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**Publication date**

2018

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Mind the Gap

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Erzeel, S., de Leeuw, S., Marien, S., & Rihoux, B. (2018). Gender-based voting. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.), *Mind the Gap: Political Participation and Representation in Belgium* (pp. 227-250). Rowman & Littlefield International/ECPR Press.

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## *Chapter 11*

# **Gender-based voting**

Silvia Erzeel, Sijfra de Leeuw, Sofie Marien  
and Benoît Rihoux

### **INTRODUCTION**

Since the early 1990s, the political under-representation of women has been a central concern for many scholars in Europe. Although women's under-representation features many dimensions, the descriptive under-representation of women – that is their numerical under-representation in elected assemblies compared to men – remains one of the most visible and problematised forms in both research and policy (Childs & Lovenduski 2013). To redress persisting gender inequalities in politics, governments and parties have made efforts to improve the conditions for women's electoral success. In many cases these efforts took the form of gender quotas designed to remove structural barriers for female politicians. Other measures included gender awareness campaigns to encourage voters to cast votes for women. The rationale behind this is that it is often not enough to motivate parties to select female candidates – as gender quotas do – but that voters also need encouragements to elect more women to parliament.

While many studies have examined the effects of gender quotas (Dahlerup 2006; Krook & Zetterberg 2014), we know less about the role voters' choices play in the current under-representation of women. Do female candidates, for instance, attract less-preferential votes? Moreover, is there such a thing as 'gender-based voting', that is do voters prefer candidates of their own gender? Do women in politics draw disproportionately from the support of female voters? To date, few studies have considered the influence of voters' choices for male or female candidates in the election of female candidates (Giger et al. 2014; Holli & Wass 2010). A reason for this scarcity of studies is the absence of actual opportunities for gender-based voting in many electoral systems (e.g. only one candidate per political party or a closed list).

The Belgian flexible list system offers extensive opportunities for voters to advance or harm gender equality in the election of representatives. Hence, this offers a particularly interesting case to study how voters use these opportunities.

The existing research draws primarily on cases with majoritarian electoral systems, in particular the United States (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Dolan 2004, 2008). This literature shows that, all other things remaining equal, voters tend to display a ‘baseline gender preference’ (Sanbonmatsu 2002), that is a basic propensity to support candidates of one gender over candidates of the other gender. However, whether this basic inclination transforms itself into an actual vote for candidates of their preferred gender depends strongly on the context. Research on voters’ candidate choice outside the United States remains limited, particularly in PR systems. Most PR systems are closed list systems where voters, by design, do not have the possibility to cast a (preferential) vote for an individual candidate but must choose between party lists on which candidates are already ranked. Recently, a small number of studies have focused on gender-based voting in Finland and Ireland. Together, these studies find that vote choice is to some extent socially stratified, but the prevalence of gender-based voting varies substantially between and within countries (Giger et al. 2014; Holli & Wass 2010; McElroy & Marsh 2010).

In this chapter, we further contribute to this debate by uncovering the magnitude, nature and determinants of gender-based voting in Belgium. In particular, we will analyse (1) whether and to what extent gender-based voting exists in Belgium and (2) which individual voter and institutional factors account for the observed variation in gender-based voting. The Belgian case is in theory a likely case for gender-based voting because of its institutional context. First, due to strict quota regulations, all political parties are obliged to select an equal number of candidates from both sexes (Meier 2012). Voters thus have the option to vote for a candidate of their preferred gender without having to change political parties. Second, the Belgian electoral system applies multiple preferential voting, which gives voters the opportunity to express their support for one or more candidates, and to do so for different reasons. Finally, given Belgium’s long history of accommodating differences in society, gender-based claims for group representation are well established and might influence voters’ considerations too.

To study gender-based voting, we analyse data from the 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey. These data were collected using an innovative ‘mock-ballot’ technique, where respondents were asked to copy the selection made on their voting ballot onto a copy of that ballot. The advantage of this approach is that it provides us with detailed information on preference voting behaviour and allows us to link the information of the voters to information about the candidates they voted for. In what follows, we first discuss the literature on

gender-based voting and formulate a number of hypotheses on correlates of gender-based in Belgium. This is followed by a description of the Belgian case and data in a methods section. Finally, we present and discuss the findings themselves.

## WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VOTING?

Although studies generally assume that PR systems with party lists are more inclusive towards women than other electoral systems, they often remain inconclusive as to whether closed lists or open lists are more conducive to women's political representation (Kunovich 2012). If anything, open lists or flexible lists make women's political presence less predictable (Ballmer-Cao & Tremblay 2008; Wauters, Weekers & Maddens 2010), because women's chances depend not only on parties' strategic choices but also on voters' behaviour. The voter side has always been the least understood part of the story, and recently studies have begun to fill this gap by studying voters' preferences for male or female candidates.

In her seminal work on gender and candidate choice in the United States, Sanbonmatsu (2002: 20) finds that 55 per cent of the voters have a 'baseline gender preference', or a basic inclination to prefer candidates of one gender over candidates of the other gender. This baseline gender preference is partially influenced by voters' own gender, as voters are somewhat more likely to prefer candidates of their own gender, if all other factors are held constant. Although Sanbonmatsu's baseline gender preference is not the same as gender-based voting – after all, a baseline gender preference is measured at the attitudinal level and not at the behavioural level – it does tell us something about voters' propensity to support either male or female candidates and how this is linked to voters' own gender.

The concept of gender-based voting itself was first coined by Holli and Wass (2010) in the Finnish context. Contrary to Sanbonmatsu (2002), Holli and Wass (2010) focus on the actual act of preferential voting and define gender-based voting as a situation in which voters 'cast their vote for a candidate of their own gender' (Holli & Wass 2010: 601). Hence, a synonym for gender-based voting is same-gender voting. The opposite of gender-based voting is cross-gender voting, which refers to a situation in which voters cast a vote for candidates of the opposite gender. Reasons for gender-based voting can be multiple, but important is that voters have an affinity for the candidates they vote for that is based on a shared gender (Dolan 2008). Women (men) will only vote for women (men) if they identify with members of their own group, feel connected to them and believe they share some common faith with them.

Overall, however, insights on gender-based voting remain limited. The impact of voters' own gender on their candidate choice varies strongly across settings. Some studies show that voters are indeed pulled towards candidates of the same gender, and that gender-based voting even transcends party differences between voters (Plutzer & Zipp 1996). Other studies, however, do not detect a similar gender effect. Gender-based voting patterns either disappear after controlling for third variables (Paolino 1995; McElroy & Marsh 2010) or are found to be conditional upon individual voter characteristics or institutional context factors (Dolan 2004, 2008; Giger et al. 2014). In order to move beyond these contradicting results, we need to know more about the specific determinants of gender-based voting.

## DETERMINANTS OF GENDER-BASED VOTING: HYPOTHESES

Although we state that the Belgian case is a likely setting for gender-based voting, we do not expect that gender-based voting will be equally strong for all groups of voters or that it will appear under all circumstances. In the following subsections, we formulate some hypotheses on how individual voter characteristics and institutional factors might influence patterns of gender-based voting behaviour.

### Individual-level determinants

First, we hypothesise that patterns of gender-based voting behaviour will be different for male and female voters, and hence that gender will steer gender-based voting. Gender-based voting presupposes the existence of a (strong) identity link between candidates and voters. This identity link will arguably be stronger when a group is dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. A state of relative deprivation, in which a group feels deprived of certain resources and opportunities compared to another, fosters group affinity and feelings of group solidarity (Walker & Pettigrew 1984). When applied to men and women, it can be theorised that women, because they occupy a disadvantaged socio-economic and political position, will develop stronger feelings of group affinity and solidarity than men. If so, the inclination to cast a same-gender vote would be stronger for women – a hypothesis that has been corroborated in studies focusing on the United States (Dolan 2004, 2008). Holli and Wass (2010), in contrast, find that gender-based voting is more prevalent among men than among women in Finland. They explain this by the fact that the overall high level of gender equality has made young men more aware of their own gender. Gender equality in Belgium, however, has not yet reached the Finnish level, and the first hypothesis is therefore as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote is higher for female voters than for male voters.

Gender-based voting is also likely to be influenced by voters' age, but this has led to the formulation of contradicting hypotheses. On the one hand, some have hypothesised that gender-based voting will depend on voting habits, which develop during socialisation processes of individuals and remain relatively stable afterwards (Franklin 2004; Holli & Wass 2010). Older generations of voters have developed their voting habits in a time when men were over-represented on candidate lists, while younger voters might be more accustomed to a more equal presence of men and women in politics. Due to these differences, we may hypothesise that both older men and older women are more likely to vote for men, while younger generation of women are more likely to have developed a habit of voting for women (see also Holli & Wass 2010). Tied back to gender-based voting this means that:

Hypothesis 2a: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote increases with age for men and decreases with age for women.

On the other hand, we can also hypothesise that if gender-based voting is linked to feelings of identity and group solidarity, the likelihood of gender-based voting will increase when voters have been explicitly confronted with their deprived status in society. As older women are more likely to have experience in being discriminated against than younger women, the gender link between voters and candidates might be particularly strong for older women (Duncan & Loretto 2004):

Hypothesis 2b: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote increases with age for women.

Gender-based voting might furthermore be influenced by levels of political sophistication. Here too, conflicting hypotheses have been formulated in the literature. Voters sometimes use candidate's sex as a heuristic voting cue, that is, they take sex as an informational shortcut to make assessments about candidates' beliefs and policy positions (Sanbonmatsu 2002). This informational shortcut is more often used by voters with low levels of political sophistication because they lack the cognitive skills or motivation to collect and process political information. Voters with higher levels of political sophistication will be less likely to rely on descriptive characteristics of candidates, including candidates' sex, to make voting decisions:

Hypothesis 3a: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote decreases with political sophistication.

The opposite hypothesis assumes that preferential voting is a more sophisticated form of voting behaviour. Making a distinction between various

candidates, learning about them and comparing their qualities are quite demanding on the part of voters (Shugart, Valdini & Suominen 2005). It can be argued that voting for women is an activity that requires even higher levels of political sophistication than voting for men or casting a list vote. Female candidates, due to party or media biases, might have fewer chances of demonstrating their personal qualities and characteristics during election campaigns (Wauters, Weekers & Maddens 2010). Hence the cognitive investment of voters required to assess women's qualities is larger, and only (female) voters who display higher levels of political interest and political knowledge will vote for women.

Hypothesis 3b: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote increases with political sophistication but only for women.

### **Institutional-level determinants**

Gender-based voting will also depend on contextual factors. The electorate can rely on many different pieces of information to make a voting decision. Prior studies theorise that if these pieces of information are not salient or readily available, voters will compensate for this lack of information by taking the sex of the candidate as an informational shortcut (Sanbonmatsu 2002). If this assumption holds, then the propensity to cast a gender-based vote should be higher in electoral contexts for which little information is available, often labelled 'second-order' elections. As opposed to so-called first-order elections, second-order elections are generally deemed less important by voters, the media and political parties themselves (Reif & Schmitt 1980). In Belgium, the European elections are considered a textbook case of second-order elections. Due to its system of compulsory voting, the lack of information caused by the second-order character of these elections does not result in a lower turnout, and voters are strongly encouraged to make a voting decision regardless of their amount of information. Thus, we hypothesise that:

Hypothesis 4: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote is higher in European elections than in federal elections.

Finally, the magnitude of the district in which elections are held is important for gender-based voting. High district magnitude tends to foster a more balanced political representation of gender groups because political parties are more likely to diversify their lists (and their top list positions) when more seats can be won (Matland 1993). In smaller districts parties are more reluctant to select women out of a fear that they would be less successful than men in securing the few seats available. In addition, competition for the 'winning

seats' within the party is fiercer in such districts, and male candidates frequently exert more influence than their female counterparts in the intra-party candidate selection procedures (Caul 1999; Vandeleene 2016). Further, voters might follow parties' cues by voting strategically for candidates who they feel are more likely to win. If male candidates have an advantage in small districts, the opportunities for women increase in larger districts. This might have an effect on gender-based voting: women might cast more preferential votes for women candidates in larger districts (Giger et al. 2014).

Hypothesis 5: The propensity to cast a gender-based vote increases with district magnitude for women.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### **Belgium: A case in point**

Belgium constitutes a particularly interesting case because it combines a flexible list PR system with multiple preferential voting, compulsory voting and legally binding gender quotas. Preferential voting is optional, as voters can also opt to cast a vote for the party list. Belgian voters can cast as many preference votes as they want, but voting for (candidates on) different party lists is not allowed. The allocation of seats to candidates is influenced by the order in which candidates appear on the list and by the number of preferential votes candidates receive. Candidates who receive enough preference votes to pass the election threshold are automatically elected, regardless of their position on the list. For candidates not reaching this threshold, the list order defines their electoral chances. Although it is not uncommon for candidates on lower list positions to gain enough preference votes to breach the list order (especially in recent years), the candidates at the top of the list have a clear advantage and stand a (much) higher chance of getting elected. This has proven to be a disadvantage for women because parties were (and are) less likely to select them as top list candidates (Marien, Schouteden & Wauters 2017; Vandeleene 2016).

Overall, the presence of women in Belgian politics has significantly increased since 1995, mostly because the Belgian government has progressively adopted gender quota laws. The current gender parity law, adopted in 2002, stipulates that the proportion of female and male candidates on all electoral lists for all levels of government must be balanced and that the two top positions on each list must be occupied by individuals of different sexes (Meier 2012). While the quota laws have not led to complete gender parity in the Belgian federal and regional parliaments or in the Belgian representation



in the European Parliament, the situation has improved significantly. In 2014, 38 per cent of the representatives of the Belgian House of Representatives and 28 per cent of the Belgian members of the European parliament were women (www.ipu.org, 2017).

## Model specification

### *Dependent variable*

Previous studies have defined gender-based voting as a situation in which voters ‘cast their vote for a candidate of their own gender’ (Holli & Wass 2010: 601). This definition is straightforward in situations in which voters are only allowed to cast one preferential vote: voters either vote for a candidate of their own gender or for a candidate of the opposite gender. Belgian voters, however, have the possibility to cast multiple preferential votes and this makes measuring gender-based voting more complex. For measuring gender-based voting, we therefore decided to make a distinction between three types of voting: (1) same-gender voting, which refers to a situation in which voters vote exclusively for candidates of their own gender; (2) cross-gender voting, referring to a situation in which voters vote exclusively for candidates of the opposite gender and (3) mixed voting, where voters vote for both male and female candidates.

The 2014 PartiRep Survey measured preference voting behaviour across three electoral contexts, namely the regional, federal and European elections. In this chapter, we focus on the first-order federal elections and the second-order European elections. In the initial data structure (table 11.1), voting behaviour in these elections was captured by two separate variables (voting behaviour in the federal elections and voting behaviour in the European elections). To facilitate a comparison across the two electoral contexts, we generated a stacked data matrix, nesting voting behaviour into individual respondents (table 11.2). This transformation resulted in a data matrix in which each respondent’s voting behaviour was measured twice across the two different electoral contexts, for which an additional independent variable was generated. Not taking the nested structure into account would subsequently

**Table 11.1. Initial data matrix**

<i>Id</i>	<i>Voting behaviour – federal elections</i>	<i>Voting behaviour – European elections</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>...</i>
1	Same gender	Cross-gender	Man	41	...
2	Cross-gender	Same gender	Woman	23	...
3	Mixed	Mixed	Woman	21	...
...	...	...	...	...	...

**Table 11.2. Stacked data matrix**

<i>Id</i>	<i>Election</i>	<i>Voting behaviour</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>...</i>
1	Federal	Same gender	Man	41	...
1	European	Cross-gender	Man	41	...
2	Federal	Cross-gender	Woman	23	...
2	European	Same gender	Woman	23	...
3	Federal	Mixed	Woman	21	...
3	European	Mixed	Woman	21	...
...	...	...	...	...	...

result in an underestimation of the standard error, thereby increasing the likelihood of finding significant effects when they are absent. To correct this underestimation, we applied a cluster-robust correction to the standard error.

### *Independent variables*

To test the hypotheses, five independent variables are studied: sex, age, political sophistication, election context and district magnitude. Summary statistics can be found in the appendix. Respondents' sex is coded as a dummy variable (man = 0, woman = 1). Age is measured as a categorical variable with four age cohorts (18–31, 32–42, 43–59 and 60 and older). This categorisation is in line with different periods of gender quota laws. While the youngest age cohort has been socialised in a period in which the current strict quota laws were enforced, this is not the case for the older age cohorts. Political sophistication is generally operationalised by two components: cognitive and motivational components (Luskin 1990). We measure the cognitive component as the political knowledge of the respondent, using a five-item Guttman scale. Each of the items contained a multiple choice question gauging a respondent's political knowledge. This resulted in a variable that referred to the number of correct answers (ranging from 0, 'no questions answered correctly', to 5, 'all questions answered correctly'). The motivational component is operationalised as political interest, measured on a scale from 0 ('no interest at all') to 10 ('a lot of interest').

The election context is operationalised as a dummy variable, distinguishing between European and federal elections. Finally, district magnitude is measured as the number of legislative seats to be distributed within an electoral district.

### *Control variables*

We also include four control variables. First, we control for the ideological self-placement of the respondents. Erzeel and Caluwaerts (2015), as well as Marien, Wauters and Schouteden (2017), argue that left-wing voters show

greater support for female candidates than right-wing voters. Therefore, the analysis also controls for differences in voters' ideological self-placement, measured on an 11-point scale with a value 0 indicating a left-wing ideology and a value 10 indicating a right-wing ideology. Second, to make sure that the findings were not solely defined in function of the composition of the lists, we also controlled for whether respondents voted for the top candidate on the list in one or both elections. Third, we controlled for the total number of preference votes cast. Finally, we also included educational attainment as a control variable. This variable included four categories: (1) none or primary education, (2) completed lower secondary education, (3) completed higher secondary education and (4) completed tertiary higher education.

## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The presentation of the results consists of two parts. First, we present the descriptive analyses in which we discuss the extent of gender-based voting in Belgium. Second, we test the hypotheses formulated earlier by investigating which individual and institutional factors play a role. The subsequent analyses were conducted using only the data collected among respondents who cast one or multiple preference votes in the federal elections, the European elections or both. Out of the 1,532 respondents who participated in the second wave of the survey, 628 (41 per cent) cast one or multiple preference votes in the federal elections, compared to 571 (37.3 per cent) in the European elections.

### Descriptive results

Table 11.3 depicts preferential voting behaviour for men and women. The results show that, in general, voters appear to have a preference for candidates of the same sex. *Post-hoc* analyses reveal that with 40.7 per cent of the voters casting a same-gender vote in Flanders and 40.5 per cent in Wallonia, same-gender voting is a significantly more popular choice than mixed or cross-gender voting.

To investigate whether this finding applies for both male and female voters, we disaggregated the (relative) frequencies according to voters' sex. Same-gender voting appears to be especially popular among male voters, with over half of the male voters (53.7 per cent in Flanders and 56.6 per cent in Wallonia) casting a vote for candidates of their own sex. The analyses reveal that female voters also have a clear preference for male candidates. Indeed, in Flanders and Wallonia, respectively, 49 per cent and 57.3 per cent of the women voted for male candidates only.

**Table 11.3. Preferential voting by sex**

		<i>Preferential vote</i>			
		<i>Same gender, % (N)</i>	<i>Mixed, % (N)</i>	<i>Cross-gender, % (N)</i>	<i>Total, %</i>
Men	Flanders	53.7 (183)	30.2 (103)	16.1 (55)	100 (341)
	Wallonia	56.6 (146)	24.8 (64)	18.6 (48)	100 (258)
Women	Flanders	28.0 (97)	23.0 (80)	49.0 (170)	100 (347)
	Wallonia	24.1 (61)	18.6 (47)	57.3 (145)	100 (253)
Total	Flanders	40.7 (280)	26.6 (183)	32.7 (225)	100 (688)
	Wallonia	40.5 (207)	21.7 (111)	37.8 (193)	100 (511)
Flanders:		$\chi^2 = 88.037$ ; $df = 2$ ; Cramer's $V = 0.358$ ; $p < 0.001$			
Wallonia:		$\chi^2 = 86.218$ ; $df = 2$ ; Cramer's $V = 0.411$ ; $p < 0.001$			

Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

Note: Frequencies refer to the pooled data of voting behaviour in the European and federal elections; see table 11.2.

These findings suggest that both men and women have a baseline gender preference for male candidates, with men, in particular, being very likely to cast a gender-based vote. Nevertheless, the data presented in table 11.3 may be slightly misleading. Scholarship on baseline gender preferences assumes that all other factors are held constant. In this respect, women may be hampered in their willingness to express support for a candidate of the same sex by the mere fact that female candidates are often placed on less-attractive positions on the list (Vandeleene 2016). Even in Belgium, where quota legislation dictates that the supply of male and female candidates on every list must be equal, parties still have a large degree of freedom in deciding upon the gender balance for the most visible and more secure seats on their lists. One of the most important factors explaining the number of preference votes of a candidate is whether the candidate occupies the top position on the list. In both Flanders and Wallonia, these positions are more frequently occupied by men than women (Vandeleene 2016). In effect, for most female voters, the inclination to vote for a candidate based on their sex must compete with a much more salient cue – the position of a candidate on the list.

For gaining more insight into the influence of ballot composition, we take a closer look at the propensity for men and women to cast a vote for a top candidate of the same sex (table 11.4). Overall, an overwhelming majority of the voters (72.7 per cent) cast a vote for a male top candidate, which is not surprising, given that most top candidates are male. Consequently, both men and women are more likely to vote for a male candidate than for a female candidate. However, contrary to the findings in table 11.3, we observe that when a party has a female top candidate, women are significantly more likely to vote for this candidate (38.0 per cent in Flanders; 26.2 per cent in Wallonia) than their male counterparts (21.1 per cent in Flanders; 23.2 per cent in Wallonia). This

**Table 11.4. Voted for top candidate**

	<i>Voted for top candidate</i>		
	<i>Male candidate, % (N)</i>	<i>Female candidate, % (N)</i>	<i>Total, % (N)</i>
Flanders	71.1 (374)	28.9 (152)	100 (526)
Male voters	78.9 (224)	21.1 (60)	100 (284)
Female voters	62.0 (150)	38.0 (92)	100 (242)
Wallonia	75.5 (222)	24.5 (72)	100 (294)
Male voters	76.8 (126)	23.2 (38)	100 (164)
Female voters	73.9 (96)	26.2 (34)	100 (130)
Total	72.7 (596)	27.3 (224)	100 (820)
Male voters	78.1 (350)	21.9 (98)	100 (448)
Female voters	66.1 (246)	33.9 (126)	100 (372)

$\chi^2 = 1.845$ ;  $df = 2$ ; Cramer's  $V = -0.05$ ;  $p = 0.17$ .

Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

Note: Frequencies refer to the pooled data of voting behaviour in the European and federal elections.

suggests that not taking the ballot composition into account would not provide a comprehensive picture of the nature of gender-based voting behaviour.

## Explanatory results

In this section, we further investigate the effect of two sets of determinants on the propensity to cast a gender-based vote, namely individual-level voter characteristics (sex, age and political sophistication) and institutional characteristics (election type and district magnitude).

### *Individual-level determinants*

Building on the assertion that women still occupy a disadvantaged status in society, we hypothesised that the likelihood of casting a gender-based vote would be higher for women than for men in Belgium (hypothesis 1). We tested this hypothesis in two steps. First, we estimated a model with the respondent's sex as the only predictor. In line with the descriptive analyses, we find that the probability to cast a same-gender vote is almost twice as high for men as that of women ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Inversely, we find that women are approximately three times more likely to cast a cross-sex vote as compared to their male counterparts ( $\beta = 1.45$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $p = 0.00$ ). This effect, however, vanishes when we control for whether the respondent voted for the top candidate on the list or not, the results of which are displayed in table 11.5. Model 1 shows that there is no significant difference between men and women in the overall likelihood to cast a gender-based

**Table 11.5.** Explaining gender-based voting using individual-level characteristics (sex, age)

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	<i>Same</i>	<i>Cross</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Cross</i>
Sex: female	-0.34 (0.23)	1.42 (0.24)***	-1.11 (0.59) <sup>†</sup>	1.31 (0.64)*
Age (ref. 18–31) in years				
32–42	-0.78 (0.40) <sup>†</sup>	-0.30 (0.42)	-1.32 (0.50)**	-0.27 (0.59)
43–59	0.01 (0.30)	0.29 (0.41)	-0.29 (0.45)	0.40 (0.50)
60>	-0.70 (0.35)*	0.22 (0.38)	-1.09 (0.44)*	0.08 (0.52)
Sex * Age, years				
Female 32–42			1.22 (0.78)	0.14 (0.81)
Female 43–59			0.64 (0.81)	-0.11 (0.80)
Female 60>			0.86 (0.72)	0.35 (0.75)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Education				
Lower secondary	-0.66 (0.89)	-0.39 (0.82)	-0.71 (0.87)	-0.44 (0.82)
Upper secondary	-0.84 (0.90)	-0.51 (0.83)	-0.82 (0.87)	-0.56 (0.84)
Higher	-0.76 (0.91)	-0.50 (0.84)	-0.75 (0.89)	-0.54 (0.84)
Ideology	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.11 (0.05)*	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.11 (0.05)*
Vote top candidate				
One election	-0.25 (0.42)	-0.20 (0.43)	-0.24 (0.43)	-0.17 (0.43)
Both elections	-0.79 (0.33)*	-0.41 (0.36)	-0.78 (0.34)*	-0.43 (0.36)
No. of votes	-0.26 (0.09)**	-0.72 (0.09)***	-0.25 (0.09)**	-0.73 (0.09)***
Constant	3.94 (0.91)***	3.19 (0.85)***	4.30 (0.88)***	3.29 (0.92)***
Log-pseudo likelihood	-632.671		-630.381	
Pseudo- <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.2571		0.2598	

Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ .  $N = 844$  (422 clusters, average cluster size = 2). Entries are the result of a cluster robust multinomial logistic regression analysis. All parameters were calculated in function of the reference category 'mixed vote'. In the federal elections, 250 respondents cast a same-sex vote, 160 cast a mixed vote and 216 cast a cross-sex vote. In the European elections, 234 respondents cast a same-sex vote, 133 cast a mixed vote and 198 cast a cross-sex vote.

vote, whereas women remain significantly more likely to cast a cross-gender vote. In sum, we find no empirical evidence to support the claim that women are more likely to cast a gender-based vote and we cannot confirm hypothesis 1. Instead, we find that men are systematically more likely to cast a vote for a candidate of the same sex, but that this gender gap can be largely explained by the composition of the ballot.

In addition, we investigated to what extent voters' age influences their voting behaviour. Age is important, because voters' experiences and voting

habits are greatly determined by the environment in which they were raised. First, we hypothesised that, because voters are unlikely to change their voting habits, older men and younger women would be more likely to cast a gender-based vote (hypothesis 2a). Second, as older women are more likely to have some experience in being discriminated against, we hypothesised that this experience of convergence between individual and collective deprivation would encourage them to vote for a candidate of the same sex (hypothesis 2b). These expectations were tested by including an interaction term between sex and age (table 11.5, Model 2). No significant effect, however, could be detected. The propensity to cast a gender-based vote is not influenced by voters' age, and this holds for both men and women. To have an accurate interpretation of each interaction effect, we also plotted the marginal effects which supported the findings in Model 2 and offered no support for hypothesis 2a or hypothesis 2b (figure 11.1).

Moreover, we hypothesised that the sex of a candidate could serve as an informational cue for voters with low levels of political sophistication. On the one hand, we expected that gender-based voting would decrease with political sophistication (hypothesis 3a). On the other hand, we expected that for highly sophisticated women, the opposite might also be the case: highly sophisticated women could intentionally vote women into parliament to improve their descriptive representation (hypothesis 3b). These hypotheses

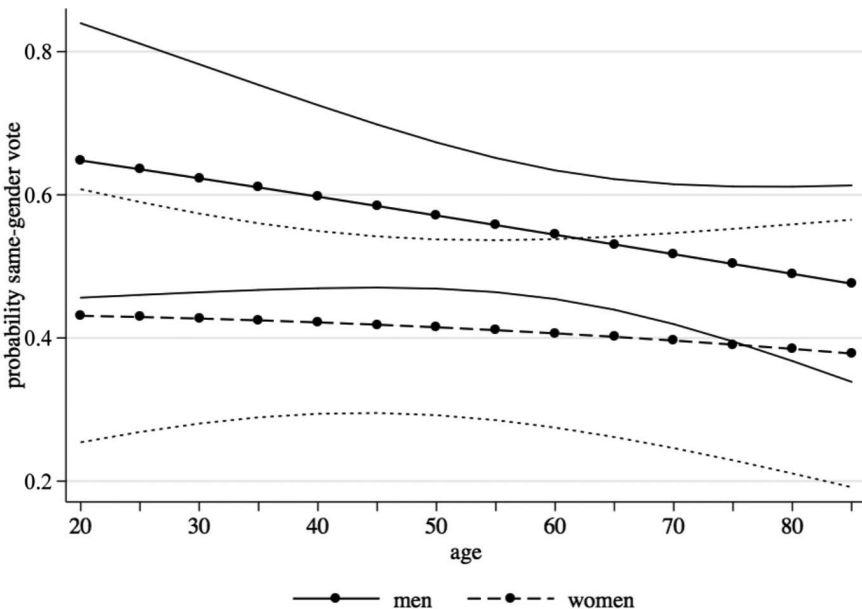


Figure 11.1. Marginal probabilities of same-gender voting according to respondents' age. Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

**Table 11.6. Explaining gender-based voting using individual-level characteristics (political sophistication)**

	Model 3		Model 4	
	Same	Cross	Same	Cross
Political interest	-0.12 (0.06)*	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.07 (0.07)	-0.10 (0.07)
Political knowledge	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.14 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.09)
Sex*Political interest			-0.10 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Sex: female	-0.56 (0.23)*	1.31 (0.24)***	-0.03 (0.67)	1.31 (0.65)*
Age (ref. 18–31), in years				
32–42	-0.65 (0.42)	-0.25 (0.43)	-0.67 (0.42)	-0.26 (0.43)
43–59	0.18 (0.41)	0.37 (0.42)	0.17 (0.41)	0.35 (0.42)
>60	-0.48 (0.36)	0.33 (0.39)	-0.50 (0.36)	0.32 (0.39)
Education				
Lower secondary	-0.57 (0.77)	-0.25 (0.79)	-0.51 (0.76)	-0.36 (0.72)
Upper secondary	-0.74 (0.77)	-0.34 (0.80)	-0.70 (0.75)	0.45 (0.73)
Higher	-0.49 (0.75)	-0.25 (0.79)	-0.46 (0.73)	0.36 (0.72)
Ideology	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.10 (0.05)*	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.11 (0.05)*
Vote top candidate				
One election	-0.23 (0.41)	0.17 (0.43)	-0.23 (0.41)	0.19 (0.42)
Both elections	-0.73 (0.35)*	-0.44 (0.37)	-0.73 (0.35)*	-0.41 (0.37)
No. of votes	-0.24 (0.08)**	-0.71 (0.09)***	-0.24 (0.08)**	-0.73 (0.09)***
Constant	4.74 (0.91)***	3.06 (1.02)**	4.45 (0.92)***	3.79 (0.94)***
Log-pseudo likelihood	-626.223		-625.111	
Pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	0.2647		0.2660	

Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ .  $N = 844$  (422 clusters, average cluster size = 2). Entries are the result of a cluster robust multinomial logistic regression analysis. All parameters were calculated in function of the reference category 'mixed vote'.



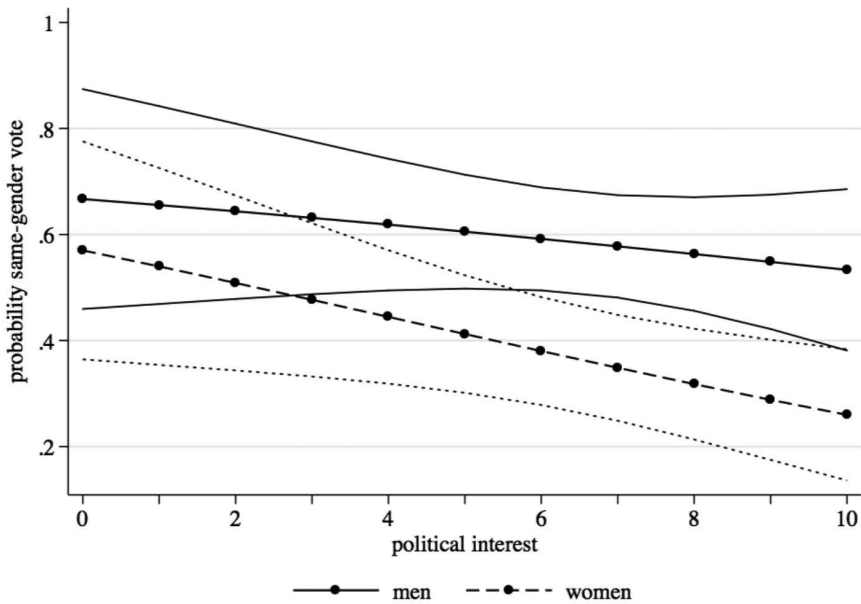


Figure 11.2. Marginal probabilities of same-gender vote according to political interest. Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

were tested in table 11.6. Model 3 first evaluates the effect of political sophistication. The results indicate that there is indeed a significant negative effect on the motivational component of political sophistication, that is political interest, but that no discernible effect could be detected for the cognitive component, that is political knowledge. Hence the support for hypothesis 3a is mixed.

In order to evaluate hypothesis 3b, we included an interaction term between political interest and sex (displayed in Model 4 in table 11.6). Analogously to the interpretation of the interaction effect in table 11.5, we rely on the marginal effects analyses for the interpretation (see figure 11.2). Although the marginal effect does not display a significant value, the clear negative pattern for both male and female voters displayed in figure 11.2 does suggest that gender-based voting is the result of the application of an informational shortcut, rather than the result of a clear intention of highly sophisticated women to improve women's descriptive representation. Hypothesis 3b does not receive support.

### *Institutional determinants*

In a last step, we investigate the influence of the institutional context. We theorised that other than the limited ability of low sophisticated voters to

collect relevant information, the limited availability of information within the context of the second-order European elections would also increase the likelihood of casting a gender-based vote (hypothesis 4). The analysis displayed in Model 5 of table 11.7, however, provides little support for the assertion, as the likelihood of casting a same-gender vote in the European elections is not significantly different from that in the federal elections, that is hypothesis 4 does not receive any support. The habitual voting argument might offer an

**Table 11.7. Explaining gender-based voting using institutional factors**

	<i>Model 5</i>		<i>Model 6</i>	
	<i>Same</i>	<i>Cross</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Cross</i>
Sex: female	-0.34 (0.24)	1.42 (0.24)***	0.63 (0.54)	2.09 (0.63)***
Election:	0.13 (0.27)	0.08 (0.26)	0.13 (0.24)	0.00 (0.26)
European				
District	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.00 (0.04)
magnitude				
DM * Sex			-0.07 (0.04) <sup>†</sup>	-0.05 (0.05)
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age (ref. 18–31) in years				
32–42	-0.78 (0.40) <sup>†</sup>	-0.31 (0.42)	0.78 (0.40) <sup>†</sup>	-0.30 (0.42)
43–59	0.01 (0.39)	0.39 (0.41)	-0.00 (0.39)	0.28 (0.41)
60>	-0.70 (0.35)*	0.20 (0.38)	-0.71 (0.35)*	0.20 (0.39)
Ideology	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.11 (0.05)*	-0.09 (0.05) <sup>†</sup>	-0.10 (0.05)*
Vote top candidate				
One election	-0.25 (0.42)	0.21 (0.42)	-0.26 (0.41)	0.20 (0.42)
Both elections	-0.77 (0.34)*	-0.38 (0.36)	-0.77 (0.33)*	-0.39 (0.36)
No. of votes	-0.26 (0.09)**	-0.73 (0.09)***	-0.26 (0.10)*	-0.73 (0.09)***
Education				
Lower secondary	-0.66 (0.90)	-0.38 (0.83)	-0.66 (0.91)	-0.38 (0.83)
Upper secondary	-0.84 (0.91)	-0.50 (0.84)	-0.84 (0.91)	-0.50 (0.84)
Higher	-0.75 (0.91)	-0.50 (0.84)	-0.75 (0.92)	-0.50 (0.85)
Constant	3.90 (0.92)***	3.40 (0.94)**	3.50 (0.92)**	3.12 (1.01)*
Log-pseudo likelihood	-632.019		-630.542	
Pseudo- <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.2579		0.2596	

Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ; <sup>†</sup> $p < 0.10$ .  $N = 844$  (422 clusters) Entries are the result of a cluster robust multinomial logistic regression analysis. All parameters were calculated in function of the reference category 'mixed vote'.

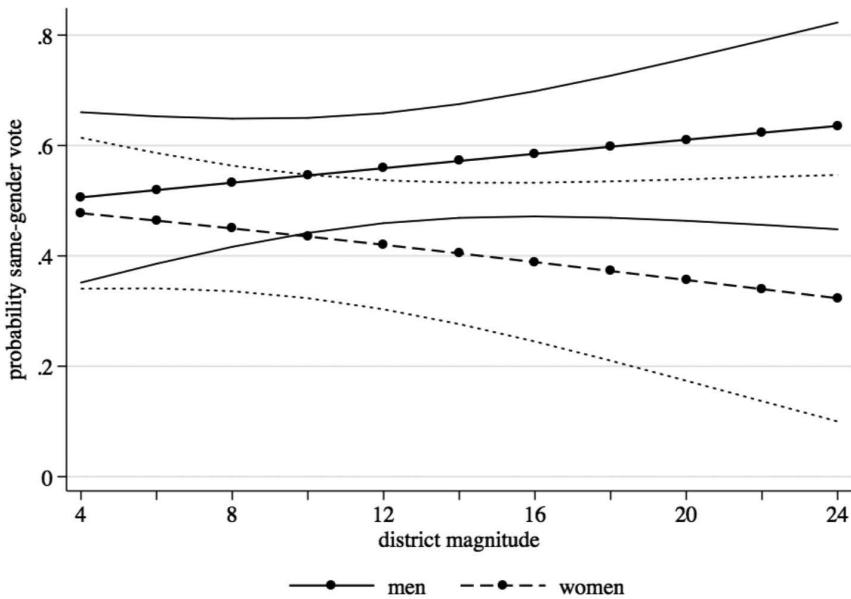


Figure 11.3. Marginal probabilities of same-gender voting according to district magnitude. Source: 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey.

explanation here. Voters might display the same voting habits for the two elections, which could explain why we observe similar gendered voting patterns across levels despite the different information environments.

Finally, we investigate whether a larger district magnitude acts more favourably upon the election of women by women by including an interaction term between district magnitude and sex. While Model 6 shows that this interaction is indeed significant, the marginal effects analysis in figure 11.3 displays no significant results. Similarly, there appears to be no indication suggesting that larger district magnitude increases the probability for women to cast a same-gender vote. Instead, the opposite appears to be the case: for men, the probability slightly increases (non-significantly) with district magnitude, whereas for women the probability slightly decreases (non-significantly). This leads us to reject hypothesis 5.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter examined whether there is such a thing as ‘gender-based voting’ in Belgium. Are voters more likely to cast preference votes for candidates of their own gender? Because of the high supply of women on candidate lists,

the system of multiple preferential voting and the history of accommodating social difference in society, we expected Belgium to be a ‘likely case’ for gender-based voting. However, evidence is mixed. Patterns of gender-based voting identified in the 2014 federal and European elections in Belgium were not that strong, and men proved far more likely to cast a gender-based vote than women. Additional variation in gender-based voting is furthermore not easily explained. Voters’ age and levels of political sophistication did not affect patterns of gender-based voting, and neither did the type of elections and district magnitude.

The bottom line of most of our findings is that gender-based vote from the part of female voters (i.e. women opting to vote for women) is still limited as a phenomenon, and certainly much more limited than the phenomenon of voters – both male and female – casting a vote for male candidates. This means that the introduction of gender parity quotas in the Belgian context has not yet led citizens to deeply change some quite traditional patterns in their voting behaviour. On the one hand, the political elites, and party selectorates in particular, have indeed complied with the quotas. In this regard, the quotas have had a very strong impact, even if their implementation is frequently tweaked in favour of male candidates. The more frequent presence of male candidates in the top-of-the-list position is, for instance, one of the indications of this. On the other hand, the voters – and female voters in particular – have not seized the new situation and have not strongly engaged in strategic voting in the favour of female candidates. This is, of course, a rather strong limitation in terms of the effect of the gender quotas, that is in terms of the actual proportion of female politicians being elected.

There are multiple potential explanations for this state of affairs. Here we just discuss a few, for which further research, through both surveys and more qualitative approaches, would be necessary. To start with, one question that remains to be empirically assessed is the extent to which Belgian women actually perceive that they have a deprived status (compared to men) in society, the extent to which this has made them gender-conscious and, more importantly (for this chapter), to what extent this gender-consciousness is strong enough to clearly shape their voting behaviour more in favour of female candidates.

Further, another hypothesis we could formulate is that voting in favour of female candidates is a form of ‘strategic voting’. If that is the case, it means that the potential public that is likely to engage in such a voting behaviour needs to meet two characteristics: (1) having a high cultural capital and a high level of political information and sophistication and (2) being ‘culturally liberal’ and, in particular, gender-conscious. However, this public only constitutes a small proportion of the whole electorate, at least in the current Belgian society (Rihoux, Meulewaeter & Baudewyns 2014), and therefore

the overarching picture of the median Belgian voter is still that of a not-so-strategic voter and not-so-gender-conscious.

Next, turning to the party-political and institutional context: the fact that the party lists are so numerous given the multiparty nature of the Belgian political system, and the fact that the lists of candidates are frequently quite long (at least in the larger constituencies) encourages voters to cast a list vote, and not a ‘strategic’ vote in favour of female candidates. The particular context of the 2014 elections could also have played a role: as these were simultaneous regional, federal and European elections, this could have produced a sort of ‘fatigue’ of the voters, also leading them to cast a list vote – except for the smaller proportion of more politicised or more strategic voters, as discussed earlier.

These Belgian findings speak well to the emerging literature on gender-based voting such as the recent study of gender-based voting in Finland, where, in a similar vein, stronger same-gender voting patterns among men have been identified (Holli & Wass 2010; Giger et al. 2014). This study echoes their findings that institutional factors might go a long way in explaining gender-based voting among men, particularly the crucial role of ballot composition. This study, furthermore, adds to this in that it shows that exploratory frameworks such as habitual voting and strategic voting need to be taken into consideration in future studies trying to explain gender-based voting.

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## *Appendix*

**Table 11.8. Summary statistics**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Elections: European	4,038	.5	.50	0	1
District magnitude	2,940	12.96	5.11	1	24
Age: 32–42 years	786	0.19		0	1
Age: 43–59 years	1,316	0.32		0	1
Age: >60 years	1,068	0.26		0	1
Left-right self-placement	3,942	4.94	2.09	0	10
Gender: female	4,038	.50	.50	0	1
Region: Wallonia	2940	.46	.50	0	1
Vote top candidate: one election	854	.31	.56	0	1
Vote top candidate: both	854	.54	.50	0	1
No. of preferential votes	4,038	1.50	4.70	0	56
Political interest	4,034	4.79	2.77	0	10
Political knowledge	4,038	2.19	1.46	0	5
Education: lower secondary	4,038	.22	.41	0	1
Education: higher secondary	4,038	.36	.48	0	1
Education: higher education	4,038	.34	.47	0	1