

## **Solving the Puzzle of Higher Female Turnout: A Civic Duty Explanation**

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### **Abstract**

Previous research in comparative political behavior has generated (but not solved) an important puzzle. Female citizens are less likely to engage in a variety of political activities (e.g. contacting politicians and working for parties), and are less cognitively engaged with the political process (i.e. they have lower levels of political interest and political information). However, for reasons that remain unclear, several cross-national surveys reveal that women are actually more likely to vote. I argue that the main reason for this gender gap in electoral participation is the higher sense of civic duty of female citizens. This theory is grounded in research in social psychology that demonstrates that women have a higher level of conscientiousness than men. I use data from the 2014 ISSP Citizenship module to test my theoretical expectations, and find strong support for the argument that civic duty mediates the relationship between sex and electoral participation.

## Introduction

Previous comparative research has shown a clear gender gap in political engagement. First, women are less likely to be cognitively engaged with the political process. Female citizens tend to be less politically interested and less politically informed than male citizens (Inglehart and Norris 2003, Fraile and Gómez forthcoming). They are also less likely to know about politics (Ferrín Pereira, Fraile, and Rubal 2015, Fraile and Gómez 2017, Fortin-Rittberger 2016). Second, women tend to participate less in the political arena. They are less likely to contact politicians, to work for political parties, and to participate in demonstrations (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010).

Two types of arguments have commonly been offered to explain why women are less likely to participate in political activities. First, cultural explanations emphasize the traditional norms, attitudes, and values about the role of men and women in public life. Cultural norms limit female political engagement because the political arena is perceived as a male domain (Jennings 1983, Paxton and Kunovich 2003, Inglehart and Norris 2003). Second, resource-based explanations link gender gaps in political activism to concomitant gender gaps in wealth, income, time, or access to networks. The non-political institutions of daily life (e.g. the family and the workplace) generate gender differences in resources and skills which create barriers for female political participation (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001, Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994).

However, existing cross-national research also suggests that women vote more than (or at least as much as) men (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014, Norris 2002). This constitutes a real puzzle. If women are less interested in politics, less informed, and less knowledgeable; why are they more likely to go to the polls on Election Day? While previous studies have shown this inconsistency between the electoral participation of women and their overall political participation, they have not fully explained what drives this pattern.

I argue that the observed gender gap in electoral participation is related to a concomitant gender gap in the feeling that voting is a civic duty. Voters are often reminded by political leaders and civic campaigns that voting is an important duty in modern (representative) democracies. And citizens who feel that they have a duty to vote are significantly more likely to participate in elections. I contend that the civic duty to vote is more generalized among female citizens. Previous research in social psychology has established that women are more conscientious than men, i.e. they are more likely to dutifully perform tasks and to take seriously obligations to others. This is critical to understand why they tend to vote more (a participatory form often presented as a democratic duty), while at the same time they participate less in other political activities, such as protest (participatory forms that can be described as democratic rights rather than duties).

This article will proceed as follows. First, I will discuss the gender gaps in political participation and present corroborating evidence from a variety of cross-national survey datasets. Second, I will introduce the civic duty argument to explain the puzzle of higher electoral participation among women. Third, I will test this argument with survey data from the 2014 ISSP. The analysis reveals that women are more likely to feel a civic duty to vote, which is key to understand why they are more likely to go to the polls on Election Day. The final section presents some implications of these findings and concludes.

### Gender Differences in Political Participation

After conducting a seven-nation comparison of different dimensions of political participation during the 1970s, Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978: 267) concluded: “In all societies for which we have data, sex is related to political activity; men are more active than women.” By and large, the gender gap in political engagement has been confirmed in more recent cross-national studies. Women are less likely to participate in politics, even after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and relevant political attitudes, such as political interest (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010). However, for reasons that remain unclear, women are more likely to go to the polls on Election Day (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014).

This section uses several recent cross-national datasets to assess whether this pattern can be observed in various contexts. I used data from the 2014 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) Citizenship module in 2014, the European Social Surveys (ESS), and the AmericasBarometer (LAPOP) to evaluate whether female respondents are more or less likely to be politically engaged and to participate in different political activities.

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

[Table 3 about here]

The models presented in Tables 1-3 evaluate the effect of respondents’ sex on cognitive political engagement (models 1-3) and on a variety of participatory forms (models 4-7). The results of these analyses provide additional support for the gender participation gaps identified in previous research. Women are markedly less cognitively engaged with the political process. The cross-national survey data reveals that female respondents are less likely to be politically interested, to be politically informed, and to have a partisan identification. Similarly, the results confirm that women are less likely to engage in a variety of participatory forms in the political arena, such as contacting politicians (except in Latin America), working for a political party, attending political meetings, and participating in protest demonstrations. In sum, the models clearly show that women tend to be less politically active than men.

However, the gender gap is reversed for the models estimating the impact of respondents’ sex on electoral participation (model 7 in Tables 1-3). The three cross-national survey datasets show that female respondents are more likely to vote in national elections. In order to assess the substantive importance of this effect, I estimated the predicted probabilities of electoral participation for female and male respondents when other variables are held at their mean values. These predicted probabilities are presented in Table 4. The effect is substantively important in Latin America, where there is a 3 percentage points difference in the likelihood of voting of female and male respondents. The two other cross-national surveys show a smaller difference (1 percentage point). But this effect is still puzzling given the fact that women are less cognitively engaged with the political process and less likely to engage in other political activities.

[Table 4 about here]

This section has confirmed the gender gaps in political participation shown in previous research with recent cross-national survey data. Women are less likely to be cognitively engaged with the political process and to participate in different political activities. However, they tend to vote more than male citizens. In the remainder of this paper, I argue (and I demonstrate empirically) that the ‘reverse’ gender gap in electoral participation results from the stronger sense of civic duty felt by women.

### Civic Duty and the Gender Gap in Electoral Participation

In any large election, the probability that any particular vote will be decisive is extremely small. From a rational choice perspective, the act of voting appears irrational because the costs of voting (e.g. the time required to go to the polling station) are always higher than any benefit that might be obtained (Owen and Grofman 1984). Still, most people vote in most national elections. Fiorina (1981) describes this pattern as the “paradox of voting.”

How can we make sense of the relatively high electoral participation rate in modern democracies? One of the main arguments that has been proposed to explain the paradox of voting is that citizens feel a civic duty to vote. As Galais and Blais (2016: 213) write,

“One possible reason [for high electoral participation] is that they feel it is a citizen’s duty to vote in a democracy. People vote not because they calculate that the benefits outweigh the costs but because they consider that this is the ‘right’, ‘ethical’ thing to do. They believe that they have a moral obligation to vote.”

The belief that there is a duty to vote is often associated with a social norm (Blais 2000, Uhlener 1986, Mueller 1989, Coleman 1990). Citizens are members of a broader community, and the act of voting is a public good. Turning out to vote is something that is perceived by citizens as necessary for the well-being of the community and for maintaining healthy democratic systems. In other words, citizens are not narrowly self-interested, and they vote to conform with a cooperative norm even when the costs of voting are relatively high. The civic duty to vote is internalized in early adulthood through socialization (Gidengil, Wass, and Valaste 2016, Campbell 2008), which creates a feeling of guilt when this socially cooperative norm is violated –i.e. when people do not vote– (Blais 2000). The duty to vote is also externally enforced by the social networks in which individuals are embedded, which often create a social pressure to go to the polls on Election Day (Knack and Kropf 1998).

Moreover, citizens are often reminded of their moral obligation to vote by the media, political leaders, and even some religious institutions around election time. Major national newspapers often publish editorials or op-ed pieces before elections reminding citizens of the importance of the act of voting (Maskivker 2016, Guénolé 2012, Bátis 2009). Knack and Kropf (1998: 593) similarly show that local newspapers in the United States communicate to their readers that voting is a civic duty. Political leaders also remind voters of the importance of voting before elections, and celebrate high rates of electoral participation after elections (even when they are defeated). In a similar vein, some religious institutions (in particular the Catholic Church) present the act of voting as a moral obligation that citizens should perform (Clarín 2001, El País 2008). It is then not surprising that the belief that voting is a civic duty is held by a majority of citizens in most democracies. Previous research estimates that between 70% and 80% of citizens in different democratic regimes have internalized the norm that voting in national elections is a duty (Blais 2000: 105, Bowler and Donovan 2013: 269, Bolzendahl and Coffé 2013: 52)

Several studies demonstrate a strong link between civic duty and turnout. People who express a moral obligation to vote are much more likely to participate in elections (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, Blais 2000, Bolzendahl and Coffé 2013). In fact, previous research suggests that citizens' duty is one of the strongest predictors of electoral participation at the individual level (Clarke et al. 2004: 259, Dalton 2008). While some scholars argue that the 'D term' might simply be an a posteriori rationalization of the act of voting (Matsusaka and Palda 1999), recent research with panel data suggests that this view is misguided. In fact, several studies show that respondents who express a civic duty to vote *before* an election are more likely to go to the polls on Election Day (Galais and Blais 2016, Blais and Rubenson 2013). In a similar vein, experimental research shows that when people are reminded of their duty to participate in elections, they are significantly more likely to vote (Gerber, Green, and Larimer 2008).

The key argument in this paper is that female citizens are more likely to feel a moral obligation to vote. This hypothesis is based on psychological research which has identified consistent gender gaps in personality traits. The Five Factor Model in psychology suggests that five broad dimensions can be used to describe the human personality: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Digman 1990). One of these dimensions is particularly important for our purposes, i.e. conscientiousness. John and Srivastava (1999: 121) describe conscientiousness as "socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior, such as thinking before acting, delaying gratification, following norms and rules, and planning, organizing, and prioritizing tasks." Conscientious individuals are more likely to behave dutifully and to follow social norms (Mondak 2010, McCrae and Costa 2005). Recent studies similarly show that conscientious people feel a stronger sense of civic duty to vote in US and Spanish elections (Weinschenk 2014, Gallego and Oberski 2012).

Previous research in psychology has revealed that women tend to be more conscientious than men. Schmitt et al. (2008) study gender differences in personality traits across 55 cultures, and find that women report higher levels of conscientiousness than men in most countries. Feingold (1994) similarly shows that women in Canada, China, Finland, Germany, Poland, and Russia score higher than men on a scale related to the personality trait of conscientiousness. Another cross-national analysis of 25 countries shows that women are more dutiful than men (Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae 2001). In sum, there is consistent cross-national evidence indicating a higher level of conscientiousness among women.

The reason for this difference is not entirely clear. One of the leading explanations of sex differences in personality traits across cultures is the social role model. According to this model, the observed gender differences in personality and social behavior result from a process of sex role socialization which defines appropriate behavior for men and women. Individuals observe since an early age the social roles occupied by men and women, and derive from this socialization a series of beliefs about the desirable attributes for each sex (Eagly 1987, Ruble, Martin, and Berenbaum 2007). In most cultures, women are much less likely to occupy leadership positions and are overrepresented in lower-level positions in organizations (Eagly and Karau 2002, Heilman 2001). This unequal gender distribution of leadership roles might influence the personality traits of women and men. In particular, the higher level of conscientiousness observed among women might result from the fact that women occupy lower-level positions in which they have to follow norms decided by people in leadership positions (mostly men). In fact, research in social and political psychology has consistently shown that men are more likely than women to be perceived as having *agentic* characteristics –i.e. forcefulness, self-sufficiency, and self-confidence– (Eagly 1987, Huddy and Terkildsen 1993).

Regardless of what drives this gender gap in dutifulness and conscientiousness, I argue that these personality differences are critical to explain why women are more likely to go to the polls on Election Day. From the discussion above, it is clear that conscientiousness is positively associated with the feeling of civic duty; and the feeling of civic duty is in turn positively associated with the decision to participate in elections. Hence, the higher level of conscientiousness observed among women might be the key element to solve the puzzle identified above, i.e. lower female political engagement but higher female electoral participation.

To my knowledge, this is the first study that attempts to explain the gender gap in electoral participation by looking at differences in the civic duty to vote for each sex. However, there are some findings in recent studies that are consistent with this argument. Córdova and Rangel (2017) show that compulsory voting increases electoral participation, but that this effect is particularly strong for female citizens. In other words, female citizens are more responsive to norms that make voting mandatory. This is exactly what the theory of this paper would predict. In a similar vein, Wang (2014) shows that conscientiousness increases female electoral participation in the United States, but has no effect on male turnout. Both of these studies suggest that dutifulness and respect for social norms are particularly important to explain the turnout decision of female citizens.

Building on these studies, I argue that female citizens have a higher sense of civic duty than male citizens. I further contend that this gender gap in civic duty is largely responsible for the puzzling gender gap in electoral participation. While previous research has shown that women are more likely to express a civic duty to vote in countries such as Canada (Blais 2000), the United Kingdom (Bowler and Donovan 2013), and the United States (Weinschenk 2014), no study has addressed this hypothesis systematically with a large cross-national dataset.

The hypotheses of this paper follow from this discussion:

Hypothesis 1: Female citizens are more likely to feel a civic duty to vote

Hypothesis 2: The positive relationship between the variables “female” and “turnout” is mediated by the sense of civic duty

### Research Design

I use data from the 2014 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) module on Citizenship. The ISSP is a cross-national collaboration conducting annual surveys on diverse topics relevant to social sciences. Each survey is fielded by a scientific organization within the member nation, typically as part of a larger random survey of the adult non-institutionalized population. More detailed information on the 2014 Citizenship module is available in Scholz et al. (2017).

The sample I will analyze has individual-level data from 33 countries. The 2014 ISSP module includes data from several rich consolidated democracies, but also a number of newer and more fragile democracies.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The countries included in the 2014 ISSP module are: Austria; Australia; Belgium; Switzerland; Chile; Czech Republic; Germany; Denmark; Spain; Finland; France; Great Britain; Georgia; Croatia; Hungary; Israel; India; Iceland; Japan; Republic of Korea; Lithuania; the Netherlands; Norway; Philippines; Poland; Russia; Sweden; Slovenia; Slovakia; Turkey; the United States; Venezuela; and South Africa.

After dropping observations with missing data on the independent variables (Allison 2002), the sample size is 44,675.

This 2014 ISSP Citizenship module is appropriate for this analysis because it includes a question that can be used to capture respondents' civic duty to vote.<sup>2</sup> The survey item used asked respondents the following question: *"There are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. As far as you are concerned personally on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 is not at all important and 7 is very important, how important is it: always to vote in elections."* Using this question, I created a dummy variable "civic duty to vote" coded as 1 when respondents answered 6 or 7 to the above question, and 0 otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

The survey also includes a few questions that capture whether respondents feel a civic duty to be politically engaged (beyond voting). In particular, using the same 1-7 scale two survey items asked respondents whether keeping watch on the actions of government and being active in social or political associations was important to be a good citizen. I also recoded these variables into dummy variables to create the variables "duty to be politically active" and "duty to keep watch on government actions" (respondents who answered 6 or 7 on these items are coded as 1, everyone else is coded as 0).

The main independent variable in the statistical analysis below captures the sex of the respondent (coded as 1 if the respondent is a woman, and 0 if the respondent is a man). I also include in the analysis several sociodemographic characteristics (age, education, employment status, and place of residence) and one political attitude (political interest) that are traditionally associated with electoral participation in comparative studies (Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014, Kuenzi and Lambright 2011), and might also be associated with the civic duty to vote.

### Model Estimation

The empirical model in this paper applies multilevel techniques that distinguish between two levels, that is, the individual level and the country level. The multilevel approach takes the layered character of the data into account. In my data set, individuals are embedded within 33 different countries. Multilevel models have the advantage that separate residual components can be specified at each level, and therefore, they adjust for the correlation of these error components of the various levels when estimating the coefficients (Gelman and Hill 2006, Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Hierarchical models also allow for a more precise estimation of individual-level factors because they control for important contextual factors that may bias the results. Because the dependent variables used in the empirical analysis are binary (duty to vote, duty to be politically active, and duty to keep watch on government actions), these models were estimated using a multilevel logistic regression.

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, other cross-national public opinion surveys such as the European Social Surveys, the AmericasBarometer, or the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems do not include variables to capture the civic duty to vote.

<sup>3</sup> The reason for creating a dichotomous variable is that the variations at the low end of the scale (e.g. from 1 to 2 or from 2 to 3) are not relevant for this analysis. What I want to assess is whether women are more likely to feel a strong sense of civic duty (i.e. to place themselves at the high end of the scale). However, using the continuous variable rather than the dummy variable does not change the results. These alternative models are available in Tables A2 and A3 in the online Appendix.

## Results

Table 5 presents three multilevel models estimating duty to engage in different political activities at the individual level. Three different “duties” are analyzed: the duty to vote, the duty to be active in social and political associations, and the duty to keep watch on government actions.

[Table 5 about here]

The first interesting finding is that, as expected, female respondents are more likely to express a sense of civic duty to participate in elections. In model 1, the variable “female” is positive and statistically significant. In order to find out whether this significant coefficient is substantively important, I estimated the predicted probabilities of civic duty to vote. Table 6 presents the predicted probabilities of voting at different values of the independent variables that were statistically significant in Model 1 above, holding all other variables at their means.

[Table 6 about here]

The predicted probabilities show that female voters are significantly more likely to feel a civic duty to vote than male citizens. When all variables are at their mean values, a respondent has a 69% probability of expressing a civic duty to vote. This probability goes up (down) by 2 percentage points when the respondent is a woman (man). While this effect is much smaller than the effect of two other variables in the model (age and political interest), the sex of the respondent has a strong impact on the probability of feeling a civic duty to vote. This effect may help explain why women participate more in elections, while they are less politically engaged overall.

However, the higher predisposition to feel a civic duty to vote among female respondents could not explain the puzzle of higher female turnout if women also felt a stronger sense of duty to participate in other political activities. Since other forms of political participation (e.g. protest or contacting politicians) tend to be presented as democratic rights rather than democratic norms, I do not expect women to feel a moral obligation to be politically active in other domains. This is exactly what the results suggest.

The models 2 and 3 in Table 5 show that women are not more likely to feel a duty to be politically active in social and political associations or to keep watch on government actions. The coefficient for the variable “female” is positive in model 2 and negative in model 3 but is not statistically significant in either model.

In sum, the three models reported in this section are consistent with my theoretical intuitions. In line with psychological research which shows a higher level of conscientiousness among women, the results indicate that female citizens are more likely to express a civic duty to vote. However, the models also suggest that women are not more likely to feel a moral obligation to engage in other political activities.

## Mediation analysis

To test Hypothesis 2, I conducted a mediation analysis to show that the effect of the respondents’ sex on turnout is mediated by civic duty. Four conditions need to be met to show that there is (complete) mediation (Baron and Kenny 1986, Judd and Kenny 1981). First, the key independent variable, “female,”

should be significantly correlated with the main outcome variable, “electoral participation,” without controlling for the mediator, “civic duty.” Model 1 in Table 7 shows that this effect exists. Second, the variable “female” should be positively and significantly associated with the mediator variable, “civic duty.” Model 2 in Table 7 shows this to be the case. Third, the mediator, “civic duty,” should be positively related to “electoral participation” controlling for the key independent variable, “female.” And fourth, the effect of “female” on “electoral participation” should be close to zero and not significant when controlling for “civic duty.” Model 3 in Table 7 shows that conditions 3 and 4 are also satisfied. Figure 1 graphically presents the relevant coefficients from these models in Table 7.

[Table 7 about here]

[Figure 1 about here]

In order to assess more precisely the magnitude of this mediation, I estimated the proportion of the total effect that is mediated (Preacher and Kelley 2011) using the Stata command “binary mediation.”<sup>4</sup> In this model, 45% of the total effect of “female” on “electoral participation” is mediated through “civic duty,” which shows that there is a (partial) mediation. This again confirms that the fact that women have a higher sense of civic duty to vote is critical to solve the puzzle of higher electoral participation among women, who are otherwise less politically engaged than men.

### Robustness models

I estimated a series of additional models to make sure that the results presented above are robust. There are alternative ways to deal with multilevel data. One possibility is to estimate logistic regressions with country fixed effects. Another option is to estimate logistic regressions with standard errors clustered around countries. I re-estimated the models in Table 5 using these alternative ways to estimate the models, and the results are the same. The variable “female” is positive and statistically significant in the models analyzing the determinants of civic duty to vote, but not significant in the models analyzing the moral obligation to engage in other political activities. The results of these models are presented in Table A1 in the online Appendix.

I also made sure that the relationship between the variables “female” and “civic duty” is not driven by any single country. In fact, the main result reported in model 1 in Table 5 (i.e. women are more likely to feel a sense of civic duty to vote) holds when each country is successively dropped from the regression, and the size of the coefficients is very similar in all the models.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, I re-estimated the civic duty model in Table 5 and the mediation analysis in Table 7 using the ordinal variable “importance of voting” (1-7 scale) rather than the dummy variable I created to capture “civic duty.” The results are very similar. The variable “female” is positively associated with the feeling

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<sup>4</sup> Since our models include dichotomous variables, the coefficients have to be rescaled (standardized) before the mediation effect can be estimated (Kenny 2013). Given the hierarchical structure of the data, I added country fixed effects to the list of covariates in this estimation.

<sup>5</sup> These models are not reported here, but are available upon request from the author.

that voting is important to be a good citizen, and the coefficient is statistically significant. The mediation analysis with this alternative measure of “civic duty” also provides support for the theoretical expectations of this paper. The four conditions of the mediation analysis are fulfilled. The variable “female” is positively associated with electoral participation and with the belief that voting is important to be a good citizen. However, when the belief that voting is important for citizenship is controlled for, the sex of the respondent does not predict turnout. I also estimated the proportion of the total effect that is mediated. In this alternative mediation analysis, 61% of the total effect of “female” on “electoral participation” is mediated through “belief in the importance of voting,” which shows that the mediation analysis reported above is robust. The models described in this paragraph are presented in Tables A2-A3 in the online Appendix.

In sum, this section has shown that the findings reported in the paper are not an artifact of a particular form of estimating the model or the way in which the variable “civic duty” is operationalized.

### Supplementary analyses

This study relies on the largest cross-national survey dataset that includes a survey item that can be used to measure citizens’ civic duty to vote. A potential limitation of the empirical analysis is that only one variable is used to capture respondents’ belief that it is a moral obligation to go the polls on Election Day. Several studies emphasize the importance of using several indicators for measuring attitudinal dimensions (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008, Carmines and Zeller 1979).

Fortunately, a recent cross-national internet survey that was conducted after the 2014 European Parliament election in seven different countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria, Greece, and Portugal) includes a battery of 13 questions to measure civic duty.<sup>6</sup> Using this dataset, Blais and Galais (2016) conduct a confirmatory factor analysis and determine that four indicators are particularly suitable to create a “civic duty” construct that is both internally consistent and has sufficient item heterogeneity. These four items are described in Table 8.

[Table 8 about here]

I recoded these four indicators into dummies (as detailed in Table 8), and then created a civic duty additive scale that ranges from 0 to 3. This procedure suggests that the belief that voting is a civic duty is widespread in these seven countries, but the strength of that belief varies considerably.<sup>7</sup> I then replicated the statistical analysis presented in the paper in this smaller sample of seven countries using this more fine-grained and very reliable construct of civic duty. The results are very similar, as can be observed in

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<sup>6</sup> Fieldwork was conducted by the institute TNS-Sofres in all seven countries. In each country, nationally representative samples were drawn from existing online panels which include several hundred thousands of email addresses, randomly chosen with a simple stratification by region. In order to overcome the well-known sociodemographic biases of internet samples, quotas on sex, age, and social status were also imposed (Sauger, Dehousse, and Gougou 2015).

<sup>7</sup> The descriptive statistics are as follows: no civic duty (0): 21%, moderate civic duty (1): 34.5%, high civic duty (2): 26%, and very high civic duty (3): 18.5%.

Table 9. The coefficients for the variable “female” are positive and statistically significant in models 1 and 2, which suggests that women are more likely to vote and to have a strong sense of civic duty. However, the sex of the respondent is no longer a statistically significant predictor of electoral participation when the civic duty scale is included as an independent variable. Again, this suggests that civic duty mediates the relationship between sex and turnout.

[Table 9 about here]

### Conclusion

While women are less interested in politics and less likely to participate in a diverse array of political activities, recent cross-national survey research shows that they are also more likely to go to the polls on Election Day. This paper provides an explanation for this puzzling gender gap in electoral participation. Social psychological research has shown repeatedly that women tend to be more conscientious than men, I therefore argue that women should have a higher sense of civic duty, which in turn explains why they are more likely to turnout. I conduct several tests of these hypotheses and find strong support for my theoretical intuitions. Using data from the 2014 ISSP module, I find that women are significantly more likely to express a civic duty to vote.

The results of the mediation analysis also suggest that about half of the total effect of sex on electoral participation is mediated through civic duty. This is an important finding, but also one that suggests that there might be other factors contributing to this ‘reverse’ gender gap in electoral participation. First, women might prioritize electoral participation (rather than contacting politicians or attending political meetings) because voting is a participatory form that requires relatively little time, and time is a resource that women often lack (Schlozman, Burns, and Verba 1994). Second, voting is a more private form of participation—the vote is secret and individuals are alone in the ballot box— which allows women to have a voice without having to openly and vocally defend their ideas in the political arena. Since many women feel that politics is a male domain and perceive themselves as less qualified than men to be politically active (Paxton and Kunovich 2003, Lawless and Fox 2005), the individualized nature of the act of voting might also contribute to this ‘reverse’ gender gap in electoral participation. Future research should assess whether these factors also contribute to the gender gaps in political participation identified in this paper.

**Table 1.** Determinants of political participation in 33 countries (ISSP 2014)

|                             | (1)                | (2)              | (3)                   | (4)                 | (5)                      | (6)            | (7)             |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
|                             | Political Interest | Party ID         | Political Information | Contact Politicians | Attend political meeting | Protest        | Vote            |
| VARIABLES                   |                    |                  |                       |                     |                          |                |                 |
| <b>Female</b>               | <b>-0.195***</b>   | <b>-0.264***</b> | <b>-0.200***</b>      | <b>-0.348***</b>    | <b>-0.317***</b>         | <b>-0.073*</b> | <b>0.093***</b> |
|                             | <b>(0.008)</b>     | <b>(0.032)</b>   | <b>(0.015)</b>        | <b>(0.037)</b>      | <b>(0.037)</b>           | <b>(0.042)</b> | <b>(0.029)</b>  |
| Age                         | 0.096***           | 0.216***         | 0.212***              | 0.179***            | 0.016                    | -0.173***      | 0.516***        |
|                             | (0.003)            | (0.014)          | (0.006)               | (0.017)             | (0.016)                  | (0.018)        | (0.012)         |
| Education                   | 0.247***           | 0.225***         | 0.226***              | 0.532***            | 0.332***                 | 0.463***       | 0.389***        |
|                             | (0.007)            | (0.027)          | (0.013)               | (0.033)             | (0.032)                  | (0.037)        | (0.026)         |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0.026***           | 0.021***         | 0.032***              | -0.027***           | -0.002                   | -0.073***      | 0.070***        |
|                             | (0.002)            | (0.006)          | (0.003)               | (0.008)             | (0.008)                  | (0.009)        | (0.006)         |
| Employment status           | -0.025***          | 0.064*           | -0.087***             | 0.166***            | 0.044                    | 0.069          | 0.260***        |
|                             | (0.009)            | (0.035)          | (0.016)               | (0.041)             | (0.039)                  | (0.046)        | (0.031)         |
| Urban                       | 0.064***           | -0.291***        | 0.094***              | -0.201***           | -0.087**                 | 0.502***       | -0.205***       |
|                             | (0.009)            | (0.037)          | (0.017)               | (0.042)             | (0.042)                  | (0.053)        | (0.033)         |
| Constant                    | 1.545***           | -3.400***        | 3.508***              | -3.972***           | -3.163***                | -3.427***      | -1.154***       |
|                             | (0.047)            | (0.194)          | (0.070)               | (0.162)             | (0.163)                  | (0.176)        | (0.154)         |
| Observations                | 43,395             | 43,459           | 41,285                | 43,131              | 43,086                   | 43,173         | 39,548          |
| Number of groups            | 33                 | 33               | 33                    | 33                  | 33                       | 33             | 32              |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table 2.** Determinants of political participation in Europe (ESS 2002-2014)

|                             | (1)<br>Political<br>Interest       | (2)<br>Party ID                    | (3)<br>Political<br>Information    | (4)<br>Contact<br>Politicians      | (5)<br>Work for<br>Party           | (6)<br>Protest                     | (7)<br>Vote                       |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>VARIABLES</b>            |                                    |                                    |                                    |                                    |                                    |                                    |                                   |
| <b>Female</b>               | <b>-0.225***</b><br><b>(0.003)</b> | <b>-0.219***</b><br><b>(0.007)</b> | <b>-0.156***</b><br><b>(0.004)</b> | <b>-0.290***</b><br><b>(0.010)</b> | <b>-0.473***</b><br><b>(0.018)</b> | <b>-0.179***</b><br><b>(0.015)</b> | <b>0.050***</b><br><b>(0.009)</b> |
| Age                         | 0.010***<br>(0.000)                | 0.022***<br>(0.000)                | 0.011***<br>(0.000)                | 0.010***<br>(0.000)                | 0.009***<br>(0.000)                | -0.014***<br>(0.000)               | 0.037***<br>(0.000)               |
| Education                   | 0.057***<br>(0.000)                | 0.051***<br>(0.001)                | 0.031***<br>(0.001)                | 0.095***<br>(0.001)                | 0.090***<br>(0.002)                | 0.086***<br>(0.001)                | 0.093***<br>(.001)                |
| Income                      | 0.071***<br>(0.002)                | 0.106***<br>(0.005)                | 0.043***<br>(0.002)                | 0.022**<br>(0.007)                 | 0.108***<br>(0.012)                | -0.003<br>(0.009)                  | 0.187***<br>(0.006)               |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0.026***<br>(0.002)                | 0.087***<br>(0.001)                | 0.011***<br>(0.001)                | -0.002<br>(0.002)                  | 0.012**<br>(0.004)                 | -0.047***<br>(0.003)               | 0.082***<br>(0.002)               |
| Employment status           | 0.010**<br>(0.003)                 | -0.007<br>(0.008)                  | -0.055***<br>(0.004)               | 0.250***<br>(0.011)                | 0.103***<br>(0.020)                | -0.037**<br>(0.015)                | 0.317***<br>(0.010)               |
| Urban                       | 0.051***<br>(0.003)                | 0.010<br>(0.008)                   | 0.055***<br>(0.004)                | -0.317***<br>(0.011)               | -0.186***<br>(0.019)               | 0.390***<br>(0.017)                | -0.217***<br>(0.010)              |
| Constant                    | 0.954***<br>(0.032)                | -2.316***<br>(0.069)               | 0.150***<br>(0.028)                | -3.427***<br>(0.077)               | -4.858***<br>(0.089)               | -3.157***<br>(0.131)               | -2.456***<br>(0.106)              |
| Observations                | 302,984                            | 297,213                            | 155,761                            | 302,958                            | 303,016                            | 302,851                            | 280,764                           |
| Number of groups            | 32                                 | 32                                 | 32                                 | 32                                 | 32                                 | 32                                 | 32                                |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table 3.** Determinants of political participation in Latin America (LAPOP 2004-2014)

|                             | (1)                | (2)              | (3)                   | (4)                 | (5)              | (6)              | (7)             |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| VARIABLES                   | Political Interest | Party ID         | Political Information | Contact Politicians | Work for Party   | Protest          | Vote            |
| <b>Female</b>               | <b>-0.151***</b>   | <b>-0.129***</b> | <b>-0.169***</b>      | <b>0.021</b>        | <b>-0.191***</b> | <b>-0.172***</b> | <b>0.207***</b> |
|                             | <b>(0.006)</b>     | <b>(0.014)</b>   | <b>(0.010)</b>        | <b>(0.015)</b>      | <b>(0.022)</b>   | <b>(0.023)</b>   | <b>(0.016)</b>  |
| Age                         | 0.003***           | 0.016***         | 0.003***              | 0.010***            | 0.009***         | -0.003***        | 0.052***        |
|                             | (0.000)            | (0.000)          | (0.000)               | (0.000)             | (0.001)          | (0.001)          | (0.001)         |
| Education                   | 0.100***           | 0.061***         | 0.180***              | 0.079***            | 0.158***         | 0.157***         | 0.188***        |
|                             | (0.002)            | (0.005)          | (0.004)               | (0.006)             | (0.008)          | (0.009)          | (0.006)         |
| Income                      | 0.019***           | 0.030***         | 0.066***              | -0.042***           | 0.104***         | -0.006           | 0.004           |
|                             | (0.001)            | (0.003)          | (0.002)               | (0.003)             | (0.014)          | (0.005)          | (0.003)         |
| Satisfaction with democracy | 0.106***           | 0.250***         | 0.011                 | 0.014               | 0.080***         | -0.077***        | 0.104***        |
|                             | (0.004)            | (0.009)          | (0.007)               | (0.010)             | (0.015)          | (0.015)          | (0.011)         |
| Employment status           | 0.040***           | 0.148***         | 0.043***              | 0.164***            | 0.358***         | 0.219***         | 0.555***        |
|                             | (0.006)            | (0.014)          | (0.011)               | (0.015)             | (0.024)          | (0.024)          | (0.017)         |
| Urban                       | -0.041***          | -0.121***        | 0.338***              | -0.308***           | -0.118***        | 0.059**          | -0.170***       |
|                             | (0.006)            | (0.015)          | (0.011)               | (0.016)             | (0.024)          | (0.025)          | (0.017)         |
| Constant                    | 1.373***           | -2.227***        | 1.117***              | -1.837***           | -3.794***        | -2.287***        | -1.908***       |
|                             | (0.034)            | (0.129)          | (0.083)               | (0.289)             | (0.130)          | (0.126)          | (0.119)         |
| Observations                | 117,886            | 116,686          | 40,334                | 118,612             | 97,662           | 98,513           | 117,102         |
| Number of groups            | 22                 | 22               | 22                    | 22                  | 21               | 22               | 22              |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table 4.** Predicted probabilities of electoral participation, by sex (ESS and LAPOP)

| <b>ISSP</b>  |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Female       | .85 |
| Male         | .84 |
| <b>ESS</b>   |     |
| Female       | .81 |
| Male         | .80 |
| <b>LAPOP</b> |     |
| Female       | .78 |
| Male         | .75 |

**Table 5.** Determinants of civic duty to vote, to be politically active, and to keep watch on government (ISSP 2014)

| VARIABLES          | (1)<br>Civic duty to vote         | (2)<br>Duty to be<br>politically active | (3)<br>Duty to keep watch<br>on government |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Female</b>      | <b>0.193***</b><br><b>(0.022)</b> | <b>0.034</b><br><b>(0.024)</b>          | <b>-0.022</b><br><b>(0.021)</b>            |
| Age                | 0.020***<br>(0.001)               | 0.007***<br>(0.001)                     | 0.011***<br>(0.001)                        |
| Education          | 0.022***<br>(0.003)               | -0.001<br>(0.003)                       | 0.007**<br>(0.003)                         |
| Political interest | 0.515***<br>(0.014)               | 0.412***<br>(0.014)                     | 0.456***<br>(0.013)                        |
| Employment status  | -0.030<br>(0.024)                 | -0.127***<br>(0.026)                    | -0.109***<br>(0.023)                       |
| Urban              | -0.076***<br>(0.025)              | -0.105***<br>(0.027)                    | 0.074***<br>(0.023)                        |
| Constant           | -1.511***<br>(0.129)              | -2.437***<br>(0.134)                    | -1.516***<br>(0.127)                       |
| Observations       | 44,675                            | 43,769                                  | 44,034                                     |
| Number of groups   | 33                                | 33                                      | 33   |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table 6.** Predicted probabilities of civic duty (ISSP 2014)

| Value on the independent variable  | Predicted probability |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| All variables at their mean values | .71                   |
| Male                               | .69                   |
| Female                             | .73                   |
| Primary education                  | .69                   |
| Higher education                   | .73                   |
| Age 18-24                          | .60                   |
| Age 25-34                          | .65                   |
| Age 35-49                          | .70                   |
| Age 50-64                          | .75                   |
| Age > 64                           | .79                   |
| Low political interest (1)         | .56                   |
| High political interest (4)        | .85                   |
| Employed                           | .71                   |
| Unemployed                         | .72                   |
| Urban                              | .71                   |
| Rural                              | .72                   |

**Table 7.** Mediation Analysis (ISSP 2014)

|                    | (1)<br>Vote         | (2)<br>Civic duty<br>to vote | (3)<br>Vote         |
|--------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>VARIABLES</b>   |                     |                              |                     |
| Female             | 0.053**<br>(0.026)  | 0.087***<br>(0.021)          | 0.043<br>(0.028)    |
| Civic duty to vote |                     |                              | 1.355***<br>(0.029) |
| Constant           | 1.639***<br>(0.137) | 0.882***<br>(0.103)          | 0.829***<br>(0.136) |
| Observations       | 42,060              | 46,494                       | 41,363              |
| Number of groups   | 32                  | 33                           | 32                  |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table 8. Four duty indicators**

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Question wording</i>   | <i>Answer options</i>  | <i>Recodification</i> |
|-------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| CHOICE      | Different people feel differently about voting. For some voting is a duty. They feel that they should vote in every election however they feel about the candidates and parties. For some, voting is a choice. They feel free to vote or not to vote in an election depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. For you personally, is voting in an election first and foremost a duty or a choice? (if duty) How strongly do you feel that voting in an election is a duty: | (0) choice/don't know; (1) Duty: not very strongly; (2) Duty: somewhat strongly; (3) Duty, very strongly | (0) 0/1; (1) 2/3      |
| GUILTY      | How guilty would you feel if you did not vote in an election?   | (0) I would not feel guilty at all ... (10) I would feel extremely guilty                                | (0) 0/7 (1) 8/10      |
| COUNTRY     | I see voting as a way to show love for my country.  | (0) Fully disagree ... (10) Fully agree  | (0) 0/7 (1) 8/10      |
| OPINION     | It is OK to abstain if you have no opinion in an election.  | (0) Fully disagree ... (10) Fully agree  | (0) 3/10 (1) 0/2      |

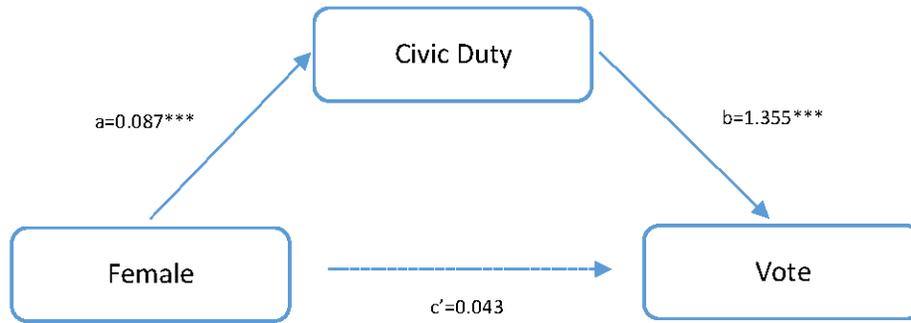
Source: Sauger et al. (2015) and Blais & Galais (2016)

**Table 9.** Determinants of Electoral Participation and Civic Duty (CED-EU14)

|                           | (1)            | (3)                   | (6)             |
|---------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|                           | Vote           | Civic duty<br>to vote | Vote            |
| VARIABLES                 |                |                       |                 |
| <b>Female</b>             | <b>0.086*</b>  | <b>0.049***</b>       | <b>0.067</b>    |
|                           | <b>(0.047)</b> | <b>(0.014)</b>        | <b>(0.048)</b>  |
| <b>Civic duty (scale)</b> |                |                       | <b>0.525***</b> |
|                           |                |                       | <b>(0.027)</b>  |
| Age                       | 0.022***       | 0.007***              | 0.020***        |
|                           | (0.002)        | (0.000)               | (0.002)         |
| Education                 | 0.072***       | 0.008*                | 0.066***        |
|                           | (0.016)        | (0.005)               | (0.016)         |
| Income                    | 0.106***       | 0.009***              | 0.107***        |
|                           | (0.010)        | (0.003)               | (0.010)         |
| Political interest        | 0.179***       | 0.111***              | 0.138***        |
|                           | (0.009)        | (0.003)               | (0.009)         |
| Employment status         | 0.016          | 0.112***              | -0.036          |
|                           | (0.050)        | (0.015)               | (0.051)         |
| Constant                  | -0.856***      | 0.318***              | -1.117***       |
|                           | (0.163)        | (0.049)               | (0.166)         |
| Observations              | 18,435         | 19,706                | 18,435          |
| Number of groups          | 7              | 7                     | 7               |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Figure 1.** Mediation Model

Percent of Total Effect Mediated: 0.45

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## Online Appendix

**Table A1.** Determinants of civic duty to vote, to be politically active, and to keep watch on government (ISSP 2014)

| VARIABLES          | Logistic regressions<br>w/ country fixed effects |                              |                          | Logistic regressions w/ clustered<br>standard errors (by country) |                              |                          |
|--------------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------|
|                    | (1)<br>Vote duty                                 | (2)<br>Participation<br>duty | (3)<br>Watch GVT<br>duty | (4)<br>Vote duty  | (5)<br>Participation<br>duty | (6)<br>Watch GVT<br>duty |
| Female             | 0.192***<br>(0.022)                              | 0.034<br>(0.024)             | -0.026<br>(0.021)        | 0.169***<br>(0.040)   | 0.010<br>(0.035)             | -0.033<br>(0.026)        |
| Age                | 0.246***<br>(0.009)                              | 0.095***<br>(0.010)          | 0.139***<br>(0.009)      | 0.179***<br>(0.033)   | -0.029<br>(0.035)            | 0.104***<br>(0.031)      |
| Education          | 0.113***<br>(0.020)                              | -0.009<br>(0.021)            | 0.024<br>(0.018)         | -0.023<br>(0.079)   | -0.299***<br>(0.091)         | -0.094<br>(0.069)        |
| Political interest | 0.521***<br>(0.014)                              | 0.416***<br>(0.014)          | 0.462***<br>(0.013)      | 0.513***<br>(0.051)   | 0.368***<br>(0.057)          | 0.372***<br>(0.061)      |
| Employment status  | -0.071***<br>(0.024)                             | -0.149***<br>(0.025)         | -0.131***<br>(0.022)     | -0.142***<br>(0.045)  | -0.280***<br>(0.054)         | -0.159***<br>(0.039)     |
| Urban              | -0.074***<br>(0.025)                             | -0.108***<br>(0.027)         | 0.075***<br>(0.023)      | 0.069<br>(0.071)  | -0.016<br>(0.051)            | 0.267***<br>(0.062)      |
| Constant           | -0.830***<br>(0.107)                             | -3.013***<br>(0.113)         | -1.010***<br>(0.092)     | -0.959***<br>(0.347)  | -1.155***<br>(0.395)         | -0.986***<br>(0.290)     |
| Observations       | 44,910   | 43,999                       | 44,272                   | 44,910  | 43,999                       | 44,272                   |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

**Table A2.** Determinants of belief that voting is important to be a good citizen (ISSP 2014)

| VARIABLES                      | (1)<br>Importance of voting<br>for citizenship |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>Female</b>                  | <b>0.169***</b><br><b>(0.015)</b>              |
| Age                            | 0.170***<br>(0.006)                            |
| Education                      | 0.077***<br>(0.013)                            |
| Political interest             | 0.395***<br>(0.009)                            |
| Employment status              | -0.020<br>(0.016)                              |
| Urban                          | -0.043**<br>(0.017)                            |
| Constant                       | 4.103***<br>(0.083)                            |
| Observations                   | 44,910   |
| Number of groups               | 33   |
| Standard errors in parentheses |  |
| *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1 |  |

**Table A3.** Mediation Analysis with alternative measure of civic duty (ISSP 2014)

|                                    | (1)<br>Vote         | (2)<br>Importance of vote<br>for citizenship | (3)<br>Vote          |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|--|----------------------|
| <b>VARIABLES</b>                   |                     |  |                      |
| Female                             | 0.053**<br>(0.026)  | 0.088***<br>(0.015)                          | 0.025<br>(0.028)     |
| Importance of vote for citizenship |                     |  | 0.404***<br>(0.008)  |
| Constant                           | 1.639***<br>(0.137) | 5.787***<br>(0.071)                          | -0.553***<br>(0.143) |
| Observations                       | 42,060              | 46,494                                       | 41,363               |
| Number of groups                   | 32                  | 33   | 32                   |

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1