

# **Gender Gap's Endurance in Political Attitudes: The Role of Individual Resources, Situational Factors and Socialization**

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the role of individual resources, situational factors and the socialization process in the endurance of a gender gap in political attitudes in contemporary Spain. We pay special attention to the reasons explaining why the effect of cohort replacement might be at some point interrupted by life-cycle aspects, particularly those related to the power and resources balance between the members of the couple. We find that the causal mechanisms behind political engagement vary with gender. Overall, women are more conditioned by situational factors such as the amount of time devoted to housekeeping and the (in)egalitarian distribution of domestic tasks within the couple.

**Key words:** Gender gap, political participation, political attitudes, domestic political economy

## Introduction

Despite Spain has rapidly made significant and rapid progress in the feminization of all layers of government (Astelarra, 1990; Uriarte and Elizondo, 1997; Valiente, 2008, Verge, 2009), gender still contributes to determine the differentiated political behavior of men and women. Regarding political culture, turnout, or participation in political and social organizations, Spain has been traditionally one of the European countries in which gender differences were larger (Cantijoch and Tormos, 2005; García-Escribano and Frutos, 1999; Morán and Jorge Benedicto, 1995; Justel, 1995).

Gender differences in political participation have notably shrank in the past decades across advanced industrial democracies thanks to the increasing access of women to the labor market and the progressive matching between men's and women's educational attainment and the corresponding generational replacement (Inglehart, 1991). However, differences are still found in some aspects.

The third wave of the European Social Survey (2006) shows that, among the 23 countries under study, Spain ranks eighth when it comes to the gender gap in interest in politics or party membership. In relation to interest in politics, as Morales (1999: 235) indicates, women consider politics to be important in their lives even more than men do but they are less interested in it. Regarding party membership, it can be observed that youth organizations affiliated to political parties present a gender-balanced, parity, composition<sup>1</sup>. When members grow old and transfer to political parties the gender gap gradually augments. Whereas up to 25 years female and male party membership is quite similar, in the 26-40 year group female presence dramatically decreases (Verge, 2009: 59). Not surprisingly, this period in women's life cycle is characterized by maternity, full incorporation to the labor market, and the increase in family responsibilities derived from children and elderly care, a source of family burden which is very often unequally distributed between women and husbands.

Several authors have argued that gender relates substantively the reproductive sphere with the productive sphere, that is women's and men's participation in one sphere affects their participation in the other one as well as the activities performed in the reproductive domain sustain and subsidize the productive activities (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 127-28; Valdés and Fernández,

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<sup>1</sup> The European Commission has defined 'parity' as a 40-60 per cent range of representation for either sex (1998).

2006: 18). Hence, it can be claim that the former install a "gender order" (Connell, 2002). Therefore, it may be that this sexual division of paid and unpaid labor prevents generational replacement from producing significant effects as women's life cycle still imposes strong constrains to all cohorts.

Gender is considered one of the explanatory variables in multivariate models which seek to account for differences between men and women in relation to political culture, turnout/abstention, or participation in social organizations. Three main explanations have been considered: first, the structural explanation argues that different access to resources (income, educational attainment or occupational status) disadvantages women when participating in politics (Schlozman et al., 1994); second, the situational explanation emphasizes that the family responsibilities women bear (as wives, carers and homemakers) inhibit their political participation (Welch, 1977); and, third, the socialization process in gender roles which establish different beliefs and attitudes about politics (Rapoport, 1985; Jennings and Niemi, 1971; Jennings, 1983; Sapiro, 2004). These explanations do not need being mutually exclusive but may complement each other.

In order to deepen into the knowledge of the gender gap, we claim that the very same research should be structured around gender. That is, we need to design surveys in which gender is the main variable so we shall be able to examine why the effect of cohort replacement might be at some point interrupted by life-cycle aspects, especially those related to the marital power and resources balance between women and husbands.

The data presented in this study comes from a face-to-face survey conducted in February 2009 by the Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió de la Generalitat de Catalunya (CEO). The sample is representative of the Catalan population aged 18-65 ( $N=1,483$ )<sup>2</sup>. Stratified sampling was implemented (by provinces and town size) and respondents were randomly selected applying age and sex quotas. The margin of error is  $\pm 2.59$  per cent – for a 95 per cent confidence interval ( $p=q=0.5$ ).

The survey contained numerous gender-linked questions as it was aimed at unveiling the differences between men and women in the household, as well as in the social, economic, and political realms. To prevent inclining the respondent towards a particular disposition (both to respond the survey and to do so in the

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<sup>2</sup> The adjusted response rate was 50.3 per cent, using the following AAPOR's (2008) calculus method of response distributions: complete/eligible plus estimated eligible among sample of unknown eligibility.

most socially desired way) the survey was introduced by interviewers as one which dealt with family and work issues.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. The first section explores the gender differences in political culture as well as in social and political participation. The second section examines with a greater detail the reasons behind the gender gap among the cohorts which present larger attitudinal differences. Apart from the classic demographic and situational variables, we also incorporate in the analysis some variables which account for the power distribution within the household, refining the traditional variables used by the situational model. Besides, we control for the effect of female politicians on political attitudes and we also include a proxy variable for gendered socialization. The final section concludes.

## **Gender and Political Participation**

The gender gap in political participation has been narrowing in Western polities in the last decades. Gender differences are quite small in political activism and they are almost negligible in electoral turnout (Topf, 1995; Schlozman et al., 1994; Verba et al., 1997). They are a bit larger but shrinking in non-conventional participation (Gundelach, 1995; Ferrer et al., 2006).

Table 1 presents evidence in this direction for the Catalan case. There appears to be non significant differences between men and women with respect to their participation in civil society organizations and social movements. With regards to conventional participation in activities like voting or attending political meetings both genders' behavior is almost indistinguishable. When it comes to unconventional participation, we just identify some slight differences with respect to consumption-boycotting, more frequent among women, and denouncing problems in the media, preferred by men. Nevertheless, the gender gap has eroded in other so-called unconventional activities such as signing a petition, participating in protest marches and strikes.

This situation is quite different to previous studies of the Spanish case. Morales (1999) presented clear evidence of a gender gap in unconventional participation and participation on social movements during the nineties.

Table 1. Political participation

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

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

Table 2 presents the gender differences in political efficacy and interest in politics. As usual, the former is divided into internal and external. Internal political efficacy captures the belief in one's own ability to understand what is going on in the political sphere, while external political efficacy measures the individual's perception of the capacity to influence political affairs and her/his confidence in the responsiveness of elected officials

Feelings of efficacy are highly correlated with participation in social and political life (Niemi et al., 1991). Efficacy usually increases with age and education level (Koch, 1997; Verba et al., 1995). Interest in politics is usually an indicator of political involvement. This predisposition is an important determinant of other related political attitudes and behaviors (Morales, 1999).

The data presented in Table 2 shows clear evidence of a still enduring gender gap in these political attitudes. Already highlighted by Angus Campbell et al. in 1960, the gender gap in internal political efficacy has remained more or less constant through the sweeping changes that have transformed many women's lives.

In Table 2 we can see there is a ten-point difference between men's and women's internal efficacy. Women are less self-confident in their political abilities and more prone to think that politics is too complicated. There is also a gap in the same direction regarding external political efficacy, though it is less pronounced. Women trust less in the capacity of citizens to influence the political sphere. The

difference between men and women also appears visibly in interest in politics. Women are less motivated and concerned than men about politics.

In the second section we will define regression models to see if these differences still endure when controlling for resources and situational factors.

Table 2. Political attitudes: political efficacy and interest in politics

	Men (%)	Women (%)	
<i>Internal efficacy</i>	58.6	48.6	***
<i>External efficacy</i>	50.3	45.5	*
<i>Interest in politics</i>	28.5	22.6	**
	N=755	N=727	

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

Table 3 takes into account potential age or generational differences in non-conventional participation, turnout, internal and external political efficacy, and interest in politics. We can not see any significant difference pointing out a potential generation or life cycle effect in the first two variables. The fact that the sample only contains people until the age of 65, can explain why there is no clear sign of age effects in non-conventional participation and life-cycle patterns in voting. The only case in which we appreciate age or generation-related differences is in internal political efficacy and interest in politics.

As to internal political efficacy, the gender gap is found in the three cohorts selected in the study, the largest affecting the 50-65 year group. This age group is also the only one which presents statistically significant differences in external political efficacy – a variable where the gender gap is usually absent (Marshall et al., 2007).

The younger the age group, the less interested in politics it is. Low interest in politics is evenly distributed among young men and women aged 18-34 (see Table 4). The two older cohorts present significant statistical differences, men showing more interest than women.

Among the older cohorts we appreciate that, although women attribute a similar importance to politics in their lives than men do (differences are not statistically significant), they are less interested in it. This pattern is reversed in the youngest cohort. Women aged 18-34 assign a greater importance to politics (the

difference being statistically significant) but they are less interested in it than their male peers (in this case significance disappears).

Table 3. Generational gender gap in political engagement

Years (Cohort) <sup>1</sup>		50-65 (1961-76)	35-49 (1977-91)	18-34 (1992-08)
Non-conventional political participation <sup>2</sup>	<i>T-test</i> ( <i>Levene's F</i> )	5.061 (p>0.10)	1.622 (p>0.10)	2.628 (p>0.10)
Voting (2006 Catalan regional elections)	$\chi^2$ (df=1)	0.177 (p>0.10)	0.101 (p>0.10)	0.001 (p>0.10)
Internal political efficacy	$\chi^2$ (df=1)	9.083 (p<0.01)	3.001 (p<0.05)	4.506 (p<0.05)
External political efficacy	$\chi^2$ (df=1)	3.198 (p<0.05)	0.283 (p>0.10)	0.912 (p>0.10)
Interest in politics	$\chi^2$ (df=3)	18.809 (p<0.01)	6.618 (p<0.10)	1.749 (p>0.10)

<sup>1</sup> Period in which members of the group turned 18 years old.

<sup>2</sup> An index has been created for the following unconventional participation activities: Has signed a petition, Has participated in protest marches, Has taken part in a strike, Has bought/stopped buying certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, Has addressed to mass media to denounce a problem.

Table 4. Interest in politics and importance of politics by cohort and gender

Years (Cohort) <sup>1</sup>		50-65 (1961-76)		35-49 (1977-91)		18-34 (1992-08)	
		M	W	M	W	M	W
Importance of politics (1-10 scale)	<i>Mean</i> <i>T-test</i> ( <i>Levene's F</i> )	3.45	3.06	3.48	3.35	2.80	3.19
		p>0.1		p>0.1		p<0.1	
Interest in politics (Very interested + quite interested)	<i>Percentage</i> $\chi^2$ (df=3)	35.1	22.6	31.0	24.9	21.8	20.8
		p<0.01		p<0.1		p>0.1	

M = Male; F = Female.

<sup>1</sup> Period in which members of the group turned 18 years old.

## The "private roots" of gendered engagement

The place women occupy in the family and the productive sector – that is, the sexual division of labor – produces serious constraints for their participation in political organizations and public institutions and even affects their political

engagement. Gendered socialization processes both in childhood and adulthood along with diverse roles in the workplace and the family between men and women shape political attitudes as well as access to the resources that facilitate political participation. Women are socialized for the private domain and its values, where religion has played a predominant role (Astelarra, 2003; Torns et al., 2007: 23). This has also generated effects on the vote, with women traditionally having identified with and voted to a much greater extent than men for right-wing parties<sup>3</sup> (Duverger, 1955; Lipset, 1960; Inglehart and Norris, 2000).

The domestic political economy of the family translates into differential power of husbands and wives both inside and outside the home, such as the marketplace and politics (Blumberg and Coleman, 1989). This is what Burns et al. (2001) call the "private roots of public action". Political participation is anchored in private life and social institutions play a very important role in fostering inequalities (including the family, school, workplace, voluntary associations, and church).

Despite the traditional patriarchal family has been replaced by other family models, men have maintained their roles and women, who now extensively form part of the labor market, have not lost their responsibility for managing and caring of the home (Carrasco and Recio, 2001: 278). Despite several surveys show that both female and male respondents prefer an egalitarian family model in which work inside and outside the home is equally distributed (see Cea D'Ancona, 2007: 208) women overwhelmingly take responsibility for most of the housework and relatives' care (the children and the elderly). This reduces their time availability, thus limiting their participation in public life (Phillips, 1991: 100). As Schlozman et al. (1994: 974) posited: "Free time varies, not with gender, but with such life circumstances such as working fulltime or having preschool children at home. However, these life circumstances do not, on average, affect the time available to men and women in quite the same way"<sup>4</sup>.

A research carried out in Spain in 2004 showed that 45.1 per cent of women assume alone all household tasks whereas only 7.1 per cent of men faces this

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<sup>3</sup> The "traditional gender gap" is currently changing as Inglehart and Norris (2000) have recently proved. Women have become more left-wing than men, particularly women belonging to the younger generations, installing a "modern gender gap" (see also Norris, 1999). Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006: 12) also argue that women in the work force are more likely to vote for left-wing parties because these parties tend to deliver social policies which lift the family burden.

<sup>4</sup> The existing distribution of domestic tasks also increases the costs of job-specialization for women, thus resulting in a sex-segregation on wages (Polavieja, 2008), which, in turn, affects the resources available to women. That is, "marketable skills are at least (partly) function of time spent on household labor" (Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006: 6).

situation; 40 per cent of employed women are also exclusively responsible for the caring of their under-12 children (men do so in 3.1 per cent of cases). Finally, 42 per cent of salaried women take care of the elderly on their own and just 9.8 per cent of women share this responsibility with their partner (Chicano, 2004: 102-103). Indeed, family responsibilities are one of the most relevant factors that limit the supply of women candidates (Astelarra, 2003). It is not surprising that in the legislative period 2004-2008 83 per cent of male MPs at the Congress of Deputies were married whereas only 59 per cent of female MPs were so. Similarly, the eight male ministers of the first paritary cabinet formed by the PSOE in 2004 added up to 22 children; the eight female ministers, just five (Verge, 2006: 190).

The survey we are analyzing in this study contains several indicators of household-task distribution<sup>5</sup>. Table 5 illustrates that most household labor is performed by women, no matter what task it is. Each variable (ironing, cooking, cleaning, shopping, and childcare) ranges from 1 to 7, with 4 being an even sharing of work. The higher the value, the more tasks are carried out exclusively or almost exclusively by women. As it can be seen, inequality is acute with regards to ironing cooking and cleaning. Men only provide a higher contribution when it comes to shopping or child care.

Table 5. Distribution of domestic tasks

	Ironing	Cooking	Cleaning	Shopping	Childcare
Mean	5.62	5.18	5.25	4.70	4.84
S.D.	1.66	1.73	1.59	1.53	1.52
Observations	788	827	808	826	695

S.D. Standard deviation.

The values contained in each variable are the following: 1 'always the man', 2 'usually the man', 3 'man with help from a third party', 4 'even distribution between man and woman', 5 'women with help from a third party', 6 'usually the woman', and 7 'always the woman'. This questions were only asked to interviewees living with her or his partner.

In the survey we also asked the amount of weekly hours the respondent devoted to household tasks (excluding child care). Women declare to spend 18.20 hours per week whereas men just work in the home 10.34 hours per week<sup>6</sup>. Life

<sup>5</sup> These variables are not so precise to calculate the distribution of domestic tasks as time diaries are but they can still serve as useful measures of it (see Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> It is reasonable to suspect that this report might be inflated. Actually, overreporting affects both men and women although it has been proved, comparing direct responses to time diaries, that

cycle, particularly parenthood, inevitably should impose more hours in household tasks. Nevertheless, Table 6 shows that men between 50-65 years spend fewer hours to these tasks than their 35-49 peers. Conversely, women experience a steady increase in the number of hours devoted to household tasks along their life. So, among the 50-65 year group, we find the largest gender difference in the number of hours spent working in the home (11.79 hours compared to 5.53 hours among the 18-34 cohort and 7.29 among the 35-49 cohort).

Table 6. Weekly hours devoted to domestic tasks

Years (Cohort) <sup>1</sup>	50-65 (1961-76)		35-49 (1977-91)		18-34 (1992-08)	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
Mean	10.14	21.93	11.81	19.10	9.05	14.58
S.D.	7.29	10.46	8.45	10.47	7.72	10.43
Observations	188	196	270	250	278	264

<sup>1</sup> Period in which members of the group turned 18 years old.

Mean weekly hours. M = Male; F = Female.

S.D. Standard deviation.

Next we will define regression models in order to explain the endurance of the gender gap in some political attitudes. First, we will explore if gender differences in internal political efficacy still persist when controlling by a group of independent variables which include individual socio-economic resources and situational factors among others. Should gender differences remain, it might well mean that unobserved variables linked to the socialization process could account for them. We will also specify regression models to separately explain the interest in politics of men and women over the age of 34. In this case, respondents below 34 years are excluded from the analysis as no gender gap can be traced. By doing so, we try to ask the question of whether the factors influencing men's interest in politics are the same as those influencing women's. Finally we look at the effect of equal distribution of household tasks within couples in the levels of political interest of both sexes when controlling by socio-economic resources in a subsample of respondents over 34 and living with a partner.

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husbands overreport 2.2 times more than wives do. Furthermore, the effects of gender mediate the effects of class and educational level quite differently for wives and husbands: educated husbands who avow egalitarian gender attitudes are more likely to feel pressure to overreport their household contribution and privileged women are more likely to report more accurately as they are more able to buy their way out of time constraints associated with housework and child care (see Press and Townsley, 1998: 193, 212).

*Modeling internal political efficacy*

In Table 7 we present the regression of internal political efficacy on a set variables informing on respondent's socio-economic resources: education, age, subjective social class<sup>7</sup> and religiosity; situational factors: living with a partner, having kids under the age of 12, labor market participation, and the weekly hours devoted to household tasks (excluding childcare); living in a town with a female mayor; and having/having had a mother who was/or still is a housekeeper, used as a proxy of parental socialization.

Table 7. Internal political efficacy

	B	Exp(B)
Constant	-3.861*** (0.779)	0.021
Sex	-0.368** (0.186)	0.692
Educational level	0.076 (0.076)	1.078
Age	0.015 (0.005)	1.012
Catholic (practicing)	0.208 (0.205)	1.231
Subjective social class	0.950*** (0.127)	2.584
Weekly hours devoted to household tasks (excluding childcare)	0.000 (0.008)	1.000
Lives with partner	0.286 (0.184)	0.702
Kids under 12	-0.082 (0.131)	0.921
Labor market (present/past) participation	0.670** (0.342)	1.954
Female mayor	-0.217 (0.241)	0.805
Mother housekeeper	-0,032 (0.164)	0.969
Nagelkerke's R-squared	0.171	
-2 Log-Likelihood	946.464	
-2LL change-pvalue	0.000	
Observations	N=1483	

Dependent variable: Internal political efficacy, 'Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I find it difficult to understand what is going on' (1 'fairly disagree' 0 'fairly agree').  
Standard errors in parentheses. Estimation method: Logistic egression.  
Significance: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.10.

<sup>7</sup> Respondents had to choose themselves among the different social class positions: lower class, lower-middle class, middle-class, upper-middle class, and upper class.

The results demonstrate that internal political efficacy is highly conditioned by a socio-economic factor: the respondent's subjective social class. Just as the resources theory predicts, having a better social position contributes to improve the odds of one's sense of internal political efficacy. Labor market participation is also a relevant situational factor (works/has worked). Respondents who work or have worked in the past are more likely to feel more politically efficacious.

Almost no other variable included in the model appears to be significant for the explanation of this attitude but gender. Gender differences clearly remain as relevant predictors even after controlling for socio-economic resources, situational indicators and other variables. Nevertheless, the sense of internal efficacy also seems to be affected by an unmeasured factor possibly related to socialization which is being captured by the variable gender.

### *Modeling political involvement*

Political involvement is considered to be an important factor explaining both conventional political participation and gender differences in Spain (Morales, 1999). But what are the factors which explain the different levels of political involvement of men and women? More specifically, do these factors influence men and women the same way? In order to answer this question we have specified two equivalent regression models for explaining the level of political interest and applied them separately to men and women over the age of 34. We exclude the younger age group from the analysis, as we have previously seen that there is no gender gap in political interest among them. Table 8 shows the estimates of the two OLS regressions. Included as independent variables there are a set of indicators of socio-economic resources (education, age, subjective social class, and religiosity), of situational factors<sup>8</sup> (weekly hours devoted to household tasks), internal political efficacy; living in a town where there is a woman mayor; and having a mother who was or still is a housekeeper, a variable we use as a proxy of parental socialization.

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<sup>8</sup> We had initially specified a model with the whole set of situational factors: living with a partner, having kids under the age of 12, labor market participation, and weekly hours devoted to household tasks. However, none of the first three variables was significant; therefore we excluded them from the final model. Other authors have also proved that marriage or children do not have significant effects on political engagement (Welch, 1977: 724; Marshall et al., 2007: 12).

Table 8 shows that the causal mechanisms explaining the political interest of men are somewhat different from those accounting for women's. Social class has a significant effect in the female sub-sample. Women with higher social status tend to care more about politics, whereas that is not the case amongst men. Men's interest in politics is not affected by social class. Instead, education attainment exerts the highest impact. Increasing women's educational level produces only half the increase in political interest than in the case of men. The interest in politics of men and women over 34 is similarly affected by one year increase in their age. Being a practicing catholic has no impact in any of the two samples.

Table 8. Political interest by gender

	Men	Women
Constant	0.857*** (0.273)	0.838*** (0.293)
Weekly hours devoted to household tasks (excluding child care)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.008** (0.004)
Educational level	0.167*** (0.032)	0.093*** (0.036)
Age	0.008** (0.004)	0.008* (0.004)
Catholic (practicing)	-0.099 (0.094)	-0.151 (0.094)
Internal political efficacy	0.436*** (0.077)	0.555*** (0.077)
Subjective social class	0.052 (0.055)	0.112** (0.057)
Female Mayor	0.199* (0.110)	0.323*** (0.120)
Mother housekeeper	-0.130* (0.074)	-0.018 (0.077)
R-squared	0.177	0.213
F	11.367	13.640
F-pvalue	0.000	0.000
Observations	N=431	N=411

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

Coefficients from OLS regressions. Standard errors in parentheses.

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

Even after including several indicators of socio-economic resources, the situational factor we have included remains significant in the women's sub-sample. The amount of hours devoted to household tasks does have an effect on women's interest in politics, whereas it has no impact in the case of men. Women's motivation towards politics is negatively conditioned by the amount of time

dedicated to housekeeping. It could also be possible that those women who are more interested in politics are those dedicating less time to housework. Therefore further research should need to apply an instrumental variable approach in order to solve this potential endogeneity problem.

The sense of internal political efficacy is affecting women's more than men's political interest. Women need to feel more self-relying in order to become interested in politics. Then it could seem that the prerequisites for women's political interest are higher than for men. And, as we have already seen, in general terms, women's level of internal efficacy is lower than men's.

On the other hand, we can observe that in towns and villages where the mayor is a woman<sup>9</sup>, women are more interested in politics. In the case of men, this variable is not significant. Verba et al. (1997) argued that, besides gender differences in political engagement (information, sense of efficacy and interest in politics) and resources (such as income, educational level, civic skills, organizational affiliation and marital situation), the gender gap in political engagement can also be explained by the belief women have about the nature of politics as a 'male' domain. To support this conclusion, they offered evidence as to the positive effect that the presence of female politicians in the Senate elections has had on women's political engagement in the USA. This belief is reinforced by the low percentages of women in elected office, which deprives female constituents from female role models (Young, 2000; Campbell and Worlbrecht, 2006; Dahlerup, 2006).

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

Furthermore, exposure to female leaders can water down stereotypes about gender roles, and eradicate potential negative bias about the performance of female leaders male constituents might have (Beaman et al., 2008).

However, this variable can be as well endogenous. A third unobserved characteristic may be both causing the election of a woman as town mayor and

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<sup>9</sup> Local elections were held in May 2007.

increasing levels of women’s interest in politics. Those villages where a woman is elected as mayor might be particularly different in some sociological characteristics, and this unobserved trait may cause both women’s higher interest and their chances to become mayor. Actually, the fact that this variable has also a significant effect in the case of men (though less pronounced) could point in this direction. In future research we should apply the suitable techniques to account for this situation, like the instrumental variable approach.

Having had a mother dedicated to housekeeping unexpectedly affects only men and it does so in a negative way. In this respect, Rapoport (1985: 200) argues, parent-child transmission rates for traits and attitudes are extremely variable. Jennings and Niemi (1971, 1981) found the highest correlations on those attitudes which concern concrete rather than abstract political objects such as partisanship, candidate preference, and voting turnout. Instead, more general political orientations like political efficacy or political trust show substantially lower levels of transmission as parental cues might be in this case more diffuse and these attitudes are more complex.

Table 9. Interest in politics among couples who live together

	Men	Women
Constant	1.560*** (0.251)	1.855*** (0.278)
Difference within couple in weekly hours devoted to household tasks (excluding childcare)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.016** (0.007)
Income	0.152*** (0.047)	0.111* (0.059)
R-squared	0.054	0.075
F	5.407	5.202
F-pvalue	0.005	0.007
Observations	191	130

Coefficients from OLS regressions. Standard errors in parentheses.  
Significance: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.10.

Finally, we explore the effect that an equal distribution of household tasks within couples has in the levels of political interest depending on the gender of the respondent. We have calculated a new variable which indicates the difference in the hours devoted to household task by women and husbands, positive values indicating women invest longer hours. We have only introduced one control variable, income, as a proxy of socio-economic resources, because we are

analyzing small sub-samples of men and women: those living as a couple who are over 34 years of age.

Table 9 indicates that women become less interested in politics when they invest more time in housekeeping than their partners. However, the same does not happen in the case of men. Equal or unequal distribution of time devoted to household tasks has no effect on men's political involvement. Therefore, women's political interest is much more sensitive to an equal distribution of responsibilities in the household, giving support to the situational explanation of gender differences.

## **Concluding remarks**

This paper has sought to explore the role of individual resources, situational factors and the socialization process in the endurance of a gender gap in political attitudes in contemporary Spain. We were interested in explaining why the positive effects of cohort replacement might be at some point interrupted by life-cycle aspects, particularly those related to the power and resources balance between the members of the couple.

Given that women have enormously increased their access to the labor market and men's and women's educational attainment has progressively been reduced we could expect generational replacement to eliminate the gender gap. But while the gender gap has evaporated in relation to conventional participation, some gender differences still endure in unconventional participation and particularly in political attitudes which facilitate political engagement. In this research we have paid especial attention to the sense of internal and external political efficacy and interest in politics.

We have found that the causal mechanisms behind political engagement do vary significantly with gender. Overall, women are more conditioned by situational factors. Yet, it is not marriage or children *per se* what inhibit women's participation but more importantly the amount of time devoted to housekeeping and the (in)egalitarian distribution of domestic tasks within the couple. Women still assume the lion's share of unpaid work in the household, which reduces their time availability and, subsequently, their engagement with politics.

However, differences in the levels of men and women's internal efficacy cannot only be accounted by socio-economic and situational factors. As gender remains significant when controlling by these dimensions, it may well indicate that there is some unobserved socialization processes involved in to the persistence of the gender gap. So a promising avenue of enquiry is to explore the impact of childhood political socialization which contributes, at least indirectly, to how adults approach the political system (Easton and Dennis, 1967).

Regarding interest in politics, the causal mechanisms explaining higher interest differ by gender. Social class only has a significant effect in the female sub-sample, women with higher social status caring more about politics. Increasing women's educational level produces just half the increase in political interest than in the case of men. Being a practicing catholic has no impact in any of the two samples. After controlling for socio-economic resources, women's interest in politics is negatively conditioned by the amount of time dedicated to housekeeping whereas it has no impact in the case of men. Besides, the larger the difference in time devoted to household tasks by the two partners – that is the more unequal the marital power balance in this area is – the lower women's interest in politics is.

We have also observed that in towns with a female mayor women are more interested in politics, which can point out a positive relationship between women's political engagement and the presence of female politicians as these can act as role models and help eliminate the belief that politics is a male business. Finally, our proxy variable for the socialization process did not behave as expected. Having had a mother dedicated to housekeeping only affects men and it does so in a negative way.

We therefore call on scholars to design surveys which combine variables that can provide useful information about the socialization process and the situational factors, apart from the classic resources variable (educational attainment, occupation, income, etc.) so as to explore with greater detail the impact of each of these groups of factors in the still enduring gender gap in political engagement.

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