

Subtle but Tough: Gender Differences in Political Interests

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Abstract

To date, research on gender and political representation has predominantly centered on women. The assumption that men as a privileged group automatically gain representation is nevertheless problematic. Not only are some (dominant) groups of men better represented than others, we simply do not know what men's interests are. Up until today, however, no study has actually explored the nature of men's interests in an empirical way. This paper offers a first attempt to conceptualize and operationalize the notion of men's interests in empirical research. Based on new and original data from the 2014 PARTIREP voter survey organized in Belgium on the occasion of the 2014 federal and regional elections, we study men and women along political themes, their political visions and their voting behavior. The main question that guides our research is the following: What do gender differences in political themes and visions tell us about male (and female) interests in politics? Next to offering empirical insights into women and men's political interests, this paper also provides a theoretical contribution to broader debates on group interests. We reflect on our observation that men and women attach importance to the same political themes but have different visions about them, and what this teaches us about "male interests" and "female interests". We also launch a call for new empirical and theoretical research into men and their interests in politics.

1. Introduction

The classical research agenda on gender and political representation deals with the underrepresentation of women. This is manifested on various levels. On the one hand, women are numerically underrepresented in the representative assemblies (town councils, parliaments, etc.) as well as in the executives, on the other hand, women's interests run the risk of being underrepresented in political decision-making. As far as the latter is concerned, there is a considerable body of literature about the question if (a similar or minimal number of) female representatives are needed to efficiently defend women's causes (see Childs & Lovenduski, 2013 for an overview). The latter argument is based on the theoretical assumption that the political participation of representatives belonging to the same social group (women, but also ethnic minorities, social classes, etc.) is advantageous, and even crucial, to formulating and defending the political needs and interests of their group (Phillips, 1995). Given the numerical underrepresentation of women (the low number of female representatives), the fear exists that politics is too little concerned with the themes that are important for women and that female perspectives on certain themes are neglected in the eventual content of laws and policies.

Beside arguments about fairness and the implementation of democratic values such as equality, the existence in this logic of gender differences in interests is becoming a highly relevant argument in favor of demanding equal representation of the sexes. Feminist political scientists and activists have taken that task to heart. Since the 1960s, there has been a vivid discussion on what women's political interests are, more specifically if they stem from the welfare work of women, from "female" ethical values and norms, or from their specific positioning on the labor market and in public life (Sapiro, 1981; Diamond & Hartsock, 1981; Phillips, 1995; Celis et al., 2014). Beside that, there is research worldwide, as mentioned above, into the question if the presence of women in politics furthers the representation of these interests. Despite the very nuanced conclusions of these studies – *yes*, the presence of women in politics is advantageous for the representation of women's interests, *but* not in all conditions and not with respect to all types of women's interests – , the difference that women can make in politics is often an argument in favor of imposing quota in political life. All over the world, quota are imposed with the aim of avoiding the domination by one gender (i.e. men) of the numbers in but also the contents of politics.

Oddly, it is only recently that the question is being asked about what that male overrepresentation actually means for the representation of *men / male interests*. Does politics concern itself too much with what men find important because of the numerical overrepresentation of men, and does their vision weigh too heavily in laws and policies? What male interests are has, surprisingly, hitherto been hardly researched in gender studies. Obviously, there are studies on manhood and male gender, but these studies are not always about male political interests and do not consider them to be a reason for participation in politics. Feminist political science does indicate that what is commonly considered to be "general" interests is often interpreted from a male perspective, because men are overrepresented in positions of power, not only in politics, but also in economics, the media, etc. Men, their lifestyle and the interests resulting out of them, are quickly seen to be the norm and their interests are hence not seen as specifically male, but as "general" and "neutral". Women then become "the other" and their interests are "specific", namely female.

This premise is also nuanced, however, from the perspective of intersectional research. Intersectionality claims that forms of inequity (for instance on the basis of gender) always interact with other forms of inequity (for instance on the basis of age, social class, ethnicity,

etc.). A kaleidoscope of inequities results because of this interaction or intersection. The “male” interests, which serve as the norm for the general interests, are *de facto* often especially the interests of a small, privileged group of men (Connell, 2005). The interests of other groups of (vulnerable) men (for instance, divorcees or men from ethnic minorities) are just as likely to be underrepresented.

In this paper, the question will be tackled whether female and male political interests exist in the two main regions of Belgium, i.e. Flanders (Northern Belgium, Dutch-speaking) and Wallonia (Southern Belgium, French-speaking). The way in which this is tackled is classical, but also innovative. Since political interests cannot be interviewed directly, gender differences will be charted on the basis of the PARTIREP survey of Flemish and Walloon voters¹, concerning male and female political *themes* and *visions*. We consider that differences in political interests are expressed in various opinions and views about political themes. A “political theme” is a theme electors may find important, such as the economy, employment, state reform, defense, etc. A “political vision” is the vision that electors have on the contents of that theme. A vision, for instance, is the kind of solution that a given issue needs or the direction a policy should take. Our analyses are on a par with previous research into gender differences in attitude and voting behavior – the so-called gender gap (Inglehart & Norris, 2000) – as well as the background interests giving rise to these differences. What makes our study innovative, however, is that we do not only tackle these differences to say something about women’s interests, but also about men’s interests. The following question arises: what do gender differences in political themes and visions tell us about female and male interests in politics? What we do not research is whether these female interests (or male interests) also get too little (or too much) weight as a result of gender inequality in politics. We do contend, however, that the existence of female and male interests – as indicated by our research – along with male overrepresentation, should worry us as democrats.

In what follows, we will immediately tackle empirical data. We will first look into the question whether there are gender differences in the extent to which men and women attach importance to various political themes. Next, we will study gender differences in visions. This will be done on the basis of the left-right positioning of the electors (how they position themselves ideologically), on the basis of their voting behavior as well as their answers to a number of statements on the role of the state in the economy, libertarian versus authoritarian values and gender equality and feminism. In the conclusion, we will reflect on our observation that men and women attach importance to the same political themes but have different visions about them, and what this teaches us about “male interests” and “female interests”. The paper ends with a call for new empirical and theoretical research into men and their interests in politics.

2. Men, women and political themes

We will start with an analysis of the political themes. In the months prior to the elections, we submitted a number of political themes to the participants of the PARTIREP survey and asked them to indicate to what extent these themes would be important for their voting choice. The themes were the following: employment, economy, crime, taxes, environment, immigration,

¹ The PARTIREP voter survey asked respondents about their electoral behavior, their voting motives, and a range of political attitudes and opinions. The first wave occurred face-to-face between March and May 2014 (i.e. before the 25 May elections) among 2019 Belgian voters (1001 Flemings and 1018 Walloons). The second wave occurred by phone right after the elections among the same individuals (or at least those willing to participate again, i.e. 1532 individuals (826 Flemings and 706 Walloons)).

state reform and defense. The voters could indicate their opinions on a five-point scale. The score of “1” meant that this theme was “very unimportant” to them and a score of “5” meant that this theme was “very important”. On average, the voters give the highest scores to the themes of “employment” (mean score = 4.69) and “economy” (mean score = 4.44). This means that they were mainly influenced in their electoral choice by these two themes. For the largest group, viz. 45.3 % of the voters, “employment” was the most important theme in their electoral choice; for 21.6 % “economy” was the most salient one. The other themes (crime, taxes, environment, immigration, state reform and defense) seemed to be much less important.

Because we are interested in gender differences in political themes, we show the mean scores for men and women for each theme in table 1. What is striking is that, first, men and women classify the themes in the same way. The theme of employment dominates with the highest mean score, while defense seems to be the least important theme, both for men and women. Second, it is clear that there are significant gender differences to be pointed out for most themes, except for the themes of employment and the economy. Employment and the economy are crucial for both men and women in their electoral choice. It can be said that men and women do not differ as far as their policy *priorities* for the 2014 elections are concerned. There were, however, gender differences in the other themes, which seem to be of secondary importance for the respondents. Female voters, on average, show a higher mean score for all themes of “secondary importance” than male voters, and hence these themes weigh more in their electoral choice than for men.

Table 1: To what extent would the following themes be important in your voting choice?

Theme	Score Men Mean (st. dev.)	Score Women Mean (st. dev.)	
Employment (Nman=976, Nwoman=1034)	4.67 (.64)	4.71 (.57)	n.s.
Economy (Nman=976, Nwoman=1034)	4.45 (.71)	4.43 (.71)	n.s.
Crime (Nman=976, Nwoman=1034)	4.24 (.88)	4.38 (.82)	***
Taxes (Nman=976, Nwoman=1034)	4.15 (.91)	4.28 (.82)	**
Environment (Nman=976, Nwoman=1034)	4.12 (.85)	4.23 (.84)	**
Immigration (Nman=980, Nwoman=1032)	3.83 (1.12)	3.96 (1.01)	**
State reform (Nman=966, Nwoman=1024)	3.23 (1.19)	3.42 (1.09)	***
Defense (Nman=975, Nwoman=1033)	3.01 (1.2)	3.28 (1.13)	***

Note: “n.s.” means “not significant” (levels of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = <0.01); “st. dev.,” means “standard deviation”. Significance after t-test. The data were weighed according to age, gender, education level and region.

For table 1 we not only calculated the mean scores but also the “standard deviation” per theme. The standard deviation shows the extent to which the respondents’ scores differ amongst each other. A low standard deviation indicates that the respondents’ scores are all concentrated around the mean value and that there are few differences among the voters. A high standard deviation means that the differences are greater and that the scores are more broadly spread. The standard deviation is important for this study, because it indicates to what

extent the voters' political priorities about political themes are homogenous or actually heterogeneous. It can be seen in table 1 that the standard deviation is relatively small for the themes of employment and economy, both for men and for women. Men as a group and women as a group are relatively homogenous when it comes to the priority given to both political themes.

In contrast to a number of earlier foreign studies (for instance Campbell, 2004), we found that men and women in Flanders and Wallonia prioritize the same political themes and that the priorities are relatively homogenous for both genders. But similar themes do not (always) translate into similar political visions, which will be demonstrated in the next part of this paper.

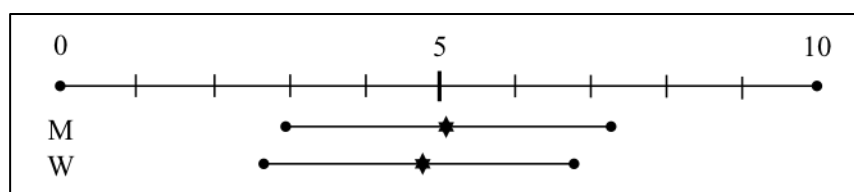
3. Men, women and political visions

To be able to measure gender differences in political visions, we will study, in line with earlier research (e.g. Campbell, 2004), gender differences in the ideological visions of the voters, as far as their voting behavior is concerned, as well as the attitudes of the voters with respect to gender equality and feminism.

3.1. Ideological visions

To measure the political visions of the Flemish and Walloon voters, first their ideological visions on the traditional left-right axis will be analyzed. The respondents were asked in the PARTIREP survey to position themselves ideologically on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 score corresponds to a "left-wing" attitude, 5 with the "center" and 10 with a "right-wing" perspective. The results indicate a clear and significant difference in the positioning of men and women ($p < 0.001$). As indicated in figure 1, the mean scores of men and women are to be found on different sides of the political center. Male voters have a mean score of 5.05 and female voters have a mean score of 4.73, which entails that men tend to be more right-wing than women. The fact that the standard deviation for men is 2.12 and that of women 2.04 (see figure 15.1), does mean that there are ideological differences, even within the male and the female groups.

Figure 1: Mean positioning of men and women on the ideological left-right scale



Note: The stars in the figure show the mean score for the voters, the dots show the standard deviation. The data were weighed according to age, gender, educational level and region.

Moreover, the ideological positioning of the voters varies according to the region (Flanders / Wallonia). Voters in Wallonia tend to have a more left-wing mean score than voters in Flanders. However, the same differences between men and women continue to exist: women

are, on average, one point more on the left on the ideological axis than men. Women in Wallonia have a mean score of 4.39 and men 4.65. In Flanders, women and men get a score of 5.08 and 5.43 respectively. Female voters in Flanders hence are also slightly more right-wing than the male voters in Wallonia.

We also studied if gender differences in the left-right self-assessment of voters continued to exist after checking for other factors, such as the educational level of the voters, their age, political self-confidence, political interests and region. In a multivariate analysis (not included here), it was found that the “gender” variable did in fact continue to have a significant impact and that the voter’s gender does influence their positioning on the left-right axis.

The question into the left-right self-assessment of the respondents measures the political visions of the voters on a one-dimensional ideological left-right axis. Ideological left-right visions can, however, also differ in two aspects: the socio-economic and the libertarian-authoritarian dimension. The first one deals with the voters’ visions about economic themes, the free market and the economic role of the authorities. The second dimension is about the visions of the voters on post-materialist items, such as moral issues (for instance abortion), law and order, tradition and democracy. Both these dimensions will be briefly discussed in succession.

To measure the position of the voters on the left-right economic axis, we presented them with the axiom that there are various opinions in politics on the way in which the economy should be organized. They were then asked to indicate on a score from 0 and 10 if they think that society must exert control over companies (score 0) or that companies should be entirely free to do as they wish (score 10). Here as well, we find that men and women position themselves differently. In comparison with women (mean score 5.09), men tend to be slightly more right-wing (mean score 5.39), which means that companies should have the freedom to do as they wish.

To measure the visions of the voters on the libertarian-authoritarian dimension, we will look at eight statements in table 2. Voters were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with these statements on a five-point score (a score of 5 means that the voters “completely agree” with a given statement; a score of 1 that voters “completely disagree” with the statement). Men and women share the same opinion on only two items, viz. the ones about raising the minimum age for administrative fines (the so-called GAS-fines) and about cumulating a tenure as an MP with a tenure as a mayor. For the other six statements, there are significant gender differences. By analogy with the left-right self-assessment of men and women, we might expect women to adopt a more left-wing libertarian vision for all these items, and men a more right-wing authoritarian perspective. However, that was not borne out. Women, on average, only have a more libertarian vision than men for three items: they think more than men that parents should be prohibited by law to spank their children, they more often favor surrogate motherhood for gay couples and they more often defend the idea that a woman should be able to give her child into adoption. On the other hand, men are more libertarian when they were asked if convicts should serve their complete prison sentence, if illegal downloads should be more harshly penalized and if youngsters should be able to go and vote as of the age of 16. Ideological left-right differences between men and women are to be primarily found in the socio-economic dimension and not in the libertarian-authoritarian one.

Table 2: Gender differences in libertarian-authoritarian issues

	Score men Mean (st. dev.)	Score women Mean (st. dev.)	
1. All convicts should serve their complete jail term (Nman=968, Nwoman=1014)	3.14 (.86)	3.3 (.77)	***
2. The minimum age for administrative sanctions should be higher than the current age of 14 (Nman=958, Nwoman=1010)	2.48 (.97)	2.48 (.95)	n.s.
3. Illegal downloading should be punished more severely (Nman=945, Nwoman=968)	2.5 (.89)	2.63 (.85)	***
4. Parents should be prohibited by law from giving their children away into adoption (Nman= 966, Nwoman= 1001)	2.61 (.9)	2.77 (.91)	***
5. Surrogate motherhood should be allowed for gay couples (Nman=949, Nwoman=987)	2.46 (.89)	2.61 (.95)	***
6. Youngsters should be able to vote as of the age of 16 (Nman=976, Nwoman=987)	1.99 (.73)	1.88 (.73)	*
7. An MP cannot cumulate with a position as mayor (Nman=969, Nwoman=990)	2.95 (.77)	2.93 (.71)	n.s.
8. A mother should be able to anonymously give her child into adoption (Nman=949, Nwoman=1010)	2.63 (.84)	2.72 (.85)	*

Note: “n.s.” means “not significant” (levels of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = <0.01, * = <0,05); “st. dev” means “standard deviation”. Significance after t-test. The data were weighed according to age, gender, education level and region.

3.2. Voting behavior

Beside the ideological differences in the voters’ visions, we also study the exteriorization of these visions, i.e. their actual voting behavior. Tables 3 and 4 provide an overview of the gender differences in Wallonia and Flanders respectively regarding voting behavior for the Belgian House of Representatives. In both parts of the country, men and women differ mainly in their electoral choice for parties positioning themselves on the traditional (economic) left-right axis, viz. the socialist parties (sp.a and PS) and the liberal ones (Open VLD and MR). Proportionally, women tend to vote more for a socialist party than men, while men tend to vote more often for a liberal party. In Flanders, more men than women tend to vote for the far-right party Vlaams Belang. These gender differences in Flanders are not entirely new. Researchers had already observed during earlier elections that the socialist party has a more female electorate, and this also held true for the green parties (Groen and Ecolo) and the Christian-democrats (CD&V and cdH). But the differences were not always significant. The right-wing parties (especially N-VA and Vlaams Belang) tended to woo a male public (Deschouwer et al., 2010:17). In comparison with prior elections, the gender gap in Wallonia was more pronounced in 2014 (Deschouwer et al., 2010: 17).

Table 3: Gender differences in voting behavior in Wallonia (N=453)

Party	Men	Women
PS	28.4%	37.8%
MR	32.1%	21.4%
cdH	14.4%	15.1%
Ecolo	9.3%	8.0%
PP	5.6%	5.0%
PTB-GO	7.9%	8.4%
Other	2.3%	4.2%

Note: The percentages are column percentages. The data were weighed according to age, gender, education level and region. Reported voting behavior for the House of Representatives.

Table 4: Gender differences in voting behavior in Flanders (N=866)

Party	Men	Women
N-VA	33.4%	32.2%
CD&V	18.3%	19.3%
Open VLD	17.3%	14.2%
sp.a	11.1%	17.1%
Groen	9.1%	8.2%
Vlaams Belang	7.0%	4.9%
PvdA+	1.9%	2.0%
Other	1.9%	3.9%

Note: The percentages are column percentages. The data were weighed according to age, gender, education level and region. Reported voting behavior for the House of Representatives.

In supplementary analyses, we checked whether gender differences in voting behavior continued to exist after assessing age, educational level, political interest, political efficacy and voters' ideological left-right positioning. It can indeed be expected that all these factors also have an influence on the voters' voting behavior, which can decrease the effect of gender, or even eliminate it. The latter did not appear to be the case. On the basis of multinomial logistical regression (not included here), it was found that gender differences remain significant after controlling for other factors. This is an interesting observation, especially in the light of the results on the political themes for men and women in table 1. Men and women manifest similar priorities when it comes to political *themes*, meaning that both consider employment and the economy to be important issues, while their *visions* about both items clearly differ. Men prefer rather a right-wing liberal program, while women go for a left-wing socialist platform.

It is difficult to say why gender differences in 2014 were especially pronounced on the traditional (socio-economic) left) right axis. One possible explanation might be that the 2014 federal elections in Belgium revolved mainly around socio-economic themes and that they weighed a lot in the electoral choices of the voters. Two socio-economic models were explicitly played out against each other during the electoral campaign (the so-called "PS-model" – a socialist left-wing model – and the "N-VA model" –a more right-wing model). When political visions are crystallized in the political debate, it also becomes clearer to the electorate what the various options are, and, as a result, they will be able to position themselves more easily with respect to these options. As a result, it might be concluded that

differences – and conflicts – in the interests of men and women are not manifested in each theme, but especially when these themes are politically salient.

3.3. Gender equality and feminism

Finally, voters do not only differ in opinion as far as their ideological visions and voting behavior are concerned, but they also manifest attitudes about the role of men and women in society. We submitted seven statements to the respondents that were all related to gender relations in society and politics. We asked them to indicate to what extent they agreed with each of those statements. Their answers were recorded on a five-point scale, where score 1 indicated they completely disagreed with a given statement, and score 5 that they fully agreed.

As demonstrated in table 5, men and women differ in opinion on most of these items. Women are systematically positioned on the more “feminist” extreme of the spectrum. In comparison with men, women tend to more agree with the statements (1) that men should do as many household chores as women, (2) that it is important to have as many men as women in parliament, (3) that there should be cookery classes at school for both boys and girls, (4) that companies should be encouraged to hire the same number of men and women, (5) that political parties should provide training for women and (6) that a company should be fined if it does not employ as many men as women. For one item, no significant gender differences were found, viz. the statement that political parties should be fined if there are not the same number of men and women on their electoral lists.

In general, it can be observed that both men and women tend to agree with items that gauge their visions about the *principle* of gender equality. The mean scores for the first and third items in table 5, for instance, are relatively low for both men and women, which suggests that both genders agree with the principle that men and women should do the same amount of household chores and that there should be cookery classes at school for both boys and girls. Both men and women, however, sound less approving when it comes to the importance of the measures proposed to abolish the existing gender inequalities (such as training and fines). Especially the statements that companies that do not employ the same number of men and women, or that political parties that do not have as many men as women on their electoral lists should be fined, are not supported. This is the case for both men and women, but applies *a fortiori* for the male respondents.

Table 5: Gender differences in visions on the role of men and women in society

	Score Men Mean (st. dev.)	Score Women Mean (st. dev.)	
1. Men and women have to share household chores (Nman=976, Nwoman=1032)	3.94 (.93)	4.2 (.93)	***
2. It is important there are as many men as women in parliament (Nman=979, Nwoman=1028)	3.15 (1.16)	3.34 (1.14)	***
3. There should be cookery classes for boys and girls at school (Nman=979, Nwoman=1030)	3.71 (1.08)	3.97 (1.01)	***
4. Companies should be encouraged to employ as many men as women (Nman=977, Nwoman=1030)	3.25 (1.19)	3.63 (1.09)	***
5. There are less politically active women than men. Political parties should provide training for women (Nman=975, Nwoman=1022)	3.02 (1.14)	3.16 (1.16)	**
6. A company that does not employ as many men as women should be fined (Nman=977, Nwoman=1030)	1.96 (.96)	2.14 (1.00)	***
7. Political parties that do not have the same number of men and women on their lists should be fined (Nman=976, Nwoman=1021)	2.2 (1.09)	2.27 (1.08)	n.s.
<i>Feminist scale</i> (nman=969, Nwoman=1008)	3.03 (.71)	3.24 (.69)	***

Note: “n.s.” means “not significant” (levels of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = <0.01); “st. dev;” means “standard deviation”. Significance after t-test. The data were weighed according to age, gender, education level and region.

The items in table 5 can be merged into a “feminist (five-point) scale (after a principal-component analysis with a Varimax rotation, Cronbach’s alpha = .779). A score of 5 on this scale corresponds to a feminist perspective on gender relations as well as a pronounced preference for gender equality in politics and society; a score of 1 corresponds to a traditional vision on gender relations as well as a suspicious attitude to gender equality in politics and society. Here too, significant gender differences are to be observed: women tend to be slightly more feminist (mean score of 3.24) than men (mean score of 3.03). Gender differences in the feminist attitudes of the electors are relatively strong and resist after checking for region as

well as the individual features of the respondents, such as their educational level, age, political efficacy, political interest and left-right self-assessment.

4. Women's interests and men's interests in Belgian politics: conclusion and discussion

4.1. Gender differences

Our attention in this paper has gone to gender differences in the political themes and visions of Flemish and Walloon voters. It was found, on the one hand, that men and women did not differ that much in their priorities in political *themes*. Male and female electors in the 2014 PARTIREP survey attached more or less attention to the same themes, mainly employment and economy. On the other hand, men and women do have other political *visions*. In general, women tend to think and vote (socio-economically) more on the left, and they are also more feminist than men; men tend to be more right-wing oriented and somewhat more traditionalist in their gender assumptions. This, of course, does not mean that all men are on the right of the political spectrum and all women on the left. On the contrary, men as well as women on the whole adopt a conciliatory position with respect to the various statements in the survey. Gender differences are thus often subtle and not huge. However, what is striking is not the size but the *persistence* of the gender gap. In 2014, gender still predominantly oriented the way in which voters think about political and societal issues. The differences in the political visions of men and women point to the fact that there is something like “women's interests” and “men's interests” in politics.

4.2. Women's interests

Differences in the political themes and visions of men and women are to be historically and sociologically explained: they result from the historical differences between (and inequities in) the socio-economical, cultural and political position of men and women, and the political interests that are on a par with them. The observation that women in Belgium tend to be more left-wing is historically not exceptional. For a number of decades now, women in Europe and the US have been voting more on the left. However, until the 1970s, women voted rather for right-wing parties, because they tended to be more religious. That “classical gender gap” reversed subsequently and women started to position themselves more on the left and more often tended to vote for left-wing parties (Inglehart & Norris, 2000).

The reason is that women have other political interests that push them more to the left. First, women developed a secular and more left-wing vision and started to vote more on the left from the moment they entered the job market in large numbers (Inglehart & Norris, 2000). From then on, they benefited from policies that paid attention to the socio-economic interests of workers and employees. And this happens to be the platform of parties that are on the left of the political spectrum. Second, women tend to be more employed in the public sector than men. They benefit from policies aimed at public investment rather than on cutbacks in public finances (Campbell & Childs, 2014). Third, the number of divorces has risen drastically, amongst other reasons because of a general secularization of society and the increased economic independence of women. However, this has made them, on average, more dependent on welfare benefits. Hence, they have become bigger supporters of a generous welfare state and bigger opponents of government cutbacks (Campbell & Childs, 2014). Despite the shifting socio-economic position of women, they continue to provide the lion's

share of unpaid childcare, as well as community care to the elderly. This reality allegedly generates not only more altruistic values with women, but also makes them greater supporters of government aid of health care and education – for very pragmatic reasons.

A second set of explanations for the more left-wing orientation of women has a feminist underpinning (Erzeel et al., 2014). Left-wing parties and ideologies generally attach more importance to abolishing inequities such as gender inequality, which could play in women's advantage. These parties are also considered to be more women-friendly, because of their stronger links with the progressive women's movement, the larger number of female candidates and women in positions of power, and the increased activity connected to legislation in favor of women and gender equality (Lovenduski & Norris, 1993).

4.2 Men's interests?

The above section claims that women have more left-wing attitudes and tend to vote more progressively, because of a blend of socio-economic and relational/family interests. The question now arises whether it may be assumed that men have more right-wing attitudes and vote more conservatively, because their interests are the opposite of those of women. On the basis of this inversion – in fact, we cannot base ourselves on theories of men's political interests – only a number of hypotheses can be formulated on the issue why men think and vote more on the right. They allegedly are less dependent on state welfare programs since they tend to be more employed in the private sector. They tend to be more well-to-do, which means they, on average, have to fall back less on welfare benefits and are less involved in caring for others (children and the elderly). This means they grade the usefulness of good health care and education much less highly. To put it differently, given the fact that men tend to have a stronger socio-economic position, they would benefit from the absence of all kinds of wealth-spreading corrective mechanisms and welfare programs, because they cannot benefit from them, but have to contribute to them. When we subsequently translate the less supportive attitude vis-à-vis gender equality and feminism to men's interests, the argument goes that men benefit from maintaining their dominant gender position. To support this vision, the notion of "capitalist patriarchy" was coined in the 1970s, on the basis of a combination of Marxist class-analysis and feminist gender analysis (Eisenstein, 1978). This concept interprets the link between gender and class as a system of inequity and as the merging of liberalism and anti-feminism. The capitalist patriarchy benefits from the survival of economic and gender inequity. The men's interests described above, as a blend of small government and even smaller feminism, allegedly resemble capitalist patriarchal interests.

Of course, from our analyses it certainly also emerges that not all men have a marked preference for right-wing ideologies and small government. The vast majority of men is, moreover, not anti-feminist and is not resistant to gender equality. As demonstrated by earlier studies, men thus do not per definition benefit from a capitalist patriarchy or the preservation of a conservative gender order. On the contrary, they might even benefit from its reversal (Cockburn, 1991). Yet, from our analysis emanates this persistent dichotomy, with, on the one hand a merger of female-left-feminist and, on the other hand, a merger of male-right-less feminist. And that begs questions about men's interests in politics.

It is clear now that a mere projection of female interests, being at the heart of the observed gender differences, on what male interests might be, would result in a rather crude and incomplete image. The resemblance with the capitalist patriarchal interests is also very

tenacious and we are convinced that there more nuanced theories should be developed. These theories should depart from a double track. On the one hand, they should not lose sight of the fact that gender is a power structure, and that (power) inequities in society often lead to differences – and conflicts – between male and female interests. The interests of men in maintaining certain power structures, such as capitalist patriarchy, is greater than women(s) interests therein (Pearse, 2002). On the other hand, future theories should ideally acknowledge that differences between men are great, that male interests (just as women's) are heterogeneous and diverse, and that they are more than merely the reverse of women's interests. Our conclusion must be an illustration of the lack of knowledge and the need for research into gender and politics, especially when it deals with male interests. This is even more salient when we recall the logic mentioned in the introduction, according to which the numerical overrepresentation of men might lead to an overrepresentation of male interests, and an underrepresentation of female interests in politics.

Eventually, we would like to indicate that our focus in this paper has been on gender as an important power structure, while we, of course, do not deny that reality is in fact more complex. Power structures (on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age, social class, sexual orientation, etc.) interact, and future research should pay more attention to these intersections in the construction of political interests.

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