by country. All differences are statistically significant: p<.001, except for the Ukraine: p<.01 and Norway and Latvia: n.s.; n=62,679. Source: EVS 2010b.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{28} The null model is a model without covariates and is used in order to assess how much of the total variance is caused by the context-level. It is also used for the calculation of the explained variance of the more complex models (Snijders and Bosker 2012).
covariates. The selection of countries in the analysis (level-2 units) is not a random sample from a population of all countries; however, this is an essential condition for the usage of the t-test and inference on other countries (Langer 2010). As we cannot make any statements about countries beyond the sample, I will be interpreting the significance more generously (i.e. report the 10-percent significance level) and also comment on substantive, but insignificant effects, where appropriate. That said, we can indeed find a support for an effect of the political culture on women’s political interest in line with theoretical expectations. This holds for both indicators used. The length of the female suffrage is clearly positively related to women’s political interest of women. For every additional year women have had the right to vote, they tend to be about 0.02 points more interested in politics. Contrasting the country with the longest uninterrupted period of female suffrage, Finland (with 102 years), and the country with the shortest, Moldova (with 15 years), this results in a difference in political interest of 1.48 points on the scale.

In the same manner, the aggregated attitudes towards the separation of the private and public sphere have a significant positive relationship with political interest of women: A one point increase on the 7-point scale translates to an almost one-point change in political interest for women, while it does not significantly affect men’s interest. However, a word of caution is needed, when interpreting the effect of this indicator. When the model is re-tested with alternative measures for gendered political culture, only some reproduce the significant effect (albeit most of them have a similar sized effects), questioning the robustness of the finding. Although this does not necessarily imply that the finding is an artefact, it points at least towards the sensitivity of its operationalisation and emphasizes again the need for a more suitable indicator. Nevertheless, as both effects are consistent, I would suggest that we can regard the results as an indication that the genderedness of political culture is relevant for the explanation of women’s political interest. Even more importantly, as there is no significant effect on men, it might account for part of the gender gap. Consequently, we can expect that for societies where attitudes towards women in the public sphere are more positive and women had more time to become integrated in the political life, the gender gap in political interest is likely to be smaller than in countries, where women’s ‘appropriate place’ is restricted to the private realm.

29 However, it might be worth keeping in mind that the country with the most conservative view, the Netherlands, and the most egalitarian view, Norway, differ by just slightly more than one point.
Turning then to the impact on women’s political representation, the second set of variables is tested. Model 2 in Table 4 indicates that the share of women in parliament does not affect women’s (or men’s) political interest, neither with regard to significance nor substantially. By contrast, the proportion of female ministers has a significant, and taking the scale of the variable into consideration, also an at least moderate impact on women (again not on men). To make the size of the effect more illustrative: a gender-equal cabinet can be associated with a 1.5 points higher interest of women than a men-only government, although it remains to discuss in how far this effect is actually linear.

These mixed results about the effect of female MPs and ministers make sense and are consistent with findings from previous studies, which have identified the visibility as an important precondition for the impact of female politicians on female political interest (Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006). Only when women are aware

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**Table 4 – Relationship between Gendered Political Culture and Women’s Presence in Politics for men and women (Multilevel Analysis)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes on separation of spheres</td>
<td>0.940* (0.491)</td>
<td>0.800* (0.464)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of female suffrage</td>
<td>0.017* (0.007)</td>
<td>0.013* (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament</td>
<td>- 0.005 (0.019)</td>
<td>- 0.005 (0.017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Ministers</td>
<td>0.031* (0.014)</td>
<td>0.025* (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (level 2)</td>
<td>0.186</td>
<td>0.170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n (level 1)</td>
<td>33,699</td>
<td>33,699</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** EVS (2010b); Inter-parliamentary Union (2009), UNDP (2009).

**Note:** Unstandardized coefficients are shown, standard errors in parentheses; N (level 2): 42; significance: *p<.05, † p<.10; all models have been tested for multicolinearity.

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30 A discussed above I expected the effect to have diminishing returns. This would mean that the effect might get weaker, once a certain threshold is exceeded. However, it is not possible to test this assumption for the European data, as there are no countries, where the share of women exceeds 50 percent.

31 They could be partly accounted for by the relatively strong association between the two ($r=0.69$).
of the gender composition of the political sphere can it affect their political attitudes. Members of parliament might not be always appear in sight of the public\textsuperscript{32}, whereas ministers can be expected to be more present in the media and consequently have a bigger impact. However, also another line of argumentation is plausible. Advocates of ‘substantive representation’ might argue that female ministers have more influence than MPs to introduce or shape policies on ‘women’s issues’ and therefore raise women’s interest in political matters (substantive influence). But it remains up to future research and more in-depth analyses to further explore the causal mechanism behind woman ministers accounting for their peers’ interest. In any case, these findings provide additional support for the promising results from the American context.

To this point, it appears as both explanations, the gendered culture and women’s representation, contribute to the explanation of women’s political interest. However, so far they have only been tested independently from each other, and as I have pointed out earlier, they should be strongly associated. In terms of analysis, this would result in decreased effects when tested together, as they partly account for the same concept. However, Model 3 shows that this expectation only holds partially. Indeed, the size of all coefficients is smaller, but all effects remain significant and with a sizeable impact. A further investigation suggests that this might be due to the poor indicators for political culture. The indicators used are only moderately associated with women’s political representation (Pearson’s r ranging from .11*** [female suffrage-parliament] to .20*** [female suffrage-minister], rather in contradiction with findings from previous research which have found much stronger associations for more direct measurement of gendered political ideology\textsuperscript{33} (cf. Paxton and Kunovich 2003).

Nevertheless, the fact that the effect of the share of female ministers is reduced by about one fifth shows sufficiently that excluding an cultural effect can lead to overestimation of the effect of women’s representation (and vice versa) and strongly supports the argument that an account for the culture is essential for cross-national research.

\textsuperscript{32} Even if they did, it would require a good cognitive skills to be able to have more than a very general idea about composition of such a large institution.

\textsuperscript{33} Including the agreement to statements such as: “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do.”
The interdependency of gendered culture and women’s representation

Models 4 and 5 in Table 6 and 7 then explore whether the effect of women’s representation is stronger within the context of societies with more traditionalist political culture. To avoid problems of multicollinearity, I decided not to use interaction terms, but instead to divide countries into two groups according to whether they are more (22 countries) or less traditional (20 countries) than average (mean=4.45) in their views on the gendered separation of the spheres\(^{34}\). The analyses have then been performed separately on the two groups.

Table 5 – Overview of the characteristics of countries with a more traditional and a more egalitarian political culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Overall</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes on separation of spheres (0-7 scale)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of female suffrage (years)</td>
<td>74.90</td>
<td>18.63</td>
<td>73.43</td>
<td>21.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament (percent)</td>
<td>21.47</td>
<td>10.35</td>
<td>19.09</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female ministers (percent)</td>
<td>21.55</td>
<td>13.79</td>
<td>19.28</td>
<td>12.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest gap (0-13 scale)</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest (women) (0-13 scale)</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest (men) (0-13 scale)</td>
<td>6.81</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>6.72</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest (overall) (0-13 scale)</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: EVS (2010b); Inter-parliamentary Union (2009), UNDP (2009); The last column shows the result of a t-test for of equality of means of the two groups (unequal variance assumed); significance: ***p<.001

Traditional: Netherlands, Iceland, United Kingdom, Finland, Malta, Ireland, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Albania, Moldova, Estonia, Slovenia, Turkey, Poland, Portugal, Italy, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece, Switzerland, Russian Federation, Austria.

Egalitarian: Cyprus, Croatia, Slovakia, Serbia, Belgium, Belarus, Latvia, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Sweden, Germany, Macedonia, Spain, Georgia, Hungary, Ukraine, Denmark, France, Norway, Luxembourg.

Table 5 provides an overview of the differences in characteristics of both groups. Especially the (not significant) difference in the political interest gap is intriguing, but we can also see that the other explanatory variables differ substantially\(^{35}\), again

\(^{34}\) The correlation between the centred attitudinal variable and the centred interaction term was too high and would have led to multicollinearity problems.

\(^{35}\) The non-significance might be partly accounted by the low N (42).
emphasizing the issue of confounded effects discussed above. However, within these
two groups, share of female members of parliament and the proportion of female
ministers are very highly correlated, so the two effects were again tested in separate
models (Table 6 and Table 7).
On the first sight, the results are truly intriguing: It appears like in traditional and more
egalitarian societies the effects of women’s representation and political culture are
diametrically opposed. In line with the theoretical expectation, women’s representation
has a strong effect on political interest only in the traditional societies, both in terms of
significance and effect size. Interestingly enough, a significant (although smaller)
effect is found for men, which is, however, in line with findings from earlier research.
Some scholars have argued in different contexts that gender equality might also signify
the general fairness of the political system, thus, positively affecting men as well as
women (cf. Karp and Banducci 2008; Schwindt-Bayer 2009).
More puzzling is the finding that the gendered political culture is only significantly
associated with political interest in countries that are already more progressive. This
could either indicate that the political culture needs to exceed a certain gender equality
threshold, before becoming relevant for women’s political identities at all, or it reveals
a problem with the categorization. A closer look to the countries in the two groups
shows no obvious regional pattern. In order to rule out that the categorization is too
broad, the model has been refitted with four groups (-2sd; -1sd; +1sd; +2sd from the
mean), which confirms the general picture. However, that does not eliminate the
possibility that quality issues of the variable underlying this qualification might be a
problem.
To assess whether the results hold when countries are classified according to other
measures of gender equality (in a more general sense), the model was re-run for
categories based the ‘Gender Empowerment Measure’ (UNDP 2009) or the
Postmatrialism-Index (EVS 2010b) and the results do not hold. This advises caution
when drawing anything else than a general conclusion from these findings. Research
using different data (with possibly a better measurement for gendered political culture)
will be necessary to confirm or disprove the effects found here and shed more light on
this issue.

36 The effects of female ministers and female MPs are extremely similar, which is expectable, as the
two are highly correlated.
37 These measures are, however, only weakly associated with the gender gap, whereas the
correlation between the gender gap and the attitudinal scale I use is comparatively higher.
### Table 6 – Interaction between Gendered Political Culture and Women’s Presence in Politics for men and women – *Female ministers* (Multilevel Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 5a (traditional)</td>
<td>Model 5b (egalitarian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes on separation of spheres</td>
<td>0.465 (1.085)</td>
<td>1.537 (1.230)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of female suffrage</td>
<td>-0.001 (0.008)</td>
<td>0.043*** (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female ministers</td>
<td>0.024* (0.002)</td>
<td>0.017 (0.013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (level 2)</td>
<td>18,021</td>
<td>15,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n (level2)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** EVS (2010b); Inter-parliamentary Union (2009), UNDP (2009).

**Note:** Unstandardized coefficients are shown, standard errors in parentheses; significance: ***p<.001, *p<.05, † p<.10; all models have been tested for multicolinearity.

### Table 7 – Interaction between Gendered Political Culture and Women’s Presence in Politics for men and women - *Female MPs* (Multilevel Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 4a (traditional)</td>
<td>Model 4b (egalitarian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes on separation of spheres</td>
<td>0.915 (1.127)</td>
<td>2.132† (1.187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of female suffrage</td>
<td>0.003 (0.007)</td>
<td>0.046*** (0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in parliament</td>
<td>0.038* (0.017)</td>
<td>-0.007 (0.016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female ministers</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>______</td>
<td>______</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$ (level 2)</td>
<td>18,021</td>
<td>15,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n (level2)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** EVS (2010b); Inter-parliamentary Union (2009), UNDP (2009).

**Note:** Unstandardized coefficients are shown, standard errors in parentheses; significance: ***p<.001, *p<.05, † p<.10; all models have been tested for multicolinearity.
However, what we can conclude is, that possibly different effects in different context cannot be rules out in advance. Future cross-national would do well to account for and further explore the context dependency.

*The effect of gender quotas*

Finally, we were interested in the symbolizing effect of gender quotas. However, the empirical results (not shown) do not provide any support for such an effect. Parliamentary quotas, as regarded here, appear to have neither a direct or indirect effect by themselves, nor do they affect the coefficients of other variables, when introduced to the full model (i.e. Model 3). This goes for men and women equally. To be sure, although this result is in line with other empirical findings (Zetterberg 2009), it does not provide any indication that *quotas in general* do not affect women’s (or men’s) political interest. Gender quotas take more diverse forms than considered here, which also encompass voluntary and party-level measurements and they might operate through mechanisms that are hard to capture in quantitative analysis. Also, Zetterberg (2009) has argued, that the effect of quotas might depend on how and how strictly they are enforced. However, as for the gender quotas analysed here, empirical evidence on their symbolic impact is yet to be produced.

**CONCLUSION**

The impact of women’s political representation has been the subject of much debate among the scholars of gender and politics. The aim of this study was to contribute to this discussion by elaborating on a theoretical framework for the cross-national analysis of the impact of women’s political representation, culture and gender quotas on women’s political interest, and therefore on the gender gap of political interest. I have argued that cross-national analysis ultimately requires an account for the genderedness of political culture, assuming a confounding effect. Moreover, I have suggested that effects of representation might be context sensitive, or more specifically, that they might have a stronger impact when they are not line with political culture.

However, the analysis presented in the second part of this article provides only partially support for claims made. Political culture and political representation have both, independently from each other, an effect on women’s political interest, albeit
testing them in a joint model shows, that this effect can be overestimated, if they are not jointly included. With regards to women’s representation, I can confirm an important qualification literature has made before (Atkeson 2003; Campbell and Wolbrecht 2006): In my model, only the share of female ministers has an effect on women’s interest, suggesting that the visibility of female politicians is a key qualification for their impact on women’s interest. What are the implications of this finding? In academic terms, it emphasizes that precision and detail is necessary when assessing effects of political representation. Where possible, indicators referring to higher ranking and more prominent politicians should be preferred (or at least included) to the simple measure of the share of women in parliament. In substantive terms, this finding provides a strong argument for the advocates of descriptive representation of women and the measures designed to enhance it. Although I could not find a direct of gender quotas on political interest, they might be ultimately effective, if they lead to a better representation of women in visible political positions. This argument has a particular weight, when we take into consideration that the effects of cultural norms and attitudes are much harder to approach. As norms and values are the result of a longer societal process, they cannot be changed overnight. Nevertheless, the findings also show that a balanced political sphere might help to challenges those attitudes.

With regard to the context dependency of the effect of representation, this study remains inconclusive, as I could not rule out that the findings were the result of the poor quality of the cultural variable. As the operationalization was without question flawed, additional research with better data has to follow. Nevertheless, the findings provide a good starting point for further (and more in-depth) explorations of the context-dependency of effects.

Future research is also needed to examine, whether the findings hold for different regions of the world. It is important to bear in mind that the findings only hold for the countries in the sample and cannot be generalised to a wider population of countries. As I said earlier, this is because the countries do not constitute a random sample of all countries (of all times), but are restricted to the very distinct subsample of (relatively) democratic Western countries of a certain region. This implies that the findings are indications, but no evidence of the found contextual effects. What is more, it should be noted that although the model provides a good starting point for future research, it has failed to explain the gender gap. When the model is fitted for a joint dataset for men
and women (including common micro-level characteristic) gender remains a highly significant factor. Moreover, it explains only about three percent of the variance among women, and under two percent of the variance for men.

Lastly, we should be aware that findings of gender differences always involve the risk of overlooking the variations *between women* along lines of ethnicity, race and generation. When discussing the results and most of all, when considering their implication, we should bear in mind that ‘the women’ do not form a homogenous category, and the effects ‘on women’ can vary considerably across this group.
References


Rabe-Hesketh, Sophia and Skrondal, Andreas, 2008: *Multilevel and Longitudinal Modeling Using Stata*. College Station, TX: Stata Press.


Appendix A: Wording of questions

Table 8: Wording of the questions in the EVS questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Interest Scale</th>
<th>v5</th>
<th>Please say, for each of the following, how important it is for your life: Politics.</th>
<th>Very important; quite important; not important; not at all important (don’t know; no answer)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v7</td>
<td>When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never?</td>
<td>Frequently; occasionally; never; (don’t know; no answer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v181</td>
<td>How interested would you say you are in politics?</td>
<td>Very interested; somewhat interested; not very interested; (don’t know; no answer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>v286</td>
<td>How often do you follow politics in the news on television or on the radio or in the daily papers?</td>
<td>Every day; several times a week; once or twice a week; less often; never; (don’t know; no answer)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender Role Attitude Scale

| v163 | People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each: Having a job is the best way for a woman to be an independent person | Agree strongly; agree; disagree; disagree strongly; (don’t know; no answer) |
| v161 | People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each: Men should take as much responsibility as women for the home and children | Agree strongly; agree; disagree; disagree strongly; (don’t know; no answer) |

The wording of the questions is derived from the Master Questionnaire (EVS 2008)

Appendix B: Manifestation of country-level variables

Table 9: Manifestations of macro-level variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender culture</th>
<th>Vote right</th>
<th>Years since vote right</th>
<th>Women in parliament</th>
<th>Female ministers</th>
<th>Gender quotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Country mean</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>In years</td>
<td>In percent</td>
<td>In percent</td>
<td>Yes/no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>4.214</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>4.365</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>4.447</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>4.582</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4.569</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia Herzegovina</td>
<td>4.378</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td>Population %</td>
<td>Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>4.609</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>4.477</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>4.453</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>4.211</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>4.913</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>4.247</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>4.111</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4.934</td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>4.775</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>4.655</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>4.391</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4.791</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>3.915</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>4.138</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>4.314</td>
<td>1945</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>4.584</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>4.203</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>5.022</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>4.673</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>4.134</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>4.240</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>4.592</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3.903</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>4.996</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>4.272</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>4.278</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>4.428</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>4.551</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak Republic</td>
<td>4.546</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>4.256</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4.730</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4.647</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>4.393</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>4.259</td>
<td>1930</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>4.793</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>3.975</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DATA SOURCE**

- UNDP (2009)
- IPU (2009)
- Schwindt-Bayer (2009)/Quota project (2014)

**Graph**

- **Aggerated gender role attitudes**
- **Fitted values**
- **Gender gap in political Interest**

**Data**

- Ukraine: 4.793, 1919, 89, 8.2, 4%
- United Kingdom: 3.975, 1928, 80, 19.5, 23%