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Abstract	Compulsory voting is an underexposed factor of the electoral system that possibly influences women's descriptive representation. Studlar and McAllister (Eur J Polit Res 41(2):233–253, 2002) found a negative effect, but no theoretical explanations were given. We develop two possible explanations: voters who only vote because they have to are less politically sophisticated, and therefore vote less sophisticatedly, and/or they have different attitudes about women in political life. From our study, we are able to detect a gendered effect of compulsory voting in Belgium's flexible-list PR system, but only the vote sophistication explanation is confirmed. Voters who would no longer vote without compulsory voting significantly vote more for top candidates (mostly men) and give significantly less preference votes for candidates lower down the list. This points us to the complexity of the ballot structure as an important new dimension that could help explain gendered voting effects of compulsory voting systems. Finally, since different effects for formal and descriptive representation appear, we posit that compulsory voting constitutes a dilemma for women activists.
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Keywords (separated by '-')	Compulsory voting - Women - Gender - Electoral systems - Preferential voting - Belgium
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3 **Forced to vote, but not for women. The effect**
4 **of compulsory voting on voting for women**

5 **Bram Wauters¹**

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25 voting · Belgium

29 **Introduction**

30 A vast literature (Caul 1999; Duverger 1955; Krook and Schwindt-Bayer 2013;
31 Studlar and McAllister 2002) has emphasised the importance of institutional factors
32 (and electoral institutions in particular) as intervening variables for explaining the
33 (descriptive) representation of women in parliaments. In this article, we will focus

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34 on one specific underexposed institutional variable that is part of the electoral
 35 system: the provision of compulsory voting. By doing so, we provide a significant
 36 contribution to the existing literature on electoral systems and the factors that shape
 37 women's representation.

38 While it could be argued that this provision is beneficial for the formal
 39 representation of socially disadvantaged groups (including women), its effect on the
 40 descriptive representation of women remains underexposed. In a cross-country
 41 analysis on the macro level, Studlar and McAllister (2002) found a negative effect
 42 of compulsory voting on women's descriptive representation, but no theoretical
 43 explanations for this finding were given. Here, we will conduct an in-depth analysis
 44 of Belgium, one of the approximately thirty countries worldwide using compulsory
 45 voting. By conducting a study based on survey data at the individual level, we
 46 provide more insight in the underlying mechanisms of the gendered effects of
 47 compulsory voting. It will be investigated whether voters who would no longer vote
 48 if compulsory voting were to be lifted are less likely to vote for women, and how
 49 this can be explained. A crucial intervening variable is political sophistication. Less
 50 sophisticated voters are less likely to vote when compulsory voting is lifted. We test
 51 two hypotheses about voters who would abstain from voting if it was not
 52 compulsory (and who are accordingly less politically sophisticated): they cast a less
 53 sophisticated vote and have different attitudes about women's role in political life.

54 We find that people who vote only because of compulsory voting provisions are
 55 less likely to vote for women, and this is mainly because they cast less sophisticated
 56 votes. As such, it seems that compulsory voting per se is not detrimental for voting
 57 for women—as was found by Studlar and McAllister (2002)—but, as we
 58 hypothesise, that the gendered effect of compulsory voting is conditional upon
 59 the complexity of the electoral system.

60 Electoral institutions

61 Electoral institutions are “the formal and informal rules governing the electoral
 62 process” (Krook and Schwandt-Bayer 2013). Three formal elements of electoral
 63 institutions that are important for women's representation will be discussed briefly:
 64 the electoral formula, the district magnitude and the ballot structure. Most attention
 65 will be devoted to the ballot structure, since we believe that this plays an important
 66 role in explaining the gendered effect of compulsory voting (cfr. *infra*).

67 There is a general consensus (Caul 1999; Duverger 1955; Rule 1987; Studlar and
 68 McAllister 2002) that the list variant of *proportional representation* (PR), in which
 69 seats are allocated among lists of candidates in accordance to their respective share
 70 of the vote, is more propitious for the nomination and election of women than the
 71 plurality/majority rule. PR systems perform better because of their higher *district*
 72 *magnitudes*, i.e. the number of seats elected in a district (Duverger 1955; Matland
 73 2005; Rule 1987), and because of parties' different electoral strategies (Krook and
 74 Schwandt-Bayer 2013; Matland 2005). PR-system lists should reflect the social
 75 diversity in the electorate (Matland 2005), whereas in majoritarian systems, the



76 party candidate is supposed to represent the district population as a whole and
77 mainly territorial interests are pursued (Krook and Schwindt-Bayer 2013).

78 Also, *ballot structure* is an important element of electoral institutions (Krook and
79 Schwindt-Bayer 2013). Duverger (1955) already suggested that female candidates
80 may be more successful under electoral rules that give voters less choice. Since the
81 mid-1990s and the introduction of quota systems, the view that closed lists (in
82 which seats are allocated to the candidates according to their order on the list) are
83 more advantageous for the election of women has become the most common
84 perspective (Caul 1999; Rule 1987; Schmidt 2009; Wauters et al. 2010).

85 There is yet another element related to the ballot structure that is relevant for our
86 purposes, i.e. the complexity of casting a vote. Gallego (2010) demonstrated that in
87 systems with many different choices to be made (open-list or flexible-list PR
88 systems), citizens with lower levels of political interest tend to abstain more than in
89 'easy' systems (majority systems or closed-list PR systems) in which only one
90 choice out of a limited number of options has to be made. Voters who are not
91 politically sophisticated appear to prefer simple choices over more complex choices,
92 as the latter require more knowledge and effort. We will come back to this later.

93 In sum, research on the effects of electoral rules has focused on broad distinctions
94 between PR and majoritarian systems, and has examined nuances in district
95 magnitude and ballot structure. Other parts of electoral institutions, such as
96 compulsory voting, have been underexposed, however (Krook and Schwindt-Bayer
97 2013).

98 **Compulsory voting**

99 Most democratic governments consider participating in national elections a right of
100 citizenship. In some countries, this is considered a civic responsibility, or even a
101 duty. In these countries, voting has been made compulsory. Approximately thirty
102 countries in the world have regulations that make voting compulsory (Gratschew
103 2004). Most of them are in Latin America or Western Europe, but there are also
104 a few cases in Asia (IDEA 2015). Even when compulsory voting is not strictly
105 enforced, it at least increases social pressure to go to the polls (Gallego 2010).

106 Studies of compulsory voting have focused on the kinds of voters that would
107 otherwise abstain (Gallego 2010; Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998; Kittilson 2005;
108 Lijphart 1997; Singh 2015), on the effects on the relative strength of parties
109 (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007; Brunell and DiNardo 2004; Caluwaerts and
110 Reuchamps 2015; Quintelier et al. 2011) and on the effects on the correspondence
111 between voters' policy preferences and party choice (Selb and Lachat 2009).
112 However, it remains unclear which gender effects are linked to compulsory voting,
113 especially for descriptive representation.

114 As for the *formal dimension* of representation (i.e. the possibility to select a
115 representative), low voter turnout is usually associated with patterns of inequality
116 (Verba et al. 1995). In countries without compulsory voting, more privileged
117 citizens (those with higher incomes and better education) exercise their right to vote
118 more often (Blais 2000; Carreras and Ārepoġlu 2013; Gallego 2010; Lijphart 1997;



119 Söderlund et al. 2011). When it comes to gender and formal representation, results
 120 are mixed. Kittilson (2005) and Hooghe and Pelleriaux (1998) argue that men are
 121 more likely to participate in elections than women. De Winter and Ackaert (1998)
 122 and Campbell (2006) indicate, however, that women do not show up less because of
 123 their gender, but due to lower educational and professional status. This is confirmed
 124 by Reuchamps et al. (2015) in their study on the last Belgian elections.

125 Regarding the *descriptive dimension* of representation (i.e. the presence of
 126 representatives), the number of studies is far more limited. In their comparative
 127 analysis of women's legislative representation in twenty industrialised democracies
 128 since 1950, Studlar and McAllister (2002) indicate that there are two important
 129 factors influencing the proportion of female representatives: the electoral system
 130 and the level of turnout. They assert that turnout and voter registration are
 131 differentially located among social groups because of differences in political interest
 132 and political involvement, which could have an influence on women's represen-
 133 tation. Their reasoning is that the higher the turnout (either stimulated by
 134 compulsory voting or not), the more diverse the voters (who are more likely to cast a
 135 diverse vote), and the higher the share of elected women. Contrary to their
 136 expectations, Studlar and McAllister (2002) found that compulsory voting had a
 137 negative effect with each percentage increase in turnout reducing women's
 138 representation by 0.14%. Compulsory voting systems reduced women's represen-
 139 tation even by about 3.5%. The authors did not provide any explanation for this
 140 unexpected outcome, however. It is our aim to search for these explanations and to
 141 consider their actual role in influencing women's descriptive representation. To that
 142 end, we develop two theoretical explanations in the next section.

143 Explaining the effects of compulsory voting on descriptive 144 representation

145 We develop two hypotheses explaining why potential non-voters (i.e. people who
 146 would no longer always vote when compulsory voting is lifted) vote significantly
 147 less for women. First, we believe that they cast less sophisticated votes and, second,
 148 they could be less convinced about the importance of women's political
 149 participation. The general level of political sophistication of a voter is a crucial
 150 intervening variable in both cases.

151 There is no direct relationship between compulsory voting and voting for women.
 152 As indicated by Studlar and McAllister (2002) and illustrated in Fig. 1, this
 153 relationship starts from political sophistication (which comprises political interest,



Fig. 1 Causal relationship between participation in elections and voting for women



154 political knowledge and political trust). Voters' level of political sophistication
 155 determines three factors: (1) participation in elections, (2) the sophistication of the
 156 vote, and (3) the importance attached to women's representation (gender ideology).
 157 We hypothesise that a combination of factors 2 and 3 leads to potential non-voters
 158 voting significantly less for women.

159 First, both Reuchamps et al. (2015) and Selb and Lachat (2009) found a strong
 160 link between political sophistication and potential absenteeism (1). Those who are
 161 not interested in politics will not participate in elections. The provision of
 162 compulsory voting, however, forces voters with low interest in politics to vote. This
 163 could have several consequences on voting behaviour, and first of all, in terms of
 164 voter choice (2). The bulk of empirical research refutes the assertion that individuals
 165 with low interest in politics will transform into informed and engaged citizens when
 166 forced to vote (Fishkin 2009; Gordon and Segura 1997; Loewen et al. 2008; Selb
 167 and Lachat 2009; Singh and Thornton 2013). In general, those voters tend to make
 168 choices that are considerably less consistent with their policy preferences than
 169 voluntary voters (Selb and Lachat 2009). The most extreme consequence is what
 170 Reuchamps et al. (2015) and IDEA (2015) suggest: compulsory voting leads to
 171 arbitrary votes, as it forces electors to cast *any* vote. Potential non-voters check off a
 172 party or a candidate at random or cast invalid ballots (Hirczy 1994).

173 Consequences could also be subtler, in the sense that voters with low levels of
 174 political sophistication will make less use of preferential voting (i.e. voting for
 175 individual candidates instead of a party), when forced to vote in PR systems with
 176 intra-party choices (open-list and flexible-list systems). According to the resource
 177 model (Marsh 1985), casting a preference vote is more demanding on the part of
 178 voters, since it requires to learn about candidates and compare them (Shugart et al.
 179 2005). Since potential non-voters are less politically sophisticated, they are less
 180 likely to make the effort to cast a preference vote. André et al. (2012), using data
 181 from the Belgian 2009 regional elections, indeed come to the conclusion that a
 182 higher degree of political interest and resources is more likely to be translated into
 183 candidate-based voting. Preferential voting in general, and specifically for women
 184 (who often take positions lower down the list), can thus be considered as
 185 sophisticated electoral behaviour that requires skills and attitudes (Marien et al.
 186 2017). Above, we already discussed how complex ballot structures discourage
 187 people with low levels of political sophistication.

188 Another aspect of the sophistication of the vote is that potential non-voters vote
 189 more for established candidates and for incumbents, i.e. existing holders of a
 190 political office and heads of list. Both incumbents and candidates in prominent
 191 positions on the ballot form automatically draw more votes, even when other factors
 192 are controlled for (Maddens et al. 2006). This effect can be labelled the Ballot
 193 Position Effect (Geys and Heyndels 2003; Lutz 2010; Maddens et al. 2006). Given
 194 their historical underrepresentation and the use of selection criteria that are often
 195 based on male norms (Kenny and Verge 2016), women are less numerous among
 196 incumbents and candidates on top of the list. Owing to quota regulations taking into
 197 account top-list positions, progress has recently been made in Belgium. At the most
 198 recent elections of 2014, about 29% of all heads of lists were women (Smulders
 199 et al. 2014).



200 Research on incumbency voting has, however, demonstrated that sometimes the
 201 opposite applies: the higher the turnout at elections, the higher the vote share for
 202 challengers of incumbents (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007; Hansford and Gomez 2010;
 203 O'Malley 2008). This also seems to apply for compulsory voting: Carreras (2012)
 204 study on presidential elections in Latin America found that the score of outsider
 205 candidates was about 8% higher in systems with compulsory voting. All these
 206 studies, however, do not take into account the complexity of the electoral system
 207 (and more in particular, the ballot structure). Most of them focus on the US and the
 208 UK, whose majoritarian electoral systems ask the voters a simple and straightfor-
 209 ward choice for one particular candidate out of a handful of candidates (Bernhagen
 210 and Marsh 2007; Hansford and Gomez 2010; O'Malley 2008).

211 We hypothesise that in more complex electoral systems (PR systems with
 212 preferential voting, alternative vote, etc.), which require more effort from the voters,
 213 the anti-incumbency effect will be overtrumped by political sophistication. Casting
 214 a vote for challengers (lower down the candidate list of a party) is a sophisticated
 215 vote and supposes that a voter is informed about a large number of candidates, and
 216 potential non-voters are not sufficiently interested in politics to make all these
 217 efforts, we posit. Consequently, we expect that these potential non-voters will vote
 218 more for established candidates who occupy top-list positions. It is in that respect
 219 perhaps no coincidence that in the country sample of Studlar and McAllister (2002),
 220 who found a negative gender voting effect of compulsory voting, only countries
 221 with complex ballot structures were included (Belgium, Italy and Australia).

222 This leads to Hypothesis 1: potential non-voters cast less sophisticated votes
 223 (more list and head-of-list voting), which is a disadvantage for women, because
 224 often they are not at the top of the ballot.

225 Political interest and knowledge also impact on voters' attitudes about the role of
 226 women in political life (Bittner et al. 2010; Jennings 2006), which is also sometimes
 227 called 'gender ideology' (3) (Erzeel and Caluwaerts 2015; Shvedova 2005) or
 228 'gender role attitudes' (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). This concept refers to
 229 opinions of individual voters about the role of men and women in society (Bittner
 230 et al. 2010; Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004). Interested and knowledgeable voters,
 231 who have been intensively exposed to prominent female politicians and to
 232 discussions about women's political underrepresentation, are more likely to be in
 233 favour of gender equality in the political sphere (Bittner et al. 2010).

234 Although clear progress has been made over time, not all voters are equally
 235 convinced about the extent to which women should play a prominent role in politics
 236 (Jennings 2006). Several factors can explain differences in gender role attitudes
 237 between individuals (Brooks and Bolzendahl 2004; Jennings 2006). (Jennings 2006)
 238 exposure hypothesis posits that differences in the role conceptions about women in
 239 politics could be explained by differences in exposure to practices of gender
 240 equality and to discussions about political underrepresentation of women, which is
 241 undoubtedly related to political sophistication. Exposure is, as Jennings notes,
 242 driven by media content, social movements and interpersonal relations.

243 The limited number of studies that have focused on the link between 'political
 244 gender ideology' and voting behaviour come to the conclusion that there is a
 245 significant effect from the former on the latter (Erzeel and Caluwaerts 2015;



246 Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011). Voters more open to women taking up a
247 prominent political role are more likely to vote for women. This finding points us to
248 the importance of considering gender role attitudes in explaining voting behaviour
249 for women.

250 This leads to Hypothesis 2: potential non-voters are less politically sophisticated
251 and are consequently less open to women in politics. They are therefore less likely
252 to vote for women.

253 The two hypotheses together suggest that voters who are less politically
254 sophisticated have a higher chance to stay at home when compulsory voting is
255 lifted. Furthermore, as they tend to cast less sophisticated votes and be less open to
256 women in politics, they are less likely to vote for women. Therefore, when these
257 low-interest voters are forced to vote by the provision of compulsory voting, women
258 candidates will be worse off, we posit.

259 **Research design and method**

260 Belgium is one of the few countries in the world in which a generalised system of
261 compulsory voting exists. This is not strictly enforced: the chances that a non-voter
262 will have to appear before court are extremely small, as well as the possible fines
263 (Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998). The turnout level has, however, remained constant
264 throughout the years at a level of about 89%, which is far above the average number
265 of turnouts in other countries.

266 Belgium has a PR electoral system with flexible lists: a voter has the choice
267 between casting a preferential vote for one or more candidates (on a single party
268 list) and casting a list vote. Candidates receiving sufficient preferential votes to pass
269 the election threshold are automatically elected. The other candidates can reach the
270 threshold by making use of the list votes. These list votes are distributed to
271 candidates according to their order on the list, offering a substantial advantage to
272 candidates at the top of the list. Preference votes have a direct effect on descriptive
273 representation, as the number of candidates elected solely on the basis of their
274 preference votes have been increasing since the end of the 1990s (Put et al. 2014).
275 These votes also have an indirect effect in the sense that they are used as a criterion
276 for the selection of ministers and of candidates for the next elections (André et al.
277 2015).

278 Legislation concerning the presence of women on candidate lists has been
279 introduced in Belgium more than 20 years ago. In 1994, a first quota law was
280 introduced, which stated that a maximum of two-thirds of the candidates on a list
281 could be of the same sex. In 2002, this was changed into the requirement of an equal
282 number of men and women on the list (with a maximum difference of one in case of
283 an odd number of candidates). In addition, one of the two highest positions on the
284 list is reserved for a women candidate. Non-compliance leads to rejection of the list
285 by the public authorities (Meier 2004). This quota legislation has led to a substantial
286 increase of women MPs (Wauters et al. 2014) and to a better representation of
287 women at the top of electoral lists (Smulders et al. 2014; Vandeleene 2014; Wauters
288 et al. 2014). Meier (2004) refers to a mutual contagion effect, stating that the



289 parallel use of legal and party gender quotas created a dynamic which opened up the
290 political forum to women more than would have been the case if either party or legal
291 measures alone had been applied.

292 For our empirical analysis, we make use of data gathered by the PartiRep
293 Election Study, which is an electoral panel survey held before (pre-electoral wave)
294 and after (post-electoral wave) the European, federal and regional elections of 2014
295 in Belgium (see: www.partirep.eu). We focus in this paper on the federal (or
296 national) elections, which are generally perceived as the most important ones
297 (Dandoy et al. 2015).¹ In the pre-electoral wave, based on a stratified sample of
298 eligible voters in two main Belgian regions (Flanders and Wallonia), face-to-face
299 CAPI² interviews were conducted among 2019 respondents (response rate of 45%).³
300 The same respondents were contacted again for the post-electoral wave shortly after
301 Election Day in which telephone CATI⁴ interviews were used. This yielded 1532
302 respondents (response rate of 76%).⁵ Respondents were also asked to fill in a self-
303 administered mock ballot⁶ on which they had to cast exactly the same (preference)
304 votes as on their real voting ballot. This innovative method was previously used in
305 the Irish National Election Studies (McElroy and Marsh 2009) and in a study on
306 Belgian local elections (Pilet et al. 2013).

307 Respondents were asked: “If voting was not compulsory in Belgium, would you
308 always, often, sometimes, or never vote in the Belgian federal elections?”⁷ These

1FL01 ¹ Owing to the intensive and time-consuming coding work of the mock ballot forms, it was only feasible
1FL02 to examine one kind of election.

2FL01 ² CAPI—computer-assisted personal interviewing—is an interview technique in which the respondent or
2FL02 interviewer uses a computer to answer the questions.

3FL01 ³ A random sample was drawn from the National Register, including the inhabitants of Flanders and
3FL02 Wallonia (not the Brussels Region) who were eligible to vote in the elections of May 25, 2014, and were
3FL03 no more than 85 years old. Those who refused to participate are not arbitrarily spread: this often involves
3FL04 people in a precarious social situation, lower-skilled people or people who have little or no interest in
3FL05 society and politics. The sample is thus not perfectly representative. The sample was weighted to obtain a
3FL06 good representation of the population in terms of gender, age and level of education.

4FL01 ⁴ CATI—computer-assisted telephone interviewing—is a telephone surveying technique in which the
4FL02 interviewer follows a script provided by a software application.

5FL01 ⁵ All respondents who participated in the first wave were invited to participate in the post-electoral wave.
5FL02 Also, here, the general disadvantage about the representativeness of the sample holds.

6FL01 ⁶ A second wave of the survey was carried out immediately after the elections. With several elections in
6FL02 1 day, people tend to quickly forget which party they voted for and which candidates they cast a
6FL03 preference vote for. Therefore, a few days before the elections, all respondents received three booklets
6FL04 containing mock ballots for the lists and candidates in their district for the election of the European,
6FL05 Flemish or Walloon and federal parliament. Respondents were asked to record this vote immediately after
6FL06 casting their actual vote (for which lists and which candidates). After the elections, they were contacted
6FL07 by telephone (between May 26 and July 1, 2014). Based on the completed mock ballots, respondents
6FL08 could precisely tell what votes they cast. The information on the voting behaviour is thus very accurate.

7FL01 ⁷ We are fully aware that there might be differences between reported voter turnout in surveys and actual
7FL02 turnout (Karp and Brockington 2005). These differences are caused by social desirable answers and
7FL03 memory failure. The latter is not a problem here as our central variable does not concern voting behaviour
7FL04 in the past, but prospective behaviour. As for the social desirability, there are mechanisms to increase
7FL05 reliability (Belli et al. 1999). It has been shown that the use of a scale with more than two dichotomous
7FL06 categories (yes or no) helps. This is exactly what we do here (by giving respondents the possibility to
7FL07 choose between always, often, sometimes and never).



Table 1 Answers on the question whether respondent would still vote when compulsory voting would be abolished ($N = 1628$)

Type	Answer	<i>N</i>	%
Voter	Always	796	48.9
Non-voter	Often	224	13.8
	Sometimes	182	11.2
	Never	425	26.1

309 four different categories were recoded into two categories: always (1), and often,
 310 sometimes or never (2). Here, we follow the same categorisation as Reuchamps
 311 et al. (2015) (Table 1).

312 Results indicate that half of the respondents, 51%, say that they would no longer
 313 vote. These respondents indicated that they would ‘often’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’
 314 vote. Thus, some of them would still vote, just not always. For the sake of clarity
 315 regarding our terminology: we will call those who will always vote ‘voters’, while
 316 the others will be labelled ‘non-voters’ or ‘potential non-voters’. Nevertheless,
 317 where enough observations are available for reliable statistical analyses, we also
 318 present the results of the variable with 4 categories.

319 Belgium’s flexible-list PR system gives voters the choice to cast none, one or
 320 multiple preference votes on candidates of one or both sexes within one party list
 321 (see also Marien et al. 2017). Given that the first position on the list is a highly
 322 visible position, it is interesting to distinguish between casting one preference vote
 323 on the first candidate of the list and casting a preference vote for another candidate
 324 lower down the list. These options result in a variable with seven categories: voting
 325 for women only, including (1) casting one preference vote on the first candidate on
 326 the list, (2) voting for one woman who is not the first candidate on the list, (3) voting
 327 for multiple women and voting for men only, including (4) casting one preference
 328 vote on the first candidate on the list, (5) voting for one man who is not the first
 329 candidate on the list, (6) voting for multiple men, and finally (7) voting for both men
 330 and women. This allows us to sketch a rich and multi-faceted picture of voting for
 331 women in Belgium, taking into account the complexity of this voting behaviour. We
 332 do not have a direct measurement of incumbency, but this is to a large extent
 333 captured by analysing the head of list, since about 70% of them are incumbents (Put
 334 et al. 2014).

335 The attitude about women’s role in political life was measured by two items in
 336 the questionnaire on which respondents could strongly agree, agree, agree nor
 337 disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The first item was about an equal division
 338 of political responsibilities between men and women, the second about the need to
 339 have an equal number of men and women represented in parliament.⁸

8FL01 ⁸ Other gender-related items were included in the questionnaire, but as they mainly concerned the
 8FL02 appropriateness of the use of instruments to overcome underrepresentation (such as quota, penalties for
 8FL03 parties or companies, and gender neutral education), they are not used in this analysis.



340 We operationalise political sophistication by three variables: political interest (on
 341 a scale from 0 to 10), political knowledge (score on five questions to test political
 342 knowledge) and political trust (trust in the national parliament on a scale from 0 to
 343 10).

344 Results

345 This section is divided into two parts: in the first part, we describe the differences in
 346 voting for women between voters and non-voters. In the second part, we will test the
 347 two hypotheses by looking at the sophistication of voting behaviour and support for
 348 women's political role.

349 Descriptive part

350 Two findings immediately become obvious when looking at the differences in the
 351 voting behaviour of voters and non-voters (Table 2). First, there are significantly
 352 more list voters among potential non-voters compared to voters: 57 versus 47% (and
 353 this difference is found for all categories of non-voters). As list votes are transferred
 354 according to the list order and women only take 29% of top positions on the list
 355 (Smulders et al. 2014), a high share of list votes is adverse for women candidates.

356 Second, the percentage of voters casting at least one vote for a woman candidate
 357 is higher among voters than among non-voters (and this gap is also found when we
 358 separately consider people who would often, sometimes or never vote). Although
 359 voters have ample opportunity to vote for women (as the number of women
 360 candidates equals that of men due to quota regulations), 26% of the voters and only
 361 16% of the non-voters do so. This allows us to conclude that non-voters vote less
 362 often for women than voters. In other words, compulsory voting has a negative
 363 effect on the descriptive representation of women. This means that female
 364 politicians would have a greater vote share when the votes of potential non-voters
 365 would not be taken into account, which is in line with the results of Studlar and
 366 McAllister (2002).

367 Explanatory part

368 We developed two hypotheses for why non-voters vote significantly less for women:
 369 potential non-voters cast less sophisticated votes (by following the lists presented by
 370 party elites) (H1) and are less convinced of the quality of women in politics (H2).

371 For the first explanation, we already demonstrated in Table 2 that non-voters
 372 generally prefer list voting over preference voting. Now, we will investigate the
 373 kind of preference vote more in detail. In particular, we look at whether a vote was
 374 cast for the candidate at the top of the ballot, for another candidate on the list or for
 375 more than one candidate on the list, and in addition, whether a candidate's gender
 376 makes a difference in these kinds of votes. In this case, we decided to restrict our
 377 analysis to the dichotomy between voters and non-voters. The number of



Table 2 Kind of vote for voters and (several types of) non-voters (list vote versus preference vote)

	List vote	Preference vote	For at least one women	For no women	Unknown
Voter/always (<i>N</i> = 613)	47.6	52.4	25.9	23.3	3.1
Non-voter (<i>N</i> = 531)	57.3	42.8	16.4	22.6	3.8
χ^2	***		**		
Often (<i>N</i> = 168)	56.5	43.5	22.6	17.9	3.0
Sometimes (<i>N</i> = 124)	59.7	40.3	14.5	25.0	0.8
Never (<i>N</i> = 239)	56.5	43.5	12.6	24.7	6.2
χ^2	**		**		

For these respondents, we only know that they have casted one or more preferential votes, but not for which candidate(s)

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3 Kind of preference vote for voters (*N* = 321) and non-voters (*N* = 227) (only those who cast a preference vote)

Voted for...	Voter	Non-voter	Voted for...	Voter	Non-voter
	%	%		%	%
Only head of list***	32.5	47.3	1 woman as head of list (ns)	6.0	9.7
			1 man as head of list**	26.5	37.9
One candidate lower on list (ns)	24.5	23.7	1 woman lower on list (ns)	13.6	9.7
			1 man lower on list (ns)	11.4	14.1
Several candidates***	43.0	28.2	Several women (ns)	5.3	2.9
			Several men*	9.9	5.3
			Several men and women*	27.8	20.3

Although it would be interesting to make a distinction by party preference, we only look at the distribution of votes in general. Owing to the existence of two separate party systems in Belgium (in Flanders and Wallonia) and to the high number of parties due to the PR system, the number of observations by party are too small to conduct reliable statistical analyses (also taking into account that about half of the voters cast a list vote). The same applies to the answer categories ('often', 'sometimes' and 'never') of the non-voters

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

378 observations is too small per category for the full range categorisation, which would
 379 hinder reliable analyses.

380 The results in Table 3 (first three columns) indicate that there are significant
 381 differences between voters and non-voters regarding voting for the head of list and
 382 **AQ4** voting for multiple candidates. This is a clear confirmation of the 'less sophisticated
 383 vote' hypothesis (H1). Votes that suggest more in-depth knowledge about
 384 candidates, such as voting for several candidates, are less often cast by non-voters:
 385 28% versus 43% for people who would always vote. Conversely, non-voters vote
 386 more often for a head of list (47% versus 32% for voters). For this kind of vote,
 387 limited political knowledge (about a handful party figureheads) suffices.



Table 4 Support for a political role for women (row percentages)

	(Strongly) agree	Agree nor disagree	Strongly (disagree)
Women and men should be given equal responsibilities in politics ($N = 1621$)			
Voter/always	89.4	7.6	3.0
Non-voter	88.3	7.7	3.5
	$\chi^2 = 0.899$ (not significant)		
Often	89.3	6.7	4.0
Sometimes	90.1	6.6	3.3
Never	87.4	8.8	3.8
	$\chi^2 = 2.184$ (not significant)		
It is important that there is an equal number of men and women in parliament ($N = 1617$)			
Voter/always	46.6	24.1	29.3
Non-voter	43.0	30.3	26.7
	$\chi^2 = 7.922^{**}$		
Often	42.7	27.1	30.2
Sometimes	38.5	35.7	25.8
Never	45.0	29.9	25.1
	$\chi^2 = 13.606^{**}$		

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$

388 In the last three columns of Table 3, we combine the kind of vote and the gender
 389 of the candidates voted for. Non-voters do not appear to have a negative bias
 390 towards women candidates. They vote significantly more for male top candidates
 391 (38 versus 26%) and give significantly less preference votes for several men (5
 392 versus 10%) and for several men and women together (20 versus 28%). It is
 393 noticeable that there are no significant differences for whether or not to vote for
 394 female heads of lists, for one woman and for several women. In sum, the less
 395 frequent vote for women is caused by the fact that non-voters do not really 'choose'
 396 candidates, but follow the figureheads (mostly men) put forward by the party.

397 Now, we move towards the second explanation by analysing whether there are
 398 differences in opinion between voters and non-voters concerning women's political
 399 role.

400 The results in Table 4 show that there is almost unanimity that political
 401 responsibilities should be shared (statement 1).⁹ Differences between voters (89%)
 402 and non-voters (88%) are small and non-significant: the percentage of people that
 403 disagree is low, both for voters and for non-voters (3%). This is even the case for
 404 people who would never vote. In sum, based on the analysis of the first statement,
 405 no differences in gender role attitudes between voters and non-voters could be
 406 detected.

407 The opinions of voters and non-voters on an equal descriptive representation in
 408 parliament (statement 2) do differ significantly, but the direction of difference is not

9FL01 ⁹ We calculated the Cronbach alpha for a construct underlying both statement 1 and statement 2, but this
 9FL02 is rather low with 0.301. Therefore, we treat these two statements separately.



Table 5 Binominal logistic regression with whether or not at least one vote was casted for a woman as dependent variable

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)	B	Exp(B)
Opinion equal responsibilities in politics (ref = agree)	(ns)		(ns)		(ns)		(ns)	
Nor agree nor disagree	0.126	1.134	0.138	1.148	0.122	0.761	0.142	1.153
Disagree	- 0.333	0.717	- 0.351	0.704	- 0.377	0.434	- 0.368	0.692
Opinion on equal number in parliament (ref = agree)	**		**		**		**	
Nor agree nor disagree	- 0.524**	0.592	- 0.496*	0.609	- 0.536**	0.585	- 0.504*	0.604
Disagree	0.339	1.403	0.332	1.394	0.337	1.401	0.336	1.399
Woman (versus man)	- 0.092	0.912	- 0.034	0.966	- 0.083	0.921	- 0.063	0.939
Wallonia (versus Flanders)	- 0.370*	0.691	- 0.373*	0.689	- 0.347*	0.707	- 0.329	0.720
Non-voter (versus voter)	- 0.425**	0.654	- 0.187	0.830				
Voting without compulsory voting (ref = always)					**		(ns)	
Often					0.146	1.158	0.208	1.231
Sometimes					- 0.630*	0.533	- 0.563*	0.570
Never					- 0.770**	0.463	- 0.382	0.683
Political interest			0.059	1.060			0.051	1.052
Political knowledge			- 0.066	0.936			- 0.091	0.913
Political trust			0.131**	1.140			0.118**	1.126
Constant	0.795		- 0.166		0.664		- 0.188	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.06		0.09		0.08		0.10	
N	563		558		563		558	

* $p < 0.1$; ** $pp < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$



409 clear. Voters are more in support of this statement than non-voters (46% versus
410 43%), but the opponents of descriptive representation are also more numerous
411 among voters (29%) than among non-voters (26%).

412 In general, some minor differences in how voters and non-voters perceive women
413 in politics appear, but these differences are small and not always unequivocal. This
414 seems to suggest that gender role attitudes could only provide a minor explanation
415 for differences in voting for women between voters and non-voters.

416 This is confirmed if we run a binominal logistic regression with whether or not at
417 least one vote was cast for a woman as dependent variable (see Table 5). We
418 include gender and region (Flanders or Wallonia) as control variables. Over the
419 years, fewer women have been elected in Wallonia than in Flanders (IGVM 2016)
420 and there is a higher proportion of voters casting preference votes only for men in
421 Wallonia than in Flanders (47.9 versus 43.2%) (André et al. 2010). This could be an
422 indication of a political culture that is less open to women taking up prominent roles
423 in politics.

424 The results of this regression analysis demonstrate that the effect of compulsory
425 voting on voting for women remains significant when two variables about gender
426 role attitudes are added (Model 1). The odds of a non-voter casting a vote for
427 women is only 0.654 times the odds of a voter doing so (even when controlling for
428 the effect of gender role attitudes, gender and region). This supports our results
429 discussed above: non-voters vote less for women, but not because they are not
430 convinced of a prominent role for women in politics.

431 In Model 2, we add the three political sophistication variables to the analysis.
432 Political trust is the only of the sophistication variables that has a significant
433 effect.¹⁰ As expected, the significant effect of compulsory voting disappears once
434 we control for political sophistication. This suggests that the effect of compulsory
435 voting is mainly driven by this political sophistication, as we already demonstrated
436 above.

437 In Models 3 and 4, we insert the original variable with four categories (always,
438 often, sometimes, and never) into the analyses. The effects are almost the same
439 (significant effect for voting without mandatory voting, which disappears when
440 political sophistication is added to the analysis), but we clearly see that the effect is
441 more outspoken for voters who would never vote if compulsory voting were to be
442 lifted.

443 Conclusion

444 The presence of women in parliaments (and factors influencing this) has been high
445 on the research agenda for several decades. We focused on the provision of
446 compulsory voting, a specific institutional variable that has often been overlooked
447 when analysing the effects of electoral rules on women's representation. While it

10FL01 ¹⁰ We also ran a logistic regression analysis with an interaction term between gender and the political
10FL02 sophistication variables, but since these interactions were not significant, the added value of this analysis
10FL03 is limited. In order to not to confuse the readers, it was left out of this article.



448 could be argued that compulsory voting is beneficial for the formal representation of
 449 socially disadvantaged groups, including women, its effect on the descriptive
 450 representation of women remained underexposed. In a cross-country analysis on the
 451 macro level, Studlar and McAlister (2002) found a negative effect, but no
 452 theoretical explanations were given. It was our aim to search for these explanations
 453 and to consider their actual role in influencing women's descriptive representation,
 454 using data from the 2014 PartiRep Election Study in Belgium.

455 We posit that voters who would no longer vote without compulsory voting are
 456 less politically sophisticated, which leads to two possible explanations for the lower
 457 number of votes for women.

458 The first is that potential non-voters also vote less sophisticatedly (more list and
 459 head-of-list voting), which is a disadvantage for women, because often they are less
 460 likely than men to be on top of the ballot. Potential non-voters often lack the skills
 461 and attitudes needed to cast a sophisticated vote. These expectations are confirmed
 462 by our results: non-voters vote significantly more for top candidates (who are more
 463 likely to be men) and give significantly less preference votes to candidates lower
 464 down the list (this is especially true for ballots that combine votes for both men and
 465 women). The less frequent vote for women by potential non-voters is caused by the
 466 fact that these kinds of voters do not really 'choose' candidates, but follow the
 467 figureheads (mostly men) put forward by the party.

468 Second, we pointed to differences in voter attitudes about the political role of
 469 women. We hypothesised that voters with low levels of political sophistication are
 470 less convinced about the political role of women, and precisely these kinds of voters
 471 are also more likely to abstain if compulsory voting is lifted. We found, however, no
 472 clear evidence for this explanation. Our results demonstrate that the effect of
 473 compulsory voting on voting for women runs mainly through the sophistication of
 474 the vote, and not so much through the gender ideology of (potential) non-voters. The
 475 effect of compulsory voting on voting for women remains significant when we
 476 control for gender ideology.

477 Our findings have three further implications.

478 First, there is a clear trade-off between boosting women's descriptive representa-
 479 tion (by abolishing compulsory voting) and keeping women's formal representa-
 480 tion on the current level (by maintaining compulsory voting). We showed that
 481 compulsory voting has a negative effect on the descriptive representation of women,
 482 while earlier research (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015; Hooghe and Pelleriaux
 483 1998; Kittilson 2005) indicated that (without controlling for other effects) women
 484 are more likely to abstain if voting was no longer compulsory.

485 Both dimensions of representation have an effect on substantive representation,
 486 which is often considered the most important dimension of representation (e.g.
 487 Pitkin 1967). Formal representation leads to politicians who, out of electoral
 488 concerns, take interests of potential voters into account, but the descriptive
 489 representation ensures that champions of women's interests are present in
 490 parliament, which relates to Phillips' (1995) politics of presence argument. Policy
 491 makers, female politicians and women's interest groups have to consider this trade-
 492 off and have to define their position towards abolishing or maintaining compulsory
 493 voting.



494 Second, it appears again that party selectorates contribute significantly to the
 495 underrepresentation of women, which refers to the importance of a systemic bias
 496 over a voter bias. In their selecting criteria, party selectors are likely to evaluate the
 497 qualities of those already present in politics more highly than the qualities of
 498 excluded groups (Murray 2014). When the selection of candidates depends heavily
 499 on the views and initiatives of party elites, the onus for change lies with them. If
 500 party selectors would equally nominate men and women at the top of the lists, no
 501 gender effects of compulsory voting would appear, as these effects are mainly
 502 driven by voters following the choices of the party elite. Consequently, referring
 503 back to the previous point, this would also solve the trade-off between women's
 504 descriptive and formal representation. By boosting women's descriptive represen-
 505 tation, party selectors resolve part of the dilemma and give women's interest groups
 506 the freedom to focus on activities aimed at keeping women's formal representation
 507 at the current level (hence maintaining compulsory voting). The combined effect of
 508 these actions is supposed to be beneficial for women's substantive representation.

509 Finally, by digging deeper into the relationship between compulsory voting and
 510 women's representation and by focusing on the micro level (i.e. voters), we were
 511 able to provide a significant contribution to the existing literature on electoral
 512 systems and the factors that shape women's representation. The negative effect of
 513 compulsory voting on the descriptive representation of women already demon-
 514 strated (but not explained) in the cross-country study of Studlar and McAllister
 515 (2002) is mainly attributable to the less sophisticated voting behaviour of potential
 516 non-voters, and not to their gender role attitudes. It remains to be seen whether this
 517 also applies to less complex electoral systems. As such, an important intervening
 518 variable of the compulsory voting effect on women's representation comes to the
 519 fore, i.e. the ballot structure of an electoral system. In rather simple electoral
 520 systems (majority and plurality systems), where it suffices to mark one candidate
 521 out of a limited number of candidates, outsider candidates (including women,
 522 perhaps) are more likely to obtain a high number of votes. In complex systems (PR
 523 systems with preferential voting, alternative vote), voting for non-incumbents
 524 requires much more effort and knowledge. Therefore, in such systems, people who
 525 vote only because they are forced to will vote more for established (Crisp et al.
 526 2013) candidates (on top of the list). The ballot structure of an electoral system is an
 527 important new dimension that could help explain gendered voting effects in
 528 compulsory voting systems. We hypothesise in line with Studlar and McAllister
 529 (2002) that women candidates will be worse off in elections with compulsory
 530 voting, but mainly in electoral systems offering a complex ballot structure
 531 (including open and flexible-list PR systems). In addition to Belgium, other
 532 countries such as Brazil, Congo, Ecuador and Luxembourg use compulsory voting
 533 in combination with a complex ballot structure. We expect to find the same bias
 534 against women there because of the strong effects of political sophistication. In
 535 other countries using majority or plurality systems in combination with compulsory
 536 voting (including, for instance, Thailand, Singapore, Gabon, Egypt and many
 537 presidential elections in Latin America), we expect to find no bonus for incumbent
 538 (Crisp et al. 2013) candidates. Future cross-country research should further develop



539 and test our argument that the gendered effect of compulsory voting is conditional
 540 upon the complexity of the electoral system.
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