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Blome, Agnes; Lloren, Anouk; Rosset, Jan

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The politicization of abortion, voters' stereotypes, and the electoral success of women candidates

Agnes Blome, Anouk Lloren & Jan Rosset

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Abstract

Gendered stereotypes about politicians are widespread in the electorate. This article analyses whether such stereotypes impact electoral results in a PR open list system where candidates do not only compete against candidates from other parties but also compete against other members of their party. Borrowing from the literature on “gender issue ownership”, we evaluate whether female candidates who favor abortion, and thus conform to the prescriptive gendered stereotype regarding women's policy stances, have an electoral advantage. Using Swiss survey data, we compare the national election of 2007, where the issue of abortion was not salient, with the national election of 2011, where the issue was politicized. Results indicate that, in the context of a public debate on abortion, candidates' position on gendered issues matter for women's election prospects, but not for men. Women who hold more liberal preferences on abortion are electorally more successful than liberal-minded men and women who have a more conservative stance on abortion. Our findings indicate that prescriptive stereotypes matter in contexts where intra-party competition is likely and gender equality issues are salient.

Keywords: Abortion, Gender issue ownership, Politicization, Elections, Switzerland

Introduction

On July 25 2013, Texas State Legislature was poised to pass a bill restricting abortion rights. The Texas Senate Bill 5 included measures such as a ban on abortion at 20 weeks post-fertilization and recognized the state to have a compelling interest in protecting fetuses from pain (Smith *et al.* 2013). These measures triggered resistances. With an eleven hours long

filibuster aimed at delaying the passage of the bill until the end of the legislative session former State Senator Wendy Davis attracted most media attention. According to the Washington Post, "As she spoke, Twitter registered 400,000 tweets with the hashtag #standwithwendy. One of them came from the official account of President Obama, and said: 'Something special is happening in Austin tonight'" (Tumulty and Smith 2013). Although her strategy failed and the bill passed in a second special session, the then Senator acquired nationwide fame, which eventually led her to run for Governor. These events illustrate the importance of abortion, and morality issues more broadly, on the political agenda. Be it same-sex marriage, surrogate motherhood, stem-cell research or euthanasia and assisted suicide, moral issues have increasingly polarized elites, party activists, and rank-and-file voters.

At the same time, a growing literature shows that voters hold gendered stereotypes about electoral candidates and political parties on morality issues and other traditional left-right issues. Gender, as much as party, functions as a cue for the electorate. Findings from the U.S. context indicate that Republican and Democratic female candidates are perceived as more liberal than their male counterparts (Herrnson *et al.* 2003; King and Matland 2003). In particular, female politicians from both parties appear more pro-choice on abortion issues. Arguably, voters in Texas accredited concern with the issue of abortion to Wendy Davis.

Moreover, the public considers female candidates to be more competent on social issues such as education and health, while they believe men are better at handling issues such as national defense and crime (Sanbonmatsu 2002; Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). Yet, we know little about the electoral consequences of morality issues, and the literature on how gender stereotypes affect women's electoral success is inconclusive (Bos and Schneider 2017; Brooks 2013; Dolan 2014).

We contribute to this debate by examining whether female candidates who support abortion rights have an electoral advantage. More specifically, we investigate whether voters discriminate or reward female candidates who have a pro-choice attitude on abortion. We also ask to what extent and under which circumstances gender influences candidates' electoral success when women's issues become salient in electoral campaigns. To answer these questions, we build on research on gender stereotypes as well as on the concept of "gender issue ownership" (Hernson *et al.* 2003: 247). The concept of gender issue ownership contends that voters positively associate specific issues, such as education or abortion, to women candidates. Provided that women's issues are politicized, we expect that female candidates who support issues "owned" by women and conform to prescriptive stereotypes are more likely to win political office.

To examine this argument, we focus on Switzerland, which has an open list proportional representation (PR) system. Contrary to other electoral systems, open list PR systems more strongly encourage candidates to cultivate a personal reputation as they do not only compete against candidates from other parties but also against other candidates running on the same list (Carey and Shuggart 1995)¹. This context is particularly useful to test the impact of gender stereotypes on female candidates' electoral success. It allows to analyze whether candidates with specific policy positions have an electoral advantage over other candidates from the same party running in the same constituency. We are hence able to isolate the specific contribution of individual characteristics on electoral fate. In addition, the Swiss case is especially interesting because the issue of abortion became the topic of a heated debate between the 2007 and 2011 elections. Indeed, a group of parliamentarians affiliated to the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (UDC) and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) launched a referendum in

¹ Studies on the campaign strategies of Swiss candidates confirm that a substantial part of their campaigning efforts can be explained by intra-party competition (Selb and Lutz 2015).

2010 to privatize the costs of abortion. By using Swiss survey data (the Selects Survey), we are able to model the positions candidates hold on abortion on the likelihood of being elected in two different contexts: first, a context where women's issues are not salient (2007) and, second, a context where women's issues are politicized (2011). Since there is hardly any work on how candidates think about issues, this article fills an important gap in the literature by exploring how candidates' stances on gender equality issues affect women's chances of winning elections. More generally, we contribute to an emerging literature on the impact of gender stereotypes in electoral studies.

Gender stereotypes, gender issue ownership, and female candidates' electoral success

Prescriptive stereotype theory suggests that gendered expectations towards individuals provide strong normative criteria upon which these individuals are judged (Prentice and Carranza 2002). Independent of whether the stereotypes are positive or negative, individuals who do not conform to them run the risk of being penalized. For instance, previous research on personality traits shows that women who do not conform to gender stereotypes face difficulties in job seeking situations or when they run in elections (see e.g. Rudman and Phelan 2008; Okimoto and Brescoll 2010; Tyler and McCullough 2009). More recent research based on experiments, however, shows that the relationship between stereotypes and electoral penalization is not so straightforward. Bauer argues that evaluations of female candidates are influenced by stereotypes only when they have been activated during a campaign (2015) and that counterstereotypic gender strategies, i.e. when women emphasize masculine trait competencies, improve evaluations of female candidates (2017). Theories on prescriptive gender stereotypes have so far mostly been tested in relation to psychological factors, such as personality traits or ambition.

Also, voters have expectations with regard to candidates' competences and their policy stances. According to the literature on party issue ownership, parties and candidates have incentives to *differentially* emphasize certain issues in election campaigns. More precisely, they tend to campaign on problems² on which they have an advantage, namely the ones voters see them as more competent handling (Petrocik 1996). While the concept has been first developed in relation to political parties, it has been extended to other characteristics on which the public can take voting cues. Socio-demographic characteristics, such as race and gender, can also affect voters' evaluation of candidates and their voting choices (Sanbonmatsu 2002, Philpot and Walton 2007).

Drawing on the literatures of party issue ownership and gender stereotypes, Herrnson *et al.* (2003: 247) proposed the concept of gender issue ownership. It argues that women have a special connection to women's issues that creates a perception of "ownership" of these issues. This ownership leads to the feeling that women are more competent and, therefore, act more credibly on behalf of women's issues (Osborn 2012). In other words, voters hold gendered stereotypes when evaluating candidates (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009). Sanbonmatsu and Dolan's (2009) results also indicate that American voters consider women candidates of both parties to be more liberal, i.e. more pro-choice, on abortion issues, which leads them to conclude that gender transcends party. Likewise, Koch (2002) provides evidence that the public perceives female Republicans as ideologically moderate. In other words, voters' evaluations of candidates are based on individual characteristics, such as gender cues, that are partly independent of campaign activity and party platforms (Hayes 2011).³ This literature points to the fact that

² Following Petrocik (1996), we use issue and problem interchangeably.

³³ There is also research that examines how voters' gender stereotypes impact upon female and male candidates' campaign behavior. Some scholars suggest that female candidates reinforce gender stereotypes by "running as women", while others argue that women deliberately focus on what are perceived as "masculine" issues in their campaigns. Windett (2013) argues for a

voters have expectations with regard to candidates' positions and competences on some specific issues, and that these expectations depend at least in part on the gender of the candidate. Therefore, gender stereotyping is likely to play out in politics not only in relation to personality but also according to attitudes towards political programs or morality issues. The few studies that analyze the effect of gender stereotyping on voters' decisions have documented that gender matters for candidates' evaluations by voters (Dolan and Lynch 2014), but has little influence on voters' actual electoral behavior (Dolan and Lynch 2014; King and Matland 2003; Hayes 2011).

This discrepancy between voters' evaluation and their behavior has been shown mainly for female candidates during US elections. It is partly explained with the possibly conflicting information that women send to voters who must reconcile party and gender stereotypes. While party issue ownership is often consistent with gender stereotypes for the Democratic Party, Republican women are rather penalized by gender stereotypes. This is because the perception of more liberal-minded female candidates does not match with the more authoritarian party line (Koch 2002; Dolan and Lynch 2014).

Most of the research on gendered voting concentrated on single member district elections. In such contexts, there is usually one candidate per party. Candidates will compete against a candidate from another party and partisan differences will likely prevail over potential gender considerations in voters' choice. By contrast, in open list PR systems candidates do not only need to campaign in a way that their party gets votes, but also have to make sure that they gather

more dynamic view on campaigns that focuses on the interaction between male and female candidates. He demonstrates that women running for office prefer to not appear as a "female" candidate in the beginning of their campaigns. But, male candidates who face female opponents then attempt to force women to campaign on stereotypical "feminine issues."

more votes individually than other members of their party running in the same district. In such a system – the one in use for the election to the Swiss National Council (lower house of parliament) – candidates are encouraged to cultivate a personal reputation (Carey and Shugart 1995) and their campaigning efforts are closely related to intra-, rather than inter-party competition (Selb and Lutz 2015). As it allows comparing the electoral success of candidates running for the same party and in the same constituency but who might differ in their individual characteristics, an open list PR electoral system provides a particularly favorable context for studying gendered vote choices (see e.g. Kunovich 2012, Giger *et al.* 2015). In other words, because an open list PR system allows voters to choose between candidates it enables us to study whether or not voters reward female politicians who conform to stereotypes and punish those who do not.

To sum up, it seems reasonable to postulate that voters associate candidates of each gender with specific policies and tend to evaluate more positively those candidates who match with their expectations. In addition, the literature on gender issue ownership shows that those issues where gender stereotypes are most salient relate to women's issues such as abortion. On this particular matter, voters tend to expect women to be more pro-choice compared to men candidates. Taking both arguments in parallel, it becomes clear that if prescriptive gender stereotypes are to play a role in the electoral fate of candidates, they are likely to be visible in relation to specific issues and generally in favor of those individuals who conform to the gendered social norm. Therefore, we expect that *candidates' stances on abortion matter for the election of women candidates, with more pro-choice female candidates having an electoral advantage over pro-life female candidates* (H1). We do not expect any substantial effect for male candidates since abortion is perceived as a women's issue and should therefore more likely matter for women candidates. In other words, the effect of a candidate's preferences for abortion matters more for women

than men. For female candidates, conforming (or not) to the prescriptive stereotype will provide an electoral advantage (disadvantage).

However, we also have grounds to think that under certain environmental conditions generic stereotypes play a larger role for the evaluation of candidates. In fact, the effect of gender stereotypes on a candidate's electoral chances becomes greater when a gendered issue becomes salient. In other words, gender stereotypes play out more strongly for salient issues (Falk and Kenski 2006). For example, under conditions of threat (e.g. war), people value stereotypical masculine characteristics and issue competencies more highly and perceive women as less suitable for political leadership than men (Holman *et al.* 2011). Likewise, in a context in which a morality issue becomes salient, individuals hold relatively more positive assessments of the general capabilities of female politicians. Research showed that women will receive an electoral advantage from stereotypes when the saliency of an issue complements the stereotypes about women candidates (Kahn 2006). This is especially so when issues are politicized and medialized (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Indeed, if gender issues are politicized and voters have a chance of actually knowing the positions of a specific debate, then gender stereotypes likely play a role for voting behavior. In other words, if the issue of abortion is not salient, gender issue ownership should less likely affect women's election prospects. Therefore, we also hypothesize that *the effect of gender stereotyping on women's electoral chances is conditional on the salience of gendered issues in a given election (H2)*.

The 2007 and 2011 Swiss National Council elections provide an interesting case for testing these hypotheses. First, an open list electoral system is in use where voters can cast preferential votes for specific candidates within a list. The seats gained by a party are then distributed among its candidates according to the number of preferential votes received by each of them. Voters

can cast a vote for specific candidates and gender might play a role in voters' choice. Second, the issue of abortion became salient in-between the two elections because a popular referendum was launched on the issue in 2010. The next section presents the context of the Swiss federal elections more closely and discusses the popular initiative for the privatization of the costs of abortion.

The Swiss political context and the popular initiative on privatizing the costs of abortion

Compared to other European countries, women's suffrage was introduced very late in Switzerland (1971). Nevertheless, women's political representation has increased steadily since then. In 2015, women make up about 28.5% of the lower chamber and Switzerland is now among the top 40 countries worldwide in terms of women's descriptive representation in national parliaments (IPU 2015). Besides the late introduction of women's suffrage, Switzerland is often described a typical case in terms of women's representation (Gilardi 2015). Note that Switzerland displays one of the biggest modern gender gaps in voting, i.e. women voters tend to be more leftist compared to men voters (Abendschon and Steinmetz 2014; Giger *et al.* 2009).

The debate about the legal regulation of abortion in Switzerland is ongoing since the early 1970s. After several attempts during the 1970s and 1980s, a parliamentary initiative was submitted in 1993. The initiative provided for allowing and financing abortion within the first three months of pregnancy.⁴ The parliament adopted the Federal law in 2001 and citizens approved it via a popular vote in 2002. Since then, the basic health insurance scheme bears the costs for abortions within the first three months of pregnancy.

⁴ For a description of the legislative process, see Bundesrat 09.05.2012

In January 2010, a group of parliamentarians affiliated with the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (UDC) and the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) launched a popular initiative⁵ with the goal to privatize the costs of abortion. Members of the Evangelical Party (PES) and the Federal Democratic Union (UDF) supported the initiative committee. The initiators acted independently from their parties.⁶ The issue of abortion entails a high potential of party internal conflicts, in particular within the UDC and the PDC.⁷ The referendum's proponents argued that the amendment would reduce the high financial costs of the basic health insurance scheme, strengthen the freedom and the self-responsibility of the individual, and finally reduce the number of abortions by lowering the financial incentive to terminate pregnancies.

The initiative collected more than the requested 100,000 signatures by July 2011, shortly before the national elections in October. Many of the signatures were gathered by church associations. In relation to the population, the highest share of supporters came from Catholic cantons.⁸ But there were also strong voices opposing the initiative, in particular from women politicians belonging to the Social Democratic Party (PSS) who feared health risks for women who may not be able to finance abortions.⁹

In May 2012, the government (*Bundesrat*) recommended to reject the proposal. At the same time, a broad cross-party coalition of women campaigned for the rejection of a change of the law.¹⁰ Both the National Council and the women's movement argued that the privatization of

⁵ One of the main features of Switzerland's political system is direct democracy, which enables citizens to express their view in popular votes. A popular initiative is one of the procedures of direct democracy. It requires 100,000 signatures to be collected within 18 months to have a popular initiative taken into consideration by the legislative.

⁶ lepoint.fr 05.07.2011

⁷ *SonntagsZeitung* 24.01.2010

⁸ SDA - Basisdienst Deutsch 04.07.2011

⁹ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 04.07.2011

¹⁰ *Tages-Anzeiger* 30.05.2012

abortion costs would neither save money nor conform to the referendum of 2002 where 72% of the Swiss people had agreed to allow and finance abortion.¹¹ In 2013, the parliament recommended rejecting the initiative. And on February 9, 2014, the majority of voters – 69.8% – rejected the referendum.

The public debate about the initiative had a strong impact on how issues relating to gender equality were perceived not only by the population, but also by politicians and candidates running for the 2011 national election. In 2007, when the abortion issue was not politicized, only 10 candidates (0,6%) – one of them male – out of the 1632 participating in the Selects survey stated that gender equality was among the three most important problems faced by Swiss society.¹² In 2011, however, the number of candidates who considered the issue of gender equality as one of their top three priorities rose to 232 representing 15,5% of the 1475 respondents (Table 1). In both cases the proportion of women candidates who indicated gender issues as one of the top three political problems was significantly higher than that of men.

This sharp increase in the attention to gender equality issues between the two elections is corroborated by an analysis of news coverage in the months preceding the elections. Looking at the mention of abortion in newspaper articles during the electoral campaign, it appears that there were only 29 articles on the topic in 2007 and more than four times as many (117) in 2011.¹³ While abortion was certainly not the most central political issue on the agenda even in 2011, it seems fair to say that it has grown as one of the secondary issues that were present and debated during the campaign. Several interviews published in the press also confirm that it was

¹¹ Bundesrat 09.05.2012; SDA-Basisdienst 29.05.2012

¹² Note that abortion was not a specific response category in the survey.

¹³ The search was performed using the LexisNexis database and concerned Swiss newspapers. The keywords searched were "aborto", "Abtreibung", "avortement" and "Schwangerschaftsabbruch". The search was restricted to articles that concerned Switzerland or Swiss politics. The periods analysed covered the three months prior to the election (21.07 – 21.10.2007- and 23.07-23.10.2011).

one of the issues on which there was a high level of within-party disagreement, at least in parties from the center and from the right.¹⁴

Table 1 about here

Data and Research Design

Data

Our empirical analyses use data from the 2007 and 2011 Swiss electoral studies (Selects) that were conducted in the context of the federal parliamentary elections. Within this framework, several surveys were carried out, including a survey of electoral candidates. About 3000 candidates ran in the 2007 and 2011 National Council election, out of which 200 won a seat in the lower chamber of the Swiss parliament. In both elections, around half of all candidates took part in the Selects electoral survey, which asked questions related to their political background, campaign activities, and political preferences.¹⁵ In addition, the survey provides information on whether candidates were elected or not. We use these two political elite surveys to analyze how the salience of gender equality issues has evolved over time among candidates and to assess whether candidates' preferences on abortion affect their electoral success.

Operationalization of variables

Dependent variable. Because the Swiss open list electoral system gives voters the opportunity to vote for specific candidates we are able to test whether voters reward female and male

¹⁴ For instance eight days before the election, Yvan Perrin, the Vice President of the UDC, the largest Swiss party, declared he was worried that the initiative on abortion would create divisions within his party. "I am clearly in favour of abortion. The first time I said it to Ulrich Schuler [UDC Member of the National Council from 1995 till 2011] I thought he would bite me!" (La Tribune de Genève, 15.10.2011, p. 7). Similarly, in an interview as a newly elected Member of the National Council, Céline Amaudruz (UDC) noted that she almost always agrees with her party except for the reimbursement of abortion [and mammography] (Le Matin, 25.10.2011, pp.4-5). Within the PDC, the same divisions were to be found. While some members of the party were involved in the initiative committee, others did not hesitate to express their adverse positions (for instance Luc Barthassat declared: "I find this initiative ridiculous", Le Matin 31.08.2011, p.9).

¹⁵ Detailed information on the surveys as well as the datasets are available at: <https://forsbase.unil.ch/project/study-public-overview/8436/0/> (Selects 2007) and <https://forsbase.unil.ch/project/study-public-overview/12631/0/> (Selects 2011)

candidates differently according to their policy stances. The dependent variable in our analyses is candidates' electoral success. It is coded as a dummy variable with a value of 1 if a candidate was elected and 0 otherwise.

Independent variables. To determine the effect of candidates' policy stances on their electoral success and whether it varies according to gender, our models include a variable identifying female candidates, a variable measuring candidates' policy stances on abortion, and an interaction between gender and the policy positions taken by candidates. To measure candidates' policy positions on abortion, we used a survey question asking them how much they agree or disagree with the following statement: "Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion". Respondents were given five response categories ranging from 1 (= strongly agree) to 5 (= strongly disagree). We recoded the answers so that higher values correspond to more liberal or pro-choice stances.

Control variables. Other factors than candidates' gender and policy stances can potentially influence politicians' electoral success. First, our models control for candidates' incumbency status and prior experience at different levels of politics. Candidates who held prior office tend to enjoy greater electoral support and the (male) incumbency advantage remains the most important barrier to women's access to political office (see, e.g., Gelman and King 1990). Indeed, men are over-represented among incumbents and parties tend to nominate candidates who have already been elected. Incumbents also dispose of campaign advantages in terms of resources such as money and reputation, which makes it harder for (women) challengers to win at the polls. Note that the incumbent advantage also benefits women once they hold public office. In practical terms, we measure whether candidates served as government members at the local (municipal), cantonal, or national level, whether they were member of the national and

cantonal parliament, or whether they worked in party structures at the local, cantonal, or national level. All these variables were coded as dummies (1 if the candidate held political office, and 0 otherwise).

Candidates' political ambition is central for understanding election prospects. For instance, some candidates are placed on the bottom of electoral lists and do not intend to be elected. We therefore include an indicator for candidates' subjective evaluations of being elected. This variable contains three different categories "no chance", "open race", and "good chance" to win office, with "no chance" being the reference category. We also control for candidates' position on the list by introducing a variable indicating candidates' rank on the ballot.

Financial campaign resources can influence candidates' electoral chances, but the literature on gender and campaign financing is inconclusive. On the one hand, it shows that women often have lower financial resources to contribute to campaigns and have therefore lower chances to win political office (Schlozman *et al.* 1994). On the other hand, more recent research focusing on the U.S. indicates that women increasingly rely on similar financial and organizational campaign resources than their male counterparts (Dabelko and Herrnson 1997; Fox and Lawless 2005; Werner and Mayer 2007). Following this debate, our models include information on the declared budget of candidates' electoral campaign (in Swiss francs). We further include control variables measuring candidates' education (a dummy variable for those with a tertiary education), and their year of birth (voters being more likely to vote for educated and older candidates).

Our models also include two variables capturing the characteristics of cantons, which are the electoral district in a federal election where the candidate is running. Generally speaking, high

district magnitude is associated with a greater likelihood of women being elected. In a context of a high district magnitude a more diverse set of candidates (e.g. regarding age, gender, ethnic background) should appeal to a broader spectrum of the electorate and lead to more votes (Schmidt 2008; Matland 2005; Meier *et al.* 2006). We control for district magnitude as the number of candidates elected in each district varies substantially and ranges between 1 and 34.¹⁶

Given that Swiss cantons differ in relation to gender equality, we also introduce an index variable measuring the level of gender equality at the cantonal level. This variable captures the social modernization degree of a canton concerning gender and is computed through five indicators: the rate of women that graduated from high school; the rate of women in the workforce; the date women were granted the right to vote in each of the 26 Cantons; the approval rate for the federal referendum on women's suffrage in 1971; and, the rate of female elected within cantonal legislative bodies (Bühler 2001).

Finally, our models also include party-fixed effects to control for the fact that electoral chances depend in a large part on the popularity of the party for which candidates are running. As a candidate who runs for an unsuccessful party has virtually no chance of getting elected independent of his personal qualities, our analysis is restricted to candidates affiliated with a party that gained at least one seat in the National Council. The analysis therefore includes candidates from nine parties in 2007 and from seven parties in 2011.¹⁷ An alternative and more conservative way to test our hypotheses is to restrict the analysis to those who ran for a party

¹⁶ Note that the results presented below also hold if we restrict the analysis to candidates running in cantons where at least five seats are allocated as has been the case in previous research on the determinants of electoral success in the Swiss federal elections (see Lutz 2010).

¹⁷ Restricting the analysis to parties in which there is variance in the electoral outcome reduces our sample size by about 40%, as a substantial share of candidates ran in parties which did not gain a single seat in the election. An alternative would be to use a more restrictive criterion for including candidates in the analysis by keeping only those who ran for a party that got at least one seat in their district. The results presented below also hold if we use this alternative specification (see supplementary Table S1).

that got at least one seat in their district and to include list-fixed effect (i.e. identifying each cantonal party). The results of this alternative specification are presented in Supplementary Table S1.

Estimation strategy. The dependent variable being dichotomous, we estimate logistic regression models. We use robust clustered standard errors, as candidates' electoral chances (and other characteristics) might vary systematically across parties, thus violating the assumption that all observations are independent.

Results

Our central goal is to examine whether female candidates who support pro-choice positions have an electoral advantage. In Table 2, we start by presenting a simple model explaining candidates' electoral success in the 2007 and 2011 elections. The first two columns of Table 2 focus on factors which have been shown to influence women's electoral chances. These two models include all the variables described above, with the exception of the interaction term between gender and positions on abortion. For both elections, the results indicate that gender has no effect on the likelihood of getting elected. In other words, women have similar electoral chances as men after controlling for the factors described above. This result is in line with previous research showing that female candidates have similar electoral chances as men when they run for office and that discrimination mainly arises in the candidate selection process (see, e.g., Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Lawless and Pearson 2008). There is also no systematic association between the policy preferences of candidates on abortion and their chances of being elected. In other words, taking into account other potential sources in candidates' success heterogeneity, gender and policy stances on abortion have no effect on the odds of getting elected. In addition, the models confirm the relevance of individual level characteristics,

including political experience (in particular being an incumbent), political ambition as well as the placement on the list as most of the control variables reach statistical significance. Note that the models display a good fit, especially for the 2007 election.

Instead of assessing whether women and men politicians have similar chances of gaining a seat, our goal is rather to examine whether candidates' positions on abortion have a different influence on female and male candidates' electoral success. To do so, we introduce an interaction term between gender and the variable measuring policy preferences on abortion (Columns 3 & 4, Table 2). Results indicate that this interaction term has no effect on the odds of getting elected in the 2007 election. In other words, opinions on abortion did not matter differently for the electoral success of men and women politicians.

The results for the 2007 election contrast with the ones obtained from an identical model, which we ran with for the 2011 election. In this case, the interaction has a positive and statistically significant effect. Put differently, the effect of policy preferences on electoral success is significantly different for women and for men. Being in favor of abortion increases the odds for women candidates to be elected, but has no significant effect on men's chances of electoral success.

A crucial question is whether the interaction effect is different in 2011 as compared to 2007. Given that comparing coefficients between two logistic regression models can be problematic due to unobserved heterogeneity (Allison, 1999; Mood 2010), we use average marginal effects as suggested by Mood (2010) to test whether the interaction between gender and policy preferences is statistically different in the two elections. To that end, we estimate a model with pooled data from the two elections which includes a three-way interaction between gender,

policy preferences and a dummy variable for election year (see Supplementary Table S2). Based on that model we estimate the average marginal effect of the interaction between gender and policy preferences in the two elections. It equals -0,001 in 2007 and 0,024 in 2011 and the two marginal effects are statistically different at a $p < 0.05$ level.

Table 2 about here

To have a better understanding of these findings, we present the probability of a favorable electoral outcome under different scenarios varying candidates' gender and preferences on abortion while all the other variables are kept constant.¹⁸ The results for the 2007 and the 2011 election differ substantially (see Figure 1). In 2007, the predicted probabilities for each of the four different scenarios are very similar. In other words, attitudes towards abortion matter relatively little for both men and women's electoral chances. There is a tendency for candidates of both genders to have slightly lower chances of electoral success when they are resolutely pro-choice as compared to resolutely pro-life, but this difference is small and not statistically significant.

Figure 1 about here

The predicted probabilities for the 2011 election show a quite different pattern. In this case, opinions on abortion had a different impact on candidates' electoral faith depending on their gender. Like for the predictions based on the 2007 election, there is a substantial amount of uncertainty regarding the estimates, especially for the scenario of a pro-life female candidate.

¹⁸ The predictions were calculated keeping the other variables at their observed values using the *margins* command in Stata.

However, the results suggest that the electoral chances were higher for women with pro-choice attitudes than for women who oppose abortion. Interestingly, the pattern is different for male candidates. In their case, attitudes towards abortion had little influence on their electoral outcome and, if anything, pro-choice preferences were associated with lower chances of electoral success.

In this analysis, we assume that voters are aware of candidates' stances on abortion and do not differentiate between candidates who run on this issue and those who might find the issue less important. One way of studying whether our results hold if we take into account candidates' campaigning activity is to replace our main variable of interest "candidates' stances on abortion" with a variable measuring whether candidates listed the issue of gender equality as one of the three most important political problems. The results displayed in Supplementary Table S3¹⁹ show that our findings hold: female candidates who give high priority to gender equality issues tend to have higher chances of winning elections than women that do not (as well as men who run on gender issues).

All in all, our analyses provide evidence for the fact that candidates' stances on abortion did not matter for their election in 2007. In the time before the election, the topic of abortion was not particularly salient. Candidates' preferences on abortion did nevertheless play a role four years later when the topic became more politicized. Most importantly, candidates' stances did not matter similarly for men and women, giving support for our argument on the prescriptive stereotypes associated with women on the issues they own. Voters tend to reward women who support women's issues, but do not reward men in the same way. This suggests that the electoral

¹⁹ Note that the model cannot be replicated for the 2007 election given the very low number of candidates finding gender issues important in that election and the fact that only one man mentioned gender equality as one of his top three priorities.

advantage of holding pro-choice stances among women candidates was not merely due to the fact that these candidates were closer to the opinions of the majority of citizens, which would arguably affect the electoral faith of all candidates similarly. It is also important to note that the models control for a wide range of factors. In particular, as the model include party-fixed effects, these results cannot be explained by the fact that voters of certain parties tend to be simultaneously more in favor of abortion themselves and vote more frequently for women as compared to voters of other parties. The analyses rather suggest that voters electorally reward female candidates for supporting gender equality issues.

Conclusion

Despite potential female disadvantage in electoral contests, the recent literature emphasizes that "when women run, women win" (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Lawless and Pearson 2008). Some scholars even argue that the only remaining difference between female and male candidates lies in their issue preferences and priorities (see, e.g., Lloren and Rosset 2017). Albeit the overall electoral success of female candidates, voters do not perceive men and women candidates similarly and reward them for the same reasons.

In this paper, we examined why and how the gender of a candidate might play a role for the electoral choice of voters. In particular, we were interested in knowing whether female candidates who conform to gender stereotypes have an electoral advantage. Following Herrnson *et al.* (2003: 247), we coined this phenomenon "gender issue ownership". Theory predicts that female candidates who support issues "owned" by women are more likely to win political office. To test this theory we focused on the issue of abortion. This issue is traditionally owned by women politicians. In other words, women candidates are associated with the view that women should be free to decide on matters of abortion (see, e.g., Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009).

Accordingly, we hypothesized that candidates' stances on abortion matter for the election of women candidates, with more pro-choice female candidates having an electoral advantage over pro-life female candidates (H1). In addition, we hypothesized that the effect of gender stereotyping on women's electoral chances is conditional on the salience of gendered issues in a given election (H2). To test both arguments, we used data from the Swiss Selects Candidate Survey and examined the impact of gender stereotypes on candidates' electoral chances in an open list PR system.

Our findings support and expand existing literature. First, they indicate that female and male candidates have similar chances to get elected to the Swiss National Council. In line with recent research mainly based on U.S. data, our analyses suggest that also in other countries voters do no longer disadvantage female candidates compared to male candidates. In fact, much of the current work focuses on U.S. elections but by examining the Swiss open list PR system we demonstrate that this finding holds across different electoral systems. Second, our analyses show that voters electorally reward female candidates for supporting gender equality issues. While much of the literature focuses on candidates' personal traits, our research demonstrates the importance of moral issues and candidates' stances toward them. In addition, we show that gender not only matters for voters' evaluations of candidates (as e.g. Dolan and Lynch 2014 demonstrated), but also has influence on voters' actual electoral behavior. Third, we show that the impact of gender issue ownership varies according to the degree of politicization of the issue at stake. More precisely, female candidates are only rewarded for having more pro-choice stances when the issue of abortion is salient. Our findings reveal that gender issue ownership matters for women's electoral success, but only when gender equality issues are salient.

These findings encourage further studies on gender issue ownership. Although abortion rights usually trigger passionate public debates, the issue does not polarize strongly along party lines in Switzerland. Most political parties as well as the Swiss Parliament recommended rejecting the initiative in favor of privatizing the costs of abortion. This low level of partisan conflict enabled the emergence of a broad cross-party women's alliance, which politicized the issue of abortion rights in the 2011 electoral campaign (Lloren 2015). High polarization levels between parties or a context of economic recession might make it harder for politicians, parliaments, and governments to promote gender equality issues (Htun and Weldon 2010). Future research should investigate the impact of other "gendered issues", such as welfare and redistribution issues or health issues, on female candidates' electoral success. It would be worthwhile to disentangle the effects of gender stereotypes and female candidates' strategic use of gendered issues for women's electoral success, in particular when gender issues are salient. Another strategy might be to compare the effect of opinions about abortion rights on electoral success in different contexts, for example in the US where the issue highly polarizes both political elites and the public, but also in different electoral systems. A comparative study could reveal whether gender stereotypes and gender issue ownership matter differently for women's electoral success across electoral systems and which role gender issue saliency plays before elections.

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Tables

Table 1 Share of candidates stating that gender equality is among the three most important problems in politics in the 2007 and 2011 election campaigns (%)

Candidate	2007	2011
Female	1.54	19.15
Male	0.1	13.59
Total	0.61	15.45

Source: Selects Survey 2007, 2011. Own calculations.

Table 2 Candidates' position on abortion and its effect on electoral success

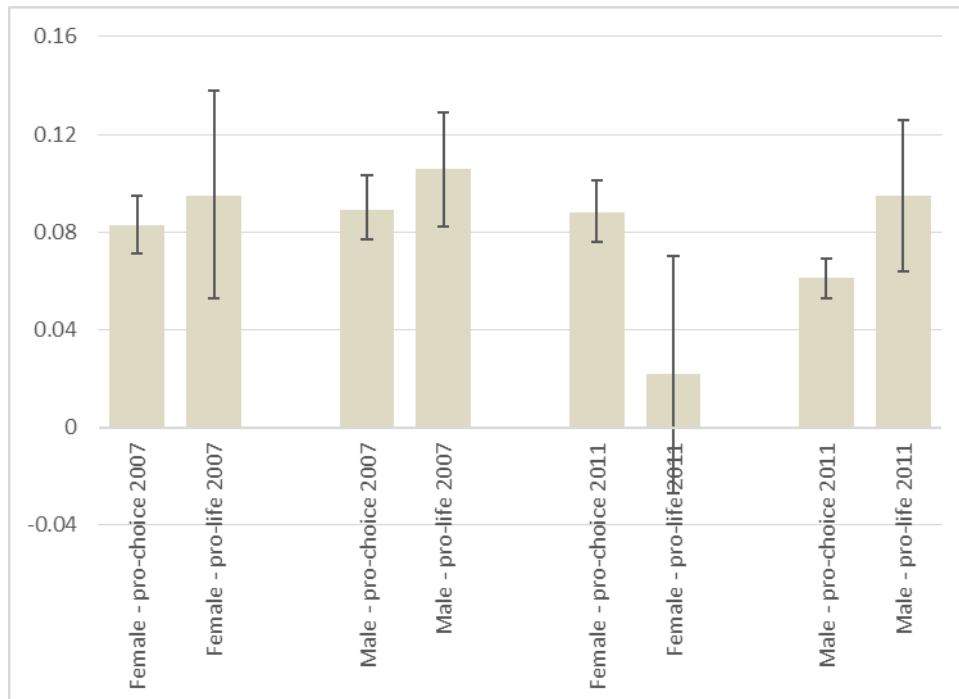
	(1) 2007	(2) 2011	(3) 2007	(4) 2011
Female	-0.307 (0.618)	0.336 (0.372)	-0.200 (0.759)	-1.535 (1.082)
Position on abortion	-0.168 (0.155)	-0.121 (0.233)	-0.149 (0.193)	-0.359 (0.216)
Fem.*Position on abort.			-0.090 (0.452)	1.363* (0.663)
Position on list	-0.154*** (0.042)	-0.036 (0.079)	-0.155*** (0.042)	-0.053 (0.067)
District magnitude	0.054 (0.028)	-0.026 (0.021)	0.052* (0.027)	-0.024 (0.021)
District equality	5.076* (2.369)	-1.318 (1.776)	5.054* (2.437)	-1.629 (2.047)
Open race	3.007** (0.994)	3.416*** (0.867)	3.002** (1.008)	3.664*** (0.949)
Good chance	4.136** (1.305)	5.752*** (0.785)	4.148** (1.284)	6.212*** (1.155)
Incumbent	5.484*** (1.017)	4.135*** (0.848)	5.467*** (0.985)	4.239*** (0.922)
Campaign spending	0.000** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Birth year	-0.006 (0.017)	0.048* (0.019)	-0.006 (0.016)	0.058* (0.027)
University level	1.053 (1.461)	1.334* (0.610)	1.060 (1.451)	1.350* (0.609)
Party office local level	-2.484*** (0.690)	0.732 (0.731)	-2.478*** (0.692)	0.655 (0.660)
Party office cant. Level	0.354 (0.271)	-0.706* (0.308)	0.361 (0.238)	-0.723* (0.312)
Party office nat. level	1.807*** (0.379)	-0.445 (0.301)	1.817*** (0.380)	-0.602* (0.287)
Local parliament	0.464 (0.316)	-0.494 (0.716)	0.464 (0.316)	-0.621 (0.727)
Cantonal parliament	0.352 (0.899)	-0.333 (0.337)	0.344 (0.870)	-0.521 (0.412)
Local government	0.059 (0.869)	1.113* (0.537)	0.065 (0.862)	1.175* (0.585)
Cantonal government	-4.731*** (0.795)	-0.535 (2.335)	-4.676*** (0.871)	-0.686 (1.861)
Party fixed-effects	yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.140 (33.154)	-101.515** (38.199)	3.605 (32.378)	-121.022* (53.975)
<i>N</i>	865	826	865	826
<i>Pseudo R</i> ²	0.787	0.679	0.787	0.693

Note: Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Source: Selects Survey 2007, 2011. Own calculations.

Figures

Figure 1 Predicted probability of a favorable electoral outcome



Note: Predictions based on models presented in Table 2. Pro-choice stances correspond to strongly agreeing with the statement that “Women should be free to decide on matters of abortion” while pro-life correspond to strongly disagreeing with the same statement. Vertical capped lines depict 95% confidence intervals.

Source: Selects Survey 2007, 2011. Own calculations.