British Journal of Political Science (2025), **55**, e40, 1–24
doi:10.1017/S0007123424000280

British Journal of Political Science

ARTICLE

Working For Democracy: Poll Officers and the Turnout Gender Gap

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(Received 10 May 2023; revised 8 February 2024; accepted 2 July 2024)

Abstract

What factors contribute to closing the turnout gender gap after female enfranchisement? In the wake of franchise expansion, we test whether being a poll officer—and hence being exposed to election management—boosted the politicisation and mobilisation of women. In the context of the Spanish Second Republic (1931–1939), we exploit a lottery that assigned recently enfranchised women to be poll officers in the first election women were allowed to vote (1933). We use an original individual-level panel database and show that women randomly selected as polling officers were as likely to participate in subsequent elections than men, while the gender turnout gap persisted among the rest. Further analyses suggest that being poll officers made women more receptive to political organisations mobilisation strategies, and their presence had positive externalities by encouraging other women to participate. Our findings highlight the potential benefits of exposure to election engineering among groups previously excluded or less engaged with democracy.

Keywords: turnout gender gap; poll officers; enfranchisement; female suffrage; historical natural experiment

Introduction

The introduction of female suffrage marked a watershed moment in the history of many countries. The number of registered voters suddenly duplicated. The uncertainty about women's political behaviour during this important moment has pushed many researchers to try to understand both the origins (Przeworski 2009; Teele 2018) and the consequences of enfranchisement processes on political behaviour, public opinion, or policies (e.g., Abrams and Settle 1999; Miller 2008). A common finding is that women's participation in the post-suffrage elections trailed that of men. Large or small, the gender gap in turnout in the first few elections after female enfranchisement was a common pattern almost everywhere (Tingsten 1937). While the electoral gender gap has been decreasing, and even reversed over time (Norris 2002), gendered turnout differences still persist under certain conditions (Kostelka, Blais, and Gidengil 2019).

This article aims to contribute to understanding the causes behind the turnout gender gap upon enfranchisement, and complement existing explanations by focusing on individual characteristics—not specific to enfranchisement—(Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006), the role of social norms (Corder and Wolbrecht 2016), institutional factors (Skorge 2021; Teele 2023), social networks (Morgan-Collins and Natusch 2022), previous mobilisation dynamics (Carpenter and

Moore 2014; Carpenter et al. 2018), or electoral competition incentives (Corder and Wolbrecht 2006; Teele 2018; Morgan-Collins 2023). We seek to understand whether electoral engineering and electoral administration rules contributed to politicising women in the early elections after enfranchisement. By doing so, we can better understand more broadly how newly enfranchised groups engage with the democratic process.

Our article also makes a contribution to the type of institutional arrangements that can contribute to mobilising people with a lower predisposition to participate in politics. Specifically, we complement the study of the consequences of electoral administration rules and the importance of polling officers. We go beyond descriptive contributions on the importance of polling workers (Clark and James 2017) and we argue that—along the lines of Artés and Jurado (2023)—serving as poll officers provides political information, can jump-start political knowledge, and eventually can have positive externalities for political participation. We contend that exposing excluded groups to the functioning of elections can facilitate their political inclusion. An institutionalised inducement mechanism that makes individuals work for democracy and exposes people to the functioning of elections and democracy can smooth the path to political mobilisation.

Despite female enfranchisement allowed women to participate in elections, politics was still seen as a male-dominated affair (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001). Nonetheless, women elected to serve for the first time as polling officers experienced a political socialisation event that went beyond the formal right to vote and supposed an extra dose of empowerment as a political actor. We argue that being exposed to the intricacies of elections contributed to closing the gender gap in turnout. Women poll officers might have realised sooner and with greater certainty that elections were no longer an 'only-male business', developing a voting habit and democratic commitment before other women.

We empirically test this argument by means of a historical natural experiment that took place in the first election women were granted the right to vote in Spain in 1933. Using a new individual-level panel database, we exploit the sortition, or random selection, of polling station officers among all (literate) registered voters.[1] Our data comprises information on *all* female poll officers selected by lot in the 1933 elections in the province of Girona (Catalonia), plus data on comparable men selected to serve as poll officers in those elections. Poll officers were responsible for managing the conduct and integrity of the poll on election day: they verified voters' identity in the census lists, counted the ballots, and wrote the polling station tallies. Using the information provided by voting roll calls, we determine whether each individual turned out to vote or not, both in the 1933 elections and in the subsequent 1936 elections. We therefore assess whether the experience as poll officer in 1933 contributed to closing the gender turnout gap in subsequent elections (1936).

Our results show that random assignment as a polling officer had a positive influence on women's electoral participation. We show that among those individuals serving as poll officers in 1933 there were no gendered differences in the expected probability to turn out to vote in subsequent elections. By contrast, the gender turnout gap remained significant among individuals who were drafted as alternate poll officers and *did not* exert polling duties in the 1933 election. The gender turnout gap was also present among individuals who were not randomly selected to act as polling officers.

In a subsequent step, we explore suggestive heterogeneous effects related to the presence of women poll officers, examining some potential factors that could be behind the closing of the turnout gap among women who were randomly selected to act as poll officers. We show that, on top of serving as poll officers, differences in the gender turnout gap were exacerbated (or closed) as a result of contextual mobilisation efforts exerted both by left and right-wing organisations. We also find some spillover effects as the likelihood to turn out to vote among women who did not

[1]The election of polling officers by lot is still common in many current democracies—e.g., Belgium, Greece, Spain, or Sweden.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000280 Published online by Cambridge University Press

serve as polling officers was larger in census tracts where there was a past record of women poll officers. All in all, the different analyses point to the idea that women selected as polling officers were reactive to mobilisation strategies by parties and trade unions and that the presence of women officers for the first time encouraged other women to participate.

Theory

The Turnout Gender Gap

The literature on female enfranchisement can essentially be divided into those works trying to understand when and why female suffrage was implemented (Hicks 2013; Przeworski 2009; Teele 2018) and those examining its consequences on a variety of outcomes: expansion of the welfare state, educational attainment, persistence or erosion of gender norms, or their impact on political behaviour (Abrams and Settle 1999; Corder and Wolbrecht 2006, 2016; Kose, Kuka and Shenhav 2021). In studying the effect of female enfranchisement, albeit with varying degrees, works focusing on political behaviour have generally documented the presence of a turnout gender gap. For instance, in Finland or Austria the gender turnout gap was below 4 percentage points (pp) during the interwar period, while in Sweden women turned out to vote around 12–15 pp. less than men in 1921 (Morgan-Collins and Natusch 2022), around 25 pp in Iceland (Tingsten 1937), and around 30 pp in the US (Corder and Wolbrecht 2016).

Why was the gender turnout gap wider in some countries than in others? Different potential explanations to this question arise. General explanations—not specific to post-female enfranchisement literature—trying to understand differences in political participation between men and women have highlighted several factors. The most broadly acknowledged is the role of individual characteristics and resources. The idea is that women have traditionally had lower levels of education, income, or other resources to deal with politics (for example, Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006) and this led to lower levels of turnout. Yet, given similar characteristics in terms of education or income, women appear to participate at different rates across different contexts. Besides resources, institutional reforms that affect the costs or incentives to vote can also shape the extent to which there are gendered differences in turnout (Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012; Beauregard 2014). Compulsory voting provisions that increase the costs of abstaining reduce turnout gender gaps (Córdova and Rangel 2017), and in referendum votes, where the individual sense of political efficacy is larger, gender gaps tend to be smaller Kim (2019).

Some of these individual and institutional factors have also been highlighted by the literature focusing on gendered turnout gaps upon enfranchisement. For instance, individual characteristics mattered and were often aggravated, upon enfranchisement, by some barriers to voting, such as literacy tests, or poll taxes, which made participation even more costly for women (Corder and Wolbrecht 2006). However, the most recent explanations have focused on the importance of institutions to understand turnout gender gaps once women were granted the right to vote. For instance, a recent contribution by Skorge (2021) has documented how the transition from plurality to proportional electoral rules in Norway increased turnout among women and Teele (2023) shows that the effect was larger in those districts that shifted from being noncompetitive under plurality to competitive under PR.

Multiple contributions have emphasised the importance of institutions in part because these can shape parties' incentives and mobilisation strategies. Women, as "peripheral voters" (Teele 2023), were more sensitive to political mobilisation by political organisations than men under specific circumstances. Several contributions pinpoint that women were more likely to turn out in those places where elections were more competitive (Corder and Wolbrecht 2016; Morgan-Collins 2023) Yet, the argument, as noted by Teele (2023), is conditional on the type of institution in place. While PR is "automatically" associated with increases in political mobilisation and thus

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reductions in gender turnout gaps, the impact of female enfranchisement under majoritarian rules depends on the levels of competitiveness and party mobilisation in the district.

Other works have pointed out additional sources of female political mobilisation, mostly related to the existence of social networks. On the one hand, political pre-enfranchisement female activism through voluntary networks had long-term consequences; women anti-slavery canvassers had a higher likelihood to become suffragettes (Carpenter and Moore 2014), and female pre-suffrage petitioning also boosted female turnout after enfranchisement Carpenter et al. (2018). The pre-enfranchisement strength posited a credible threat and ensured the representation of women's interests in parliament (Morgan-Collins 2021). On the other hand, horizontal and "non-political" social networks can help overcome voting barriers, especially for working-class women, and increase female turnout (Morgan-Collins and Natusch 2022).

Recognising the importance of institutional designs, political competitiveness and party mobilisation, we complement previous works by looking at the effect on turnout of being a polling officer. By studying a case that keeps constant almost all institutional features, we complement existing explanations by focusing on an additive factor that could help in mobilising women. In addition, we build on previous works on social networks and examine whether an important political socialising event spills over to the immediate networks, thereby helping to close the gender turnout gap among women who did not formally participate in the management of the elections.

All in all, we focus on an institutional design that induces a direct individual-level political/electoral experience. In turn, this event can be crucial to activate women politically and spur their turnout in subsequent elections. Moreover, as previous literature has emphasised, we acknowledge that these individual experiences cannot be detached of certain contextual conditions. We additionally examine how the jump-start in political awareness among women polling officers interacted with the importance of political mobilisation efforts and the existence of social networks. We contend that both elements—individual engagement and social mobilisation—should further help in closing the turnout gender gaps by enhancing women's individual levels of political participation.

Learning Democracy, Voting Habit, and Civic Duty

To understand why women vote less upon female enfranchisement, it is important to focus on the factors that are related to the decision to turn out. Previous evidence shows that previous voting behaviour is a good predictor of turnout in subsequent elections (Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003). Recently enfranchised individuals inherently lack a habit of voting and therefore their turnout rates trail that of the other groups in the first elections after enfranchisement. For some of these new voters, the habit of voting can arise as a natural consequence of their resources, political interest, or socialisation (Verba and Nie 1972), but in other cases, it is only developed through the experience of voting (Coppock and Green 2016; Green and Shachar 2000). Previous evidence has shown that the development of pro-mobilisation attitudes or voting habits among new voters can be influenced by the nature of the first election in which young people can vote (Franklin and Hobolt 2011), and how close in time elections take place when becoming eligible to vote (Meredith 2009).

Similarly, citizens may be more likely to develop a sense of civic duty after they participate in the electoral process (Dinas 2012; Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003)—yet, the direction of causality is being debated (Feitosa, Stiers, and Dassonneville 2022). Some contributions relate the closing of the gender turnout gap to increasing levels of civic duty among women (Carreras 2018; Galais and Blais 2019). Therefore, serving as a poll officer has the potential to arise as a powerful politicisation tool. When new voters face formal and informal barriers to their electoral participation —political, economic, or social —exposing them to the functioning of democracy

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000280 Published online by Cambridge University Press

through election management can represent an efficacious tool to learn about democracy, and to induce a habit of voting and a sense of civic duty on these new voters.

Electoral Engineering and Polling Officers

Electoral engineering (Norris 2004) or electoral ergonomics (Bruter and Harrison 2020) examines how different institutional set-ups affect individual electoral behaviour, including turnout inequalities. The main idea is that the election administration process shapes voters' participation costs —e.g., Orford et al. 2011; Potrafke and Roesel 2020—but also how individuals interact with elections and political events more broadly.

Poll officers play an important role in elections as they are essential to ensure the transparency and integrity of electoral procedures (Clark and James 2017) and can influence voters' perception on the integrity of elections (Hall, Monson and Patterson 2009). The selection procedure of polling officers is crucial to guarantee their independence and neutrality, and good practice is to elect polling officers by lot and to make the appointment binding (ACE Project 2012)—which is not always straightforward (Cantú and Ley 2017).

The selection of poll officers by lot implies that citizens can be randomly exposed to the functioning of elections. Recent works analysing these lotteries in contemporary settings have found effects on turnout (Artés and Jurado 2023) and on vote choices made by voters (Neggers 2018). By focusing on the effect of polling officers' selection on the eve of female enfranchisement, this article examines whether this role contributed to developing a participatory culture among individuals who had never been directly involved in the functioning of democratic elections before.

Expectations

We contend that a direct political experience in elections as a poll officer represents a political socialisation event among recently enfranchised groups that should minimise turnout gaps. If individual resources matter to understand turnout (Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001), experiencing direct exposure to the functioning of an election for the first time acts as a political socialisation experience, as a political activation device, and endows an individual with resources. Direct involvement in the management of elections should make women learn about politics and elections, and develop faster a sense of civic commitment.

We expect that being exposed to election management lowers the cost of participating and has a positive effect on political activation as a result of three different processes. First, being involved in the management of elections implies that an individual has to learn and implement several concepts related to core democratic rules. Second, women serving as officers might update their prior thoughts that politics is a 'male business'. Women become more aware that their political rights and duties are formally no different than the ones in the hands of men. Third, a larger political knowledge among officers might motivate them to consume more political information, which enhances turnout (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Overall, serving as a poll officer and being exposed to the intricacies of a democratic electoral engineering process should not only give women a direct political experience on how the elections work, but it also lays the grounds to jump-start their political mobilisation. Women poll officers have the chance of increasing their political information and political knowledge, and hence gather the necessary components positively related to political mobilisation. Therefore, the effect is arguably not circumscribed to the election when they serve, but it rather sticks with them and travels to subsequent elections.

Hypothesis 1. *Recently enfranchised women who act as poll officers should be more likely to vote in subsequent elections.*

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We also dig into whether the extent of the reduction of the gender turnout gap is conditional on different contextual factors. First, we expect the effects of being a polling officer to be larger for women in contexts of greater political mobilisation (Corder and Wolbrecht 2016; Morgan-Collins 2023; Skorge 2021; Teele 2023). Even when there are no institutional differences across geographical units in terms of the electoral system in place, the sociodemographic composition of different localities can lead some parties to be more active in certain places. Hence, the individual experience of being an officer can be reinforced when there are active organisations interested in bringing in women to the ballots to secure their support. In other words, once women polling officers become politically activated, their mobilisation capacity is likely to be higher.

Hypothesis 2. *The greater the political mobilisation by political actors, the greater the likelihood to turn out to vote among women who served as polling officers*

Second, we also expect that the presence of women as poll officers can have positive spillovers, not only for their turnout but also for their peers. Women poll officers might have—unintentionally—become role models for other women (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). The presence of women involved in politics can encourage other women to participate in politics in close social networks (Goyal 2023). Along the lines of Morgan-Collins and Natusch (2022), we would expect that networks of women should contribute to enhancing the political participation of women. Networks should be closer in smaller and tighter communities, and we should expect that women poll officers to explain their experience to other women, thereby contributing to their political socialisation. In localities where no woman assumed poll officer duties, the spread of the information of how an election is conducted was less likely to have been a topic for discussion among women. Thus, the larger the number of women poll officers, the more likely that other women were exposed to political information through other women. Through an informational channel, female turnout should be higher among *all* women in localities where women served as poll officers.

Hypothesis 3. *Women in localities where there was at least one woman poll officer should turn out at higher rates.*

Context

We examine our expectations by leveraging a natural experiment that occurred after women's enfranchisement in Spain during the 1933 general election. To provide the necessary contextual elements to the analysis, this section briefly describes the political context and electoral ergonomics in Spain during the 1930s.

Female Enfranchisement in Spain

In a situation that resonates elsewhere, female suffrage in Spain was only approved after very heated debates, especially within the left. Some left-wing MPs feared women would be manipulated by priests or their husbands to vote conservative (Martín i Berbois 2013). Two leftist women led the anti- vs. pro-female suffrage debate in Congress: Clara Campoamor, in favour of female suffrage on the basis of equality of rights, and Victoria Kent, who stood against the suffrage because, she argued, confessor priests were still the main intellectual influence for most women (Pujol-Soliano 2018). The female suffrage bill eventually passed in October 1931 with 161 votes in favour and 121 against and women would vote for the first time in legislative

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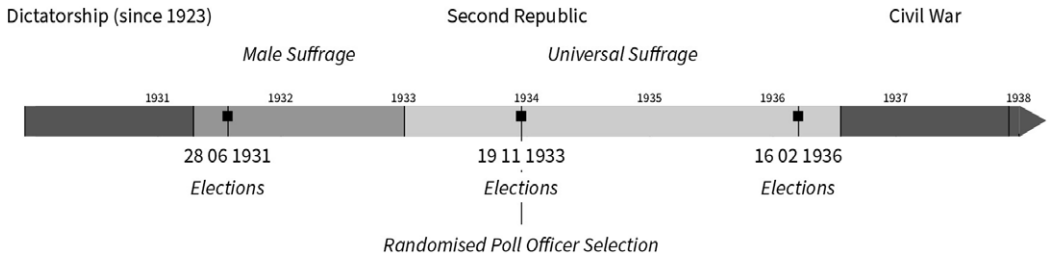

Figure 1. Timeline of the main historical events.

elections in November 1933[2] and they did it again in February 1936, before the Spanish Civil War (Fig. 1).

Female enfranchisement was granted despite the absence of a largely organized suffragette movement (Teele 2018). The widespread fears among left-wing voters of larger proportions of women being more conservative were reinforced after right-wing parties won the first elections in which women could vote in 1933. Yet, recent works have shown that this was largely a belief rather than an empirical pattern (Rodon n.d.), also present in other contexts (Teele 2024). Later, under larger turnout rates and also under full universal suffrage a left-wing coalition won the 1936 election.

Elections and Polling Officers

Voting rules in Spain at that time were the following. Each locality was composed of one or more census tracts, according to the number of registered voters. All voters in a census tract cast their vote in the same polling station —usually located in a public building, for example, a school —, where citizens could find a ballot box and rooms or cabins to maintain the secrecy of the ballot (Vilanova 1986). Each ballot box had to be supervised by three individuals randomly selected among all *literate* registered voters in the census tract. One individual was appointed as the presiding officer and the other two as supervising officers, all of them performing very similar tasks on election day. Three extra individuals —one for each position —were also drafted as backups to replace the main members who did not show up in election day, for example, due to illness.

The selection of these members was conducted through a lottery,[3] and female enfranchisement did not only grant the right to vote to women but also their right to be selected as poll officers. Despite the rules and requirements to become a poll officer were not *de facto* gender neutral,[4] for the first time in Spanish history, in the 1933 legislative election both (literate) women and men were included in the list of potential poll officers. The exact procedure to select the polling officers was as follows.

First, local civil servants compiled a list of all literate individuals in each census tract. Second, literate individuals were classified into three different groups: (a) individuals with 'academic or professional titles',[5] (b) 'major taxpayers',[6] and (c) the rest of literate individuals —the majority. Then, all individuals were alphabetically ordered (by surname) within each group. Third, two letters were chosen to create conglomerates of individuals. The three first individuals whose surname started with these letters (or a subsequent if there were not enough people) in each of the

[2]Women could vote in local elections in *some* Spanish municipalities—not in Catalonia—in April 1933.
[3]More on lotteries in electoral procedures to estimate causal effects in Cirone and Van Coppenolle (2018).
[4]Poll officers had to be literate, and there were still gendered differences in literacy at that time.
[5]For instance, civil servants, teachers, priests, or liberal professionals.
[6]This included large landowners, industrialists, shopkeepers, etc.

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three groups were eligible. To ensure rotation over time, the letters chosen changed every two years; if in one year the lists for the draw used letters A and U, two years later the draw would employ letters C and S. Fourth, the oldest person among the individuals in the first conglomerate —e.g., surname starting with A —in all three lists was appointed as president, and the oldest in the second conglomerate —e.g., surname starting in U —in the three lists was appointed alternate president.[7] Finally, each time an election was called, the remaining two officers —and their alternates —were selected among those individuals who belonged to different group lists. For instance, if the president was a major taxpayer, one officer would be selected from the 'academic' group and the other from the 'only literate' group. Table B.2 in the Supplementary Information (SI) shows a naive example of a randomised selection of polling officers. Once the lottery had been conducted, the electoral commission made the decision public by posting the list of names and their responsibilities on the City Hall noticeboard or on other public buildings, by personally notifying polling officers —sending them a letter —and by publishing their names in the official gazettes.

Research Design

To test the impact of being a poll officer on turnout, we exploit the randomized selection of polling station boards in the first election under full universal suffrage. We compiled a new individual-level panel database from archival sources to track the turnout behaviour of the same individuals in two consecutive elections.

Data

We draw our data focusing on poll officers from the province of Girona. We chose this province for three reasons. First, archives in Girona contain—almost completely—all individual-level electoral records for the 1930s elections; this means that it is possible to identify whether an individual living in this province did turn out to vote in any elections in the period we are interested. Second, we can compare our data to individual-level real voting behaviour data for a randomly selected sample of individuals in this province from Muñoz et al. (in preparation). Third, fine-grained municipality-level data are available from multiple sources and, due to the diversity of economic activities and geographic characteristics, the analyses in the Girona province are likely comparable to other regions.[8]

Sampling

Our sampling procedure was as follows. We first collected individual information on all drafted polling officers in the Girona province that were reported in the official gazettes the weeks before the 1933 elections (an example in Figure A.1, SI). We distinguish from these lists the individuals who were drafted into acting or alternate roles. Acting members were those appointed to serve on election day, while alternates were only backups in case an acting member was unable to carry out his/her responsibilities. Unfortunately, archival records do not allow us to disentangle to which group —'taxpayers', 'academic', or 'literate' —each individual belonged to. We then selected *all census tracts in which at least one woman* was drafted as a poll officer, either acting or alternate, to analyse the whole population of women poll officers in 1933 in the Girona province. Therefore, we capture the entire universe of women poll officers in the province. Finally, we randomly selected an equivalent number of census tracts in which no woman was drafted to avoid any possible source of bias, as census tracts with women as polling officers might differ from other census

[7]These two appointments were biannual and they would serve in all elections taking place during two years.

[8]Table C.2 (SI) compares the political and sociodemographic characteristics of Girona vis-à-vis the rest of Catalonia and Spain. Girona was a prototypical Catalan province and in many political aspects, it resembled other Spanish provinces.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000280 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1. Census tracts data (1933)

	Census tracts			Poll officers			
	#	Sample (%)	Total (%)	Men	Women	Total	Women (%)
No women	29	34.52	5.95	160	0	160	0.00
$\geq$ 1 *Alternate women*	17	20.24	3.49	82	20	102	19.61
$\geq$ 1 *Acting women*	38	45.24	7.80	151	69	220	31.36
Sample	84	100	17.24	393	89	482	18.46
Total Girona	487		100	2,241	89	2,900	3.07

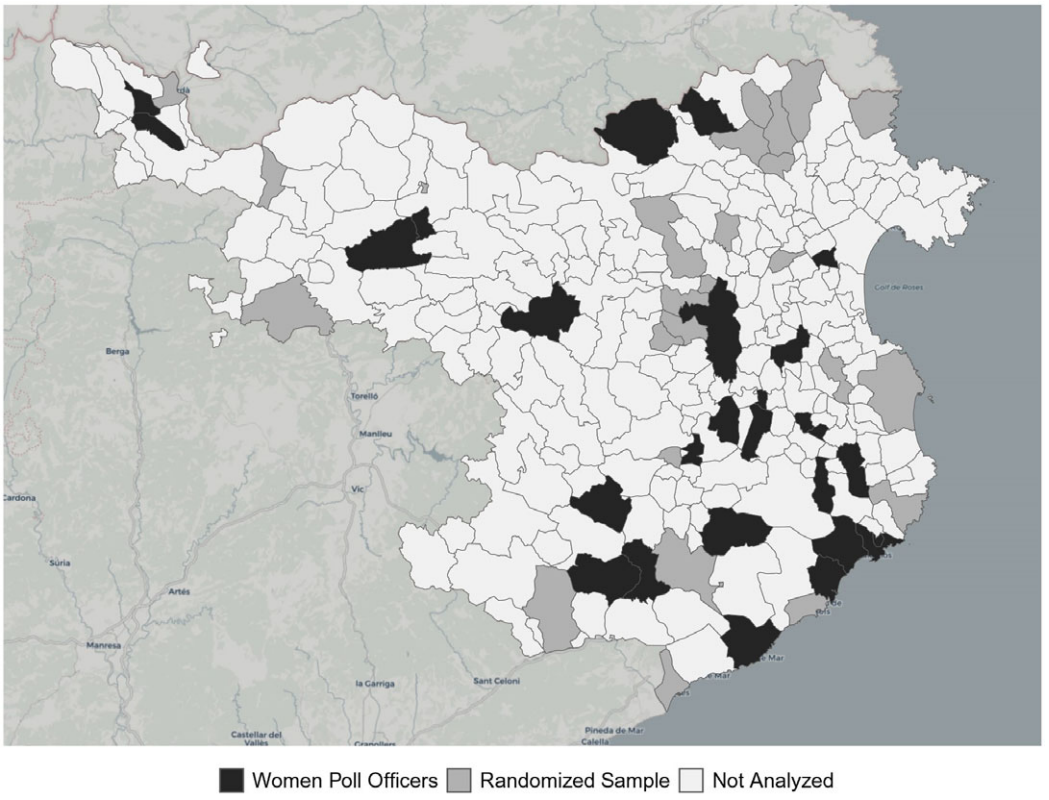

Figure 2. Map of Girona's municipalities and the sample.
Note: the map shows all municipalities in the province of Girona in 1933 as precinct maps do not exist. The poll officers' data we analyze comes from 84 precincts that were located in the municipalities shaded in mid and darker grey on the map; poll officers' data from white municipalities was not analyzed.

tracts. Unfortunately, a map of the census tracts is not available, but Figure 2 maps all those municipalities from which we collected poll officers' individual-level turnout data in our sample. Polygons in dark grey reflect municipalities where at least one woman was selected as an acting or alternate polling officer in one of its precincts, localities in middle gray, are those municipalities where we collected data for a random sample of the precincts, and the light grey municipalities are not in our study. The precincts we analyse belong to a diverse typology of localities, with variations in their geographical and socioeconomic characteristics.

As displayed in Table 1, we exploit individual-level data of drafted poll station officers in 84 census tracts (out of 487 in the province).

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In fifty-five census tracts, at least one woman was drafted and in twenty-nine no women were drafted. There is balance in multiple contextual covariates across all census tracts —regardless of the presence of women as poll officers (Table C.1, SI). This is important because a potential threat to validity is that women were only selected, for example, in richer municipalities. This is not the case, and hence we will be comparing poll officers from similar contextual environments.

As for the gender composition, around 18.5 per cent of the individuals in our sample are women. This low figure is likely to be a consequence of the lower literacy, education, and income levels of women, which made them less likely to be drafted as poll officers. We are aware that women were less likely to be elected in groups 1 (professionals) and 2 (major taxpayers), yet when looking at the occupational categories of drafted women we observe that around 20% were classified as "owners" or "professionals". Moreover, the existence of 5 census tracts with more than one woman reflects that we are also capturing some women in those two groups. Although our results might not be extensible to all enfranchised women —most notably to illiterate women —all literate women in our sample should be comparable in their observed and unobserved characteristics, except for the fact that some of them acted as polling officers. In fact, our scenario represents a hard case to test our expectations because enfranchised *literate* women who were drafted should have on average more individual resources and hence be more likely to vote than illiterate women; thus, we should expect a lower turnout gender gap among these women.

Individual-level data

We retrieved the names of all drafted individuals in the selected sample of census tracts from official Gazettes. We then manually matched these names to the information provided in the census, that is age, gender, literacy, and occupation,[9] and we traced most individuals (>90 percent) over two different censuses —one for each election we analyse —since we can use the name and two (unalterable) surnames for each individual.[10] Then, for each individual drafted as a polling officer, we collected direct turnout information over two different elections (1933 and 1936) using individual roll call lists compiled by poll officers during the election day (example in Figure A.3, SI). We also revised archival documents providing the names of the three poll officers who effectively took on their duties on election day. We compare this information to the details in the Gazette to check whether individuals appointed as acting poll officers effectively took over their duties. Finally, we also use data from a random sample of individuals in the Girona province compiled by Muñoz et al. (in preparation) for comparability reasons.

Aggregate-level data

We complement individual-level data with contextual-level information. We first include a group of indicators capturing the sociodemographic characteristics of the municipality from official censuses: logged population, literacy rates, and female marital rates. A set of variables considers the role of political contextual covariates: aggregate turnout and female share of turnout in 1933 at the census tract level. Unfortunately, separate turnout is not available in official statistics and the only way to capture turnout by sex has been to manually count the number of women in the voter lists in all census tracts in our sample.[11] Finally, we measured the feminization of poll boards by counting the number of women effectively serving as poll officers on election day.

[9]Occupation categorised according to Hisco schemes (Pujadas-Mora, Romero-Marín, and Villar 2014). Census example in Figure A.2 (SI).

[10]Most of the 'lost' individuals were men and only two of them were women. Crucially, in the context we study, women did (and still do) not change their names when they get married.

[11]Table C.1 (SI) shows balance in female turnout across municipalities with and without women poll officers. See also Figure C.3 (SI).

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Other indicators capture potential political mobilisation dynamics at the municipality level. First, two indicators identify whether a municipality had a local political branch (1) or not (0). Among the left, we consider anarchist organisations (Cucó Giner 1970) and *ateneus* —cultural and political socialisation organisations (Amat et al. 2020). Second, we also calculated whether the Lliga —the main right-wing conservative party in Catalonia —organized a political rally in the municipality in 1933 and the percentage of Catholic associations in each municipality using original archival data on associations.[12] We also consider the levels of political competition by including in the analysis either the levels of support to the left and/or right parties, or the political competitiveness.[13]

We finally take into account the role of economic development at the locality level using fiscal data in the Girona province in 1923 (Vall-Prat 2023) and an indicator of population concentration that considers the number of inhabited population nuclei and the number of inhabitants in each of them (Esteve Palós 2003). Table 2 displays descriptive statistics of the main variables of interest, showing balance in all covariates when comparing individuals who were drafted as alternates and those drafted as acting.

Empirical Strategy

As described in section 'Elections and Polling Officers', we rely on a historical natural experiment. The basic principle of our case is that treated individuals —acting poll officers —and untreated ones —alternate polling officers —should have in expectation similar characteristics except for their treatment status (Gerber and Green 2012). The comparison between the two groups allows us to be close to the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated. Yet, because of non-compliance, the average effect on the outcome depends on being assigned to treatment —acting as a polling officer —rather than experiencing the treatment. Thus with this design, we are closer to the Intent-To-Treat effect (ITT) (Gerber and Green 2012).

We classify individuals in our database in three different categories as a function of their exposure to treatment: 'alternates', 'poll officers', and 'defiers' (see Table 3). The 'alternates' category corresponds to those individuals who were drafted as backups and they did not have to stay in the polling station board during the election day. 'Poll officers' are those individuals who effectively performed the tasks as members of the polling board and spent the day supervising the elections; they were the individuals effectively treated. Finally, 'defiers' are those individuals who were drafted as acting but *did not assume* their duties as poll officers. Table 3 shows compliance status by sex.[14]

Since we are interested in whether random selection contributed to making women more prone to vote —reducing the gender gap —in the subsequent election after serving as poll officer, we initially focus on the interaction between the sex of poll officers and their exposure to treatment. Hence, we rely on the following estimation:

$$Vote36_i = \beta_1 Poll_{it-1} + \beta_2 Woman_i + \beta_3 Poll_{it-1} \times Woman + X_i' + \zeta_c' + \epsilon_{ic} \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable ($Vote36_i$) reflects whether an individual (i) voted (1) or not (0) in 1936, the second legislative election after female enfranchisement. Our main independent variables are two binary indicators capturing a) whether individuals effectively serve as poll officers in the 1933 election ($Poll_{it-1}$) and b) if an individual is a man (0) or a woman (1) ($Woman_i$). β_1 shows whether men serving as poll officers in 1933 were more likely to vote in 1936, β_2 depicts the turnout differential between non-serving women and non-serving men, and the β_3 reflects

[12]Figures C.5 and C.6 (SI) display descriptive distribution and correlation of these variables.

[13]An index that captures the extent to which there is a balance of power or parity between the two ideological groups. The operationalisation is the following: $1 - \frac{\%VoteLeft33 - \%VoteLeft33^2}{100}$ (Balcells 2011).

[14]Although women seem more likely to be defiers, gender is not a statistically significant predictor of being a defier (Table G.1, SI).

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Table 2. Summary statistics

		Polling officer draft in 1933					
		Acting (N = 240)		Alternate (N = 242)			
		Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Diff. in Means	Std. Error
Age		45.58	13.37	44.18	12.90	−1.40	1.20
Literacy (Individual)		1.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Voted 1931 (Only Men)		0.91	0.29	0.91	0.29	0.00	0.03
Voted 1933		0.89	0.31	0.86	0.35	−0.04	0.03
Voted 1936		0.81	0.39	0.79	0.41	−0.02	0.04
(Log) industry		8.75	2.64	8.76	2.64	0.01	0.24
(Log) Population		7.80	1.36	7.81	1.36	0.01	0.12
Literacy (municipality)		68.56	9.55	68.58	9.57	0.02	0.87
% Women married		40.64	5.23	40.61	5.24	−0.03	0.48
% Left vote (1933)		50.08	16.03	49.93	16.07	−0.14	1.46
% Right vote (1933)		32.47	13.56	32.53	13.59	0.06	1.24
				N	Pct.	N	Pct.
Sex	Men			197	82.1	196	81.0
	Women			43	17.9	46	19.0
Occupation	Owner			19	7.9	13	5.4
	Not working / Household			35	14.6	35	14.5
	Professional / Technical			33	13.8	25	10.3
	Administrative / Managerial			3	1.2	2	0.8
	Clerical			9	3.8	11	4.5
	Sales			13	5.4	16	6.6
	Service			4	1.7	3	1.2
	Primary Sector			79	32.9	92	38.0
	Production / Transport / Laborers			44	18.3	44	18.2
Treatment status	Defier			56	23.3	0	0.0
	Draft			0	0.0	213	88.0
	Poll Officer			184	76.7	29	12.0

Table 3. Treatment compliance (sample)

	Alternate	Row %	Poll officer	Row %	Defier	Row %	Total
Men	170	43.26	182	46.31	41	10.43	393
Women	43	48.31	31	34.83	15	16.85	89
Total	213	44.19	213	44.19	56	11.61	482

differences between women poll officers and women who did not serve as poll officers. We also include in the model a set of individual-level (X_i') and contextual (ζ_c') covariates. An important covariate is whether an individual voted in the 1933 election, which captures existing levels of voting habits (Dinas 2012; Green and Shachar 2000) and estimates coefficients net of individual baseline levels to participate in elections. We additionally present models in which we replace the $Poll_{it-1}$ covariate with the categorical variable distinguishing 'alternate', 'poll officers', and 'defiers'.[15]

[15]In extended models, it also includes a control group category constructed using a matching procedure. In addition, see section E in the Supplementary Information (SI) for a power analysis and a randomisation inference test, that allows to show whether the specific randomisation we analyse compares to a set of all possible random assignments that could have taken place (Fisher 1935; Ho and Imai 2006).

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To deal with non-compliance, we implement an instrumental variable (IV) approach using the original draft status in official Gazettes (acting vs. alternate) as the instrument in a 2SLS model. The instrument enables us to estimate the likelihood of an individual being a poll officer in 1933 (1st stage dependent variable) as a function of whether s/he was drafted as acting or alternate and other individual-level covariates —including sex to capture that there might be different gendered probabilities of self-selection into compliance. The first-stage equation is the following:

$$Poll_{it-1} = \gamma_1 Draft_{it-1} + \gamma_2 Woman_i + X_i' + \zeta_c' + \epsilon_{ic} \quad (2)$$

In the second stage, we use the predicted values of becoming an acting poll officer ($\widehat{Poll_{it-1}}$) as our main independent variable in the second stage.

$$Vote36_i = \beta_1 Woman_i + \beta_2 \widehat{Poll_{it-1}} + \beta_3 Woman \times \widehat{Poll_{it-1}} + X_i' + \zeta_c' + \epsilon_{ic} \quad (3)$$

We employ the randomised allocation between acting and alternate positions to estimate the ITT effect, net of other possible confounders leading to self-selection into treatment.

We also use data from Muñoz et al. (in preparation) to create a control group as similar as possible to all the drafted individuals in our original sample using nearest matching methods and taking into account individual and contextual characteristics. Thus, all individuals drafted as poll officers were paired with a similar control unit.[16]

The final part of the empirical analysis delves into the reasons for the closing of the gender turnout gap by exploring whether contextual characteristics trigger heterogeneous effects of the treatment. These models are based on triple interactions between gender, the predicted likelihood to become a poll officers, and contextual characteristics.

Main Results

Figure 3 presents our first set of results; that is, predicted turnout in 1936 by gender and treatment status.[17]

Figure 3a shows that women were less likely to turn out to vote in 1936 than men among non-poll officers. Yet, women who were acting polling officers in 1933 had a higher probability of participating in 1936 —albeit differences are not statistically significant —and the probability of turning out was closer to men acting as polling officers. In Fig. 3b we decompose this effect depending on the specific compliance into treatment. In the 'Alternate' group we can see a large gendered difference in the expected turnout. Yet, when focusing on 'Poll Officer' we observe that the expected turnout for both men and women is much more similar, and the gender gap closes. Women poll officers were 20 p.p. more likely to turnout than alternate women and this difference is statistically significant. Among the 'Defiers', the predicted turnout is lower overall and estimations are much more imprecise.

Instrumental Variable

As described before, a potential threat to validity is that the effects shown in Figure 3 might be biased because of non-compliance with treatment assignment. We isolate variation in the treatment status related to self-selection into treatment through an IV approach in Table 4.

The first-stage results show that sortition in an acting role is the main variable driving exposure to treatment, as it increases by 66 percentage points the likelihood of effectively becoming a poll officer. Crucially, there are no gendered differences on the likelihood of becoming poll officers, giving us further confidence that we are estimating the effect of becoming a poll officer—and not a

[16]There is balance in all relevant covariates between the poll officers data and the control group (Table G.2, SI); more details in SI section G.2 (SI).

[17]Descriptive data in Figure C.1 (SI). Models in Table D.1 (SI).

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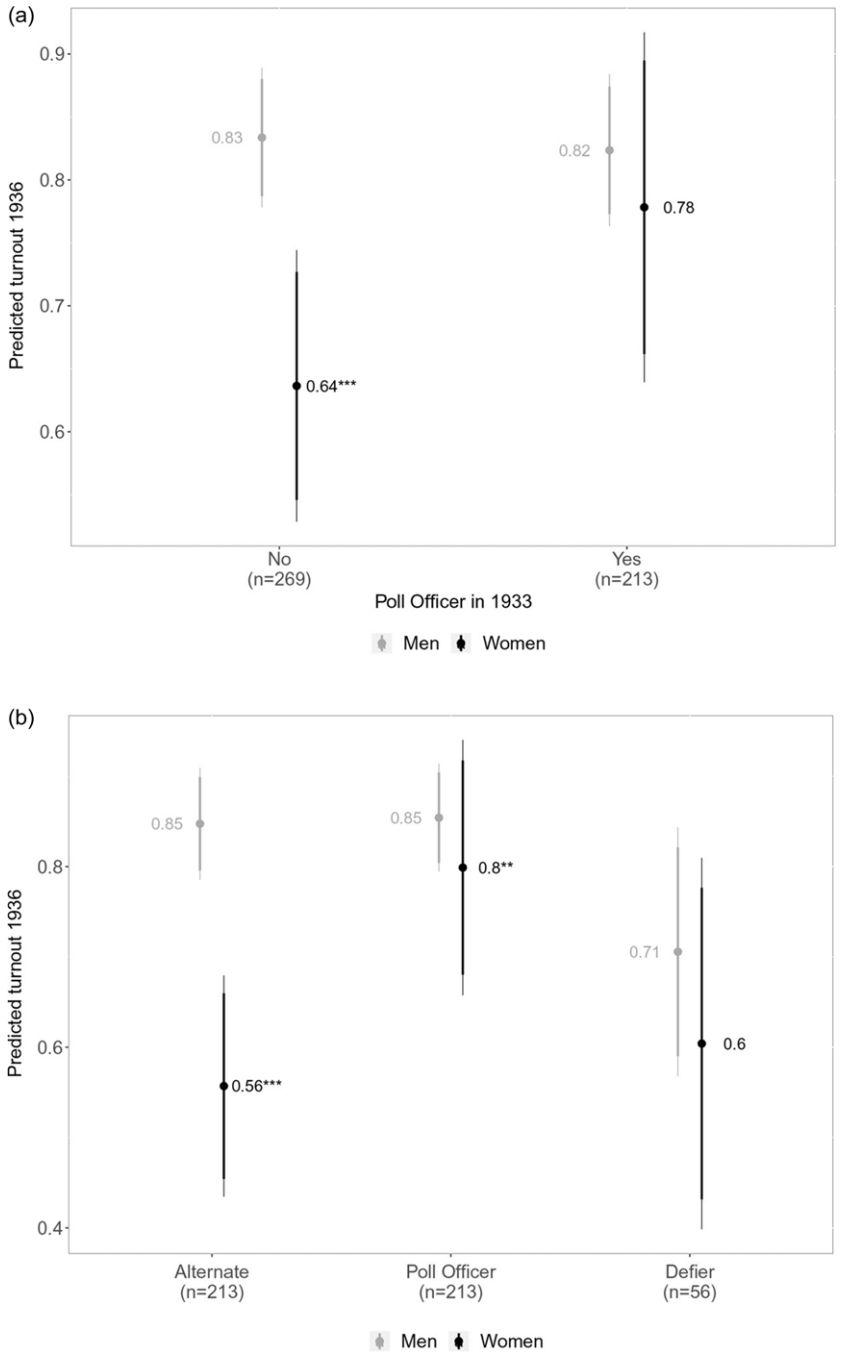

Figure 3. Predicted turnout (1936): Average Treatment Effect on the Treated. (a) Gender and Poll Officer. (b) Gender and Treatment Compliance.

Note: Only individuals from precincts where at least one woman was drafted as a poll officer Estimates from Model 3 (a) and 5 (b) in Table D.1 (SI). Stars next to predicted levels of turnout indicate the statistical significance in the corresponding coefficient in each model (*p<0.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01).

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Table 4. Instrumental Variable Analysis

	Dependent variable		
	Poll officer	Vote 1936	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 2 (Full)
Draft acting	0.661***		
	(0.071)		
Pred. poll officer		−0.038	−0.036
		(0.059)	(0.060)
Woman	−0.040	−0.306***	−0.313***
	(0.078)	(0.067)	(0.113)
Pred. poll officer x woman		0.340**	0.286**
		(0.132)	(0.114)
Age	−0.002		−0.002
	(0.001)		1 (0.002)
Voted 1933			0.264***
			(0.061)
(Log) Industry	−0.005		0.007
	(0.013)		(0.025)
(Log) Population	0.000		−0.030
	(0.027)		(0.045)
Literacy (mun)	0.000		0.001
	(0.002)		(0.003)
% Left (1933)	−0.002		0.000
	(0.001)		(0.001)
Turnout (1933)	0.000		0.002
	(0.001)		(0.002)
Num.Obs.	474	433	433
R2	0.469	0.075	0.141
R2 Adj.	0.442	0.054	0.089

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01
Comarca and Occupation FE.
Standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

gendered self-selection effect. In the second stage, the main effect is in line with our expectations (see Figure F.1, SI). Women not predicted to become poll officers in 1933 were 30 percentage points less likely to vote in 1936 than men, resulting in a statistically significant gender gap.[18] In turn, women whose likelihood of becoming polling officers in 1933 was high were more likely to participate in 1936. Moreover, given that the 'Pred. Poll Officer' coefficient is not statistically significant and the magnitude of the interactive coefficient is as high as the coefficient for 'Woman', we can assert that being a poll officer contributed to closing the gender turnout gap.[19] The effect holds even when controlling for turnout in 1933.

Robustness: Matching and Placebo

To show the robustness of our findings we also implemented matching techniques to create an equivalent control group of non-drafted individuals. This test allows us to assess whether being drafted is driving our results. Individuals in the control sample should behave as individuals in the 'Draft' category because they share individual and contextual characteristics and they never became poll officers. Figure 4 shows that this intuition is partially confirmed (see SI Table G.3). While men in the control group were less likely to vote than drafted men, women in the control

[18]This large coefficient is mostly a result of the specific characteristics of a subset of men—literate, wealthy and in high-class occupations—than to a lower turnout among alternate women, who vote at similar rates than the control group (see Figure G.2b, SI).

[19]Calculations on Intention To Treat and Complier Average Causal Effect in SI section F.1 (SI).

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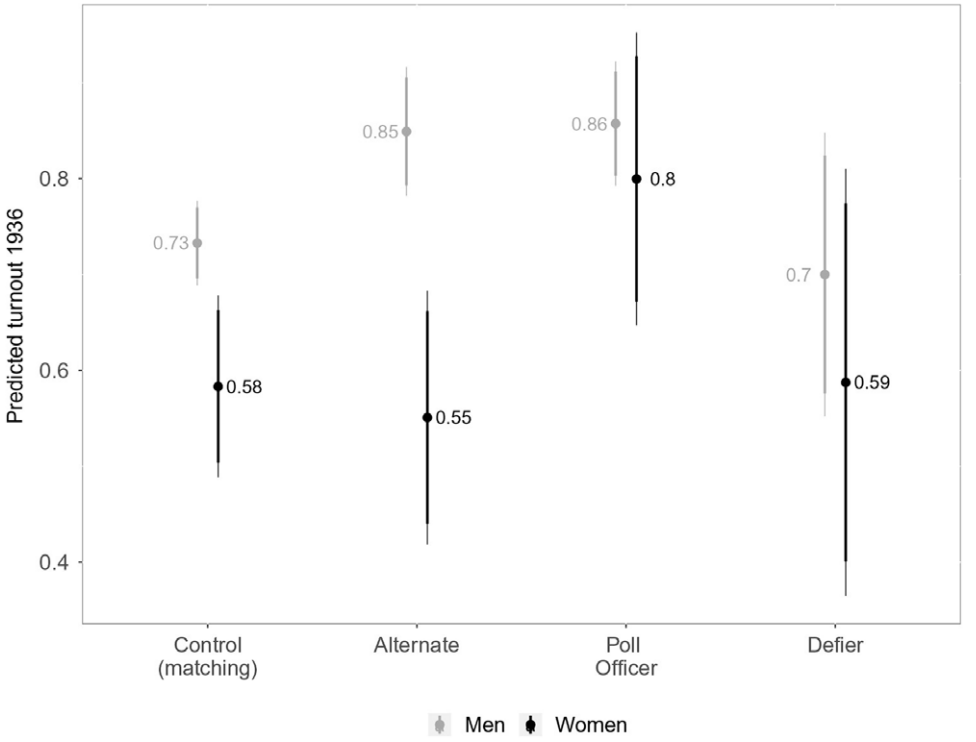

Figure 4. Predicted turnout in 1936, including control group (matching).
Note: Regular OLS estimates (not an IV strategy), see Model 5 in Table G.3 (SI).

group had similar predicted levels of turnout than women in the drafted group. Moreover, the gender turnout gap exists in both categories, albeit smaller in the control group.[20]

A placebo test (SI section G.3) estimating whether being elected as a polling officer affected turnout in pre-treatment elections (1931) confirms that being a poll officer in 1933 was not associated with larger turnout rates before the treatment.[21] This strengthens the validity of the previous findings.

Draft vs. Serving

To better understand how being drafted or serving as a poll officer changed the levels of turnout, we think it is useful to observe the evolution over time of the turnout across all the groups in our data. In Figure G.2 (SI) we observe that the gender turnout gap was large in the control group in 1933 but narrowed in 1936 as a consequence of the high polarisation in the 1936 election (Vilanova 1986). Among alternates, the gender turnout gap was present both in 1933 and 1936, but being drafted as an alternate had short-term effects and increased turnout of women vis-à-vis the control group in 1933. While for men being alternate had a positive effect on turnout in both 1933 and 1936, alternate women were more likely to participate in 1933 but not in 1936. Being drafted, thus, had enduring effects on turnout for men but not for women Finally, almost all poll officers voted in 1933 and in 1936 turnout among them slightly decreased. However, while men poll officers voted in similar numbers as alternate men, women poll officers voted in larger proportions than women in the control and alternate groups. All in all, we find some short-term

[20]Figure G.1 (SI) shows similar results when estimating the 2nd stage IV using the matched sample.
[21]Estimates only for men, as in 1931 women could not vote.

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effects among drafted women but the effects were larger and more durable among women effectively acting as poll officers. This points out that being drafted can be sufficient to boost turnout in the long-term for individuals with previous electoral experience —men —, while for recently enfranchised voters a more intense treatment —serving as poll officer —was necessary for their electoral activation.

Heterogeneous Effects

Were there any contextual characteristics under which women poll officers fostered electoral participation? We depart from previous works emphasising that gender turnout gaps differed according to certain individual and/or contextual characteristics (for example, Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; Morgan-Collins 2023; Corder and Wolbrecht 2016; Teele 2018). In this section, we scrutinise the role of two potential heterogeneous effects that we capture indirectly through the exploration of different contextual variables.

On the one hand, we examine whether living in places with a higher mobilisation capacity, combined with exposure to electoral management, contributed to pushing the turnout rates upwards of *drafted individuals*. We know that mobilisation efforts and political competition reduce gender turnout gaps (for example, Skorge 2021; Morgan-Collins 2023), thus we should expect that women would be more receptive to mobilisation efforts and further decrease the turnout gap. On the other hand, we examine to what extent serving as a poll officer has potential peer effects or spillovers on other women. That is, whether the presence of women poll officers increased other women's turnout rates, either because they observed other women being politically active or because when one woman served as a poll officer the circulation of political information among women increased, boosting their likelihood to turn out to vote. The results presented in this section should be interpreted with caution, given the small sample size, but we think that the findings are not only important to understand the electoral behaviour of women upon enfranchisement, but they also offer suggestive evidence for future research.

Mobilisation

Once female enfranchisement was enshrined, political parties in Catalonia —both left-wing (ERC) and right-wing (Lliga) —adapted their strategies, created women's sections, directly appealed for the women's vote, and included female speakers in their meetings to mobilise a new pool of voters (Martín i Berbois 2013). Beyond parties, two other organisations could also influence women's turnout. On the one hand, anarchist organisations played a crucial role in demobilising workers in the 1933 election to punish the left-wing government and in mobilising them in 1936 in order to prevent the rule of reactionary forces (Amat et al. 2020). On the other hand, the Catholic Church —at odds with the Republican governments' secular policies —disagreed with the new role given to women in the public sphere and used priests' recommendations to influence political mobilisation, especially among women. Thus, we argue that in contexts where these organisations were strong, they could have influenced the participation of women poll officers. Here, it is vital to note that we control for the specific levels of political competition, as previous literature (Morgan-Collins 2023; Teele 2023) has noted that, beyond political mobilisation, competitiveness can also spur turnout among recently enfranchised women.

Figure 5 shows to what extent mobilisation patterns influenced the 1933 drafted poll officers turnout in 1936.[22] The estimates point out that women poll officers were not more likely to vote in contexts where political mobilisation was low, but when there were mobilisation efforts differences arose. For us the most indicative differences are those that can be detected among men and women who were predicted to be poll officers under different contextual scenarios. For instance,

[22]Similar results using compliance to treatment in Figure G.3 (SI).

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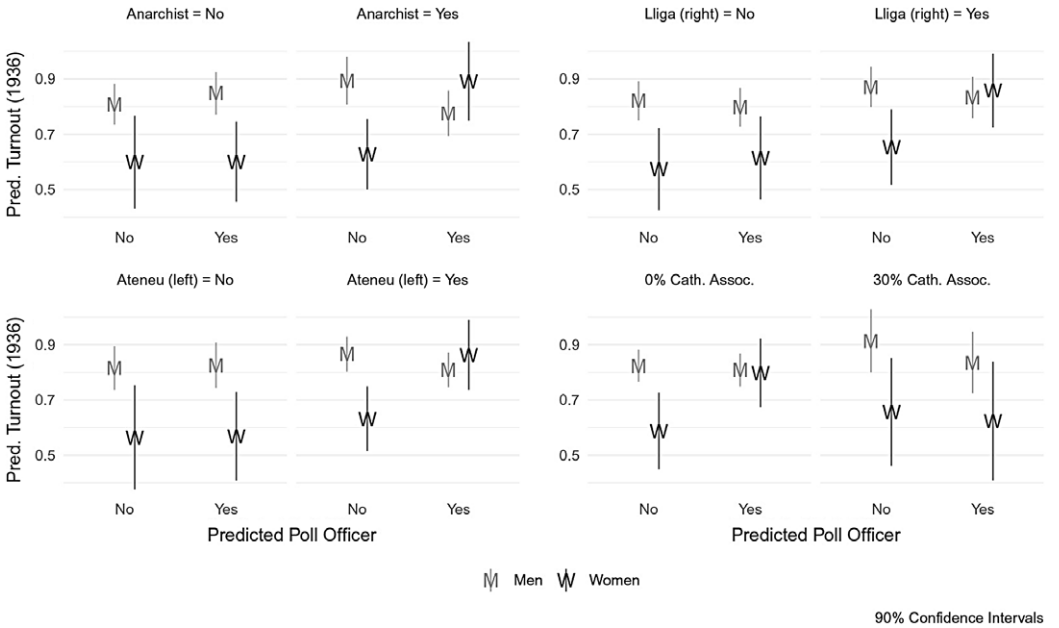

Figure 5. Heterogeneous effects. Mobilisation resources.
Note: We use the IVs second stage (models in Table G.5, SI) and we categorize individuals as predicted poll officers if their predicted value to become poll officers is above 0.5 –according to the IVs first stage.

the top-left panel shows that women predicted to become poll officers were more susceptible to vote in 1936 if there was a local anarchist organisation (p-value 0.0265). In other words, women's turnout was substantially higher when they acted as polling officers and when there was a political organization that tried to coordinate their votes compared to women predicted to be poll officers who lived in localities where anarchist mobilisation efforts were absent.

We observe similar predictions when focusing on the mobilisation capacity of the right-wing Lliga —top-right panel —and on the presence of left-wing Ateneus —bottom-left panel. In all these cases, women's turnout among predicted poll officers remains low(er) when mobilisation capacities are low, and rises when these organisations were present in the municipalities. Yet, when we explore the religious dimension we observe a slightly different story. More concretely, we see that where religiosity was more dominant, women likely to be poll officers in 1933 were less prone to participate in 1936. In municipalities with more religious social capital, there were still hurdles to female political participation. One potential explanation is that women voted the first time they were allowed to, but then they were relegated to the previous political role. Another one is that left-wing women in religious contexts might have been more disappointed than the average because of the victory of the right, thus being more demobilised.[23] Overall, these variations in women's turnout given specific mobilisation contexts is related to the closing of the gender gap in turnout, since men's turnout seems to be unrelated to contextual mobilisation characteristics.

Peer Effects

In line with our expectations, we should also observe peer effects and observe higher female turnout *among the general population* in places where there had been women poll officers. In

[23]When combining all mobilisation heterogeneous effects into a single model, the presence of anarchists is the only one that remains statistically significant, which probably makes it the most important factor in the mobilisation argument.

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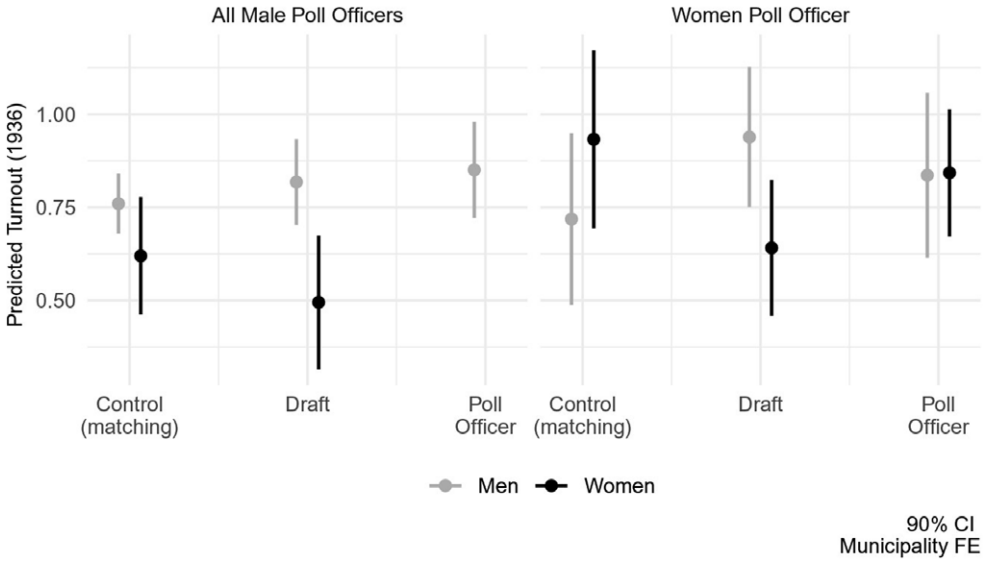

Figure 6. Peer effects through the presence of women poll officers in the past.
Note: Estimates derived from Table G.6 (SI).

places where women became poll workers, these women learned about politics, became a sort of "role models" for their neighbouring women, and should have been more influential regarding politics among their peers. This should have prompted female turnout. In turn, in places where no women assumed poll officer duties, women should have felt less compelled to vote in 1936.

Although we cannot directly test the diffusion of information, we can assume that for those women who became poll officers in 1933, this represented a clear jump-start in their political knowledge that they could have shared through their networks —as shown by Morgan-Collins and Natusch (2022) networks were important for women's mobilisation. We test this using two different strategies. On the one hand, we simply distinguish between those census tracts where there was at least one woman poll officer and all-male poll boards. Figure 6, shows how in places where there were no women in the polling stations in 1933, women were still less likely to turn out to vote in 1936. Nonetheless, when there was a woman polling officer, the gender turnout gap in the control group closed.The presence of a woman poll worker motivated political involvement of their peers. Figure G.4 (SI) displays the robustness test of this argument by showing that the larger the number of women in the polling station, the lower the gender turnout gap, especially in the control group.

On the other hand, we should expect that political information travels faster in places where people are similar or live close to one another (Morgan-Collins and Natusch 2022; Sinclair 2012). The information on who was acting as a poll officer and their experience should have been shared and diffused more widely in places where people lived close to each other. In these settings it was more likely that other people could observe changes in gender roles and news about women's presence in polling stations could politically mobilise other women.

To capture the idea of social proximity, we employ an index of population concentration from Esteve Palós (2003), which is a proxy for population density, i.e., whether all inhabitants live close one to another. The index takes a value of 1 if all inhabitants in a locality live in the same nucleus and it would take a value of 0 if each inhabitant lived isolated in different nuclei. Given that rural towns can be concentrated or dispersed and largely inhabited localities could also have their population dispersed, this indicator captures the proximity of inhabitants to one another and is

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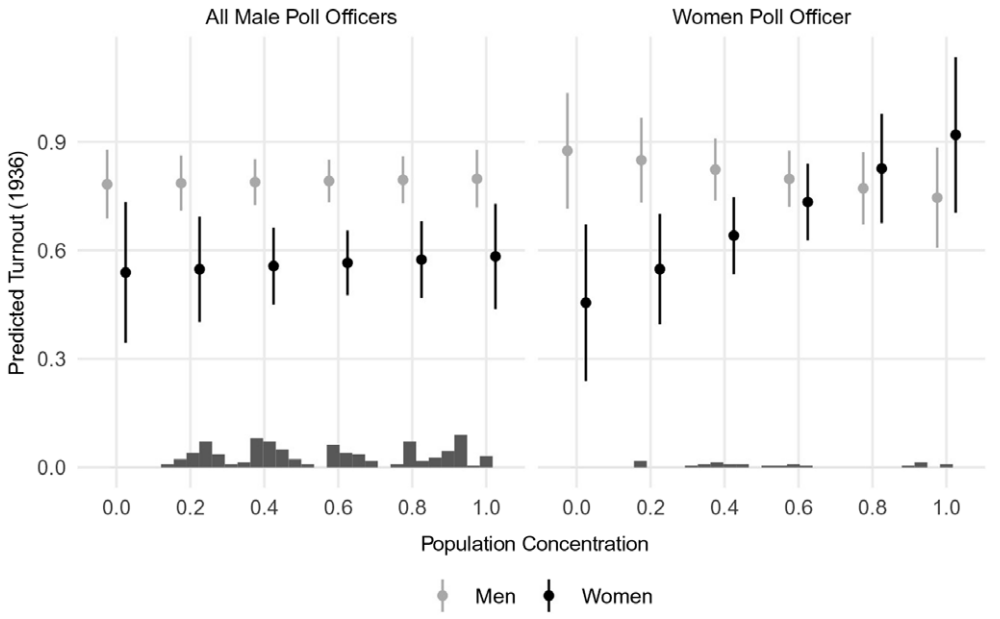

Figure 7. Heterogeneous effects. Social proximity (90 per cent CI).
Note: Estimates from Model 1 in Table G.7 (SI).

different from the classic rural-urban distinction.[24] Figure 7 shows that population concentration —controlling for the total population —was an important factor contributing to reducing the gender turnout gap, but only in those localities where there was a woman poll officer. Differences between men's and women's turnout decreased when the population concentration was larger and there was a woman poll officer in 1933. In turn, in all-male polling stations, gender gaps in turnout persisted regardless of the level of population concentration.[25]

Given the limited sample size, the results presented in this section regarding mobilization and peer effects need to be taken with caution. Nonetheless, the results pinpoint that there are relevant contextual factors that can shape the effect of serving as a poll officer.

Conclusion

Women voted at lower rates than men in the first election after female enfranchisement and, in most countries, female turnout only equalled male turnout after some elections. The reasons for this turnout gap have been related to multiple factors, ranging from economic conditions (Corder and Wolbrecht 2006), institutions (Skorge 2021; Teele 2023), or contextual factors (Morgan-Collins 2021). In this article, we have provided evidence that a direct individual political socialisation experience and, in particular, the direct exposure to the management of elections also had an effect on a woman's decision to participate. By exploiting a historical natural experiment with individual-level data on validated turnout behaviour after female enfranchisement, we have been able to test to what extent being a poll officer had a differential effect on women compared to men. Our results show that women who were not involved in the direct management of elections

[24]For instance, the fifth largest locality in Girona, Palafrugell (8,682 inhabitants), has a similar value in this indicator to Cabanes (749 inhabitants), whose population was close to the median, mostly because around 80% of their population lived in the same nucleus but the rest dispersed in other nuclei. Figure C.4 (SI) shows no correlation between the total population and the population concentration index.

[25]Figure G.7 (SI) shows robust tests.

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in the Girona province in 1933 had a substantive lower likelihood to vote in 1936 vis-à-vis men, while women who experienced being poll officers had the same likelihood to vote than men poll officers. The results point out that a direct political experience as a poll officer contributed to closing the turnout gender gap after enfranchisement.

It is important to note that the effect we find is only circumscribed to literate individuals. Even if these individuals are the most likely to vote —and gendered differences in turnout should be more difficult to emerge —, it is also true that political socialisation after working for democracy is more likely to happen. The number of poll workers is small and hence its impact should be lower compared to other institutional reforms —e.g., the introduction of PR (Skorge 2021; Teele 2023). Yet, this institutional inducement contributed to bringing voters to the polls. Working for democracy on election day influenced recently enfranchised women in an enduring way. The remaining question, which future works can explore, is whether the effect would have travelled to future elections, contests that in this case never took place given that the Civil War ended the brief democratic experience.

Moreover, we explored whether differences in the turnout gender gap can be attenuated or exacerbated depending on the different levels of contextual political mobilisation in the localities where women poll officers lived. The efforts made by political organisations reinforced the decision to participate among women poll officers, while religious mobilisation offset the impact of serving as a poll officer. Results also show that the gender gap in the likelihood to vote was more likely to close among general women if there were women serving as poll officers, especially if these women lived close to each other. Thus, women poll officers who directly experienced that politics was not an only-male business, and women who observed (or heard about) other women in the poll board eventually became more likely to turn out to vote.

All in all, this work does not only contribute to the gender gap literature, but it can also offer a potential set of policies to deal with turnout gaps. While previous works have shown that some institutional arrangements, such as electoral systems, are important in mobilising women, other small-scale interventions such as the one studied here can also help in mobilising citizens. The sortition of polling officers is not an uncommon procedure all over the world and, in some of these countries gender turnout gaps remain a characteristic in electoral behaviour. By focusing on the consequences of a broadly implemented policy in electoral management, this article sheds light on the need to consider the democratic implications of the poll officers' selection. Election management can be an effective tool to reduce turnout inequalities by fostering democratic education, encouraging the development of civic duties (Artés and Jurado 2023), and developing the habit of voting among less politically engaged groups, such as young voters or people obtaining nationality for the first time. Future studies can continue examining similar interventions, possibly larger and with no requirements (such as literacy) and hence with a higher amount of affected citizens, to study their potential for political mobilisation. Yet, the results shown here give support to the adoption of randomly selecting poll officers: it may not only ensure a more transparent and impartial electoral process, but it can also generate spillover effects and generate political equality. More broadly, selecting citizens by lot and exposing them to democratic governance can also help them in their political socialisation. All in all, establishing procedures to make some people work for democracy can eventually help in reducing political apathy, especially among less politically active groups.

Supplementary material. The supplementary materials for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000280.

Data availability statement. Replication data for this article can be found in Harvard Dataverse at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/WFSSWC.

Acknowledgements. We are grateful to the Arxiu Històric de Girona and Arxiu de la Diputació de Girona for facilitating access to the archival data. Maria Àngels Prat Torras and Benet Vall Pujol provided superb research assistance. We are very grateful to Sergi Ferrer, Emmy Lindstam, and the seminar audiences at EPOP, EPSA, MPSA, Universitat Autònoma de

Barcelona, Universitat de Barcelona, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, and University of Zurich for their helpful comments on the initial versions of the manuscript. We also thank the BJPolS editors and reviewers for their constructive comments, which significantly improved the paper.

Financial support. This research was supported by Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Universitat de Barcelona, and Universidad Carlos III–IC3JM.

Competing interests. None.

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Cite this article: Vall-Prat P and Rodon T (2025) Working For Democracy: Poll Officers and the Turnout Gender Gap. *British Journal of Political Science* 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123424000280