Engaged: Married or Divorced?

The effect of changes in marital status on women's political engagement

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Abstract

What happens in the private life has consequences for public life. With regards to women's political participation, scholars posit that the transition of marital status, an important life-cycle event, influences women's level of political participation. However, there is controversy in the theoretical expectation about whether divorce increases or depresses participation. When women go from being married to single, their ability to make decisions about their financial resources typically increases, however, their household responsibilities (e.g., child rearing) may become even more tasking. Changes in these two resources result in conflicting expectations about how divorce should impact women's participation in the polity. Using eleven waves of Swiss Household panel data, the first part of the paper implements a unique research design that takes advantage of the ability to track changes in individuals' marital status over time and changes that take place in women's lives when they change their marital status from married to divorced. In the second part, we develop a theory about how marital status structures resources needed to incur information costs. Our analyses find a differential effect of resources and political attitudes for married and divorced women.

Introduction

Political participation is crucial for a functioning democracy. For this reason, scholars have devoted a significant amount of attention to understanding why some people are more likely to participate than others. The limited amount of research that has examined the impact of marriage on political participation finds that married people vote at a higher rate than non-married people (cf. Kingston & Finkel 1987, Petrocik & Shaw 1991, Stoker & Jennings 1995). Worldwide, divorce rates are on the rise. If it is the case that married people are more likely to participate in politics, then generally speaking, the rising divorce rate could be bad for participatory democracy.

In this paper, we first explore the general question: Does divorce diminish individuals' intention to vote? We find that on average, men's intentions to vote are not influenced by divorce. Women, however, are much less likely to participate in politics post-divorce. We refer to this phenomena as the political participation marriage gap, i.e., the participation gap between married women and divorced women. The second part of this paper is dedicated to investigating why the marriage gap exists.

It is not clear why divorce results in a political participation marriage gap. Previous research that has examined political participation more generally suggests that personal traits, such as interests in politics, education, age, political efficacy, and attachments to political parties, matter most for political participation. Yet, these personal traits are not altered by changes in one's marital status. Still, this study demonstrates that when women change their marital status from married to divorced, the probability of political participation decreases, resulting in a large participation gap between married and divorced women.

What explains this marriage gap? We argue that the main reason for the gap is the marriage bonus, which we use to refer to phenomena in which married women participate more than divorced women—ceteris paribus. We argue that this phenomena occures because role specialization that frequently occures with marriage enables both men and women to benefit from the other's contribution. To the extent that individuals in a marriage specialize (e.g., have different networks or obtain different/additional infromation) marriage can reduce information costs and encourage collective action (i.e., political participation), for divorced women who lack such marriage bonus other sources of information shortcuts would become significantly more important to form their intention to participate in public sphere. Following this logic, we use panel survey data to examine the political participation of women at different martial status. We find that possessing a certain level of political party affiliation, among others, plays a critical role for female divorcees' sources of information shortcuts.

In the section follows we first review the literature on political participation and marital status. Second, we examine how changes in marital status impact political participation for men and women separately. We find that divorce results in a political participation marriage gap for women, but not for men. Third, to examine why this is the case, we track how women's lives change when their martial status changes. We show that women's personal political attitudes are not influenced by divorce. In light of these findings, we use the next section of the paper to probe further into the question of which factors matter most for women's political participation during different stages of their lives. We develop several hypotheses and test them using ten waves of Swiss household panel data. We find that different sources that could offer information shortcuts influence the probability

of participation for married women's and for their divorced counterparts. We reserve the final section of the paper to discuss the implications of our findings.

Previous Research

This study seeks to fill two holes in the existing body of literature on political participation. First, the political participation marriage gap is not well documented. Secondly, previous research has not thoroughly investigated the relationship between marital status and political participation. While some scholars argue that marriage causes women to participate less in politics (citation), others find that, all else equal, divorced women participate less than married women (citation). Given the prevalence of divorce and the lack of research that examines the relationship between marital status and political participation, the first goal of this paper is to document the existence of the political participation marriage gap, and the second is to examine what influence political participation when marital status changes.

Some studies of political participation typically acknowledge that marriage has important implications for political participation by controlling for the martial status of subjects (Fisher et al. 2008, Kittilson & Schwindt-bayer 2011, Schlozman, Burns & Verba 1994). Yet, with few exceptions, scholars rarely consider how marital status impacts political participation more generally, or how it impacts men and women differently (Burns, Schlozman & Verba 1997, Voorpostel & Coffe 2010). We know from previous research that married women are less likely than married men to participate in politics, and that married people vote at a higher rate than non-married people (cf. Kingston & Finkel 1987, Petrocik & Shaw 1991, Stoker & Jennings 1995). But we do not know how changes in individuals' marital status influences political participation.

Previous research has demonstrated that the children of divorced parents are less likely to turnout to vote (Sandell & Plutzer 2005), that married couples are more likely to share political preferences (Alford et al. 2011), and that children, parents, and spouses are instrumental in steering people to support rising new parties (Fitzgerald 2011). Moreover, research has examined the partisan marriage gap among women – for example, married women have more conservative political preferences than their single counterpart in the U.S. (e.g., Plutzer & McBurnett 1991). Nonetheless previous research has not thoroughly documented and investigated the political participation marriage gap.

Additionally, it is unclear why changes in marital status impact political participation. Some scholars argue that marriage decreases women's political participation because it reinforces traditional gender roles. Phillips explains that marriage creates a "double burden" of work for women and as a result women are too busy to participate in decision-making at home (Phillips 1991, 96). This reinforces gender roles and discouraging women from participating in the political decision-making process. Schlozman, Burns & Verba (1999) further advances our understanding of how marriage depresses women's political participation. They explain that wives have less control over income, less free time, and less power over decision-making; as a result they participate less in politics. Still, Voorpostel & Coffe (2010) finds that divorced women are less likely than their married counterparts to participate in politics. This finding seems inconsistent with previous research that argues that marriage results in lower participation rates among women. If marriage curtails women's decision-making authority and control over finances, resulting in decreased political participation, then it stands to reason that divorce would restore women's autonomy, and hence promote their political participation.

Given this theoretical puzzle, the second goal of this paper is to explain the political participation marriage gap. In doing so, as addressed in the theory section later, we take the position that political participation is a kind of collective action, and that marriage provides tools to help solving the collective action problem. In this vein, our approach to answer this question is focusing on how female divorcees could overcome the lack of such ways to solve collective action problem provided by marriage.

Examining the Marriage Gap: The Case of Switzerland

To examine how changes in marital status influence political participation, this study draws on eleven waves of panel data from Switzerland (SHP, Swiss Household Panel data). One of the principle contributions of this study is documenting the political participation marriage gap. We illustrate that there is no marriage gap for men, however, a large gap exists between single and married women as well as married and divorced women. Given that marriage disproportionately impacts women's political participation, we take the opportunity to first discuss some of the contextual factors in Switzerland that may influence women's political participation. Second, we explain why Switzerland is an ideal setting to examine the marriage political participation gap.

There are multiple contextual political factors that could influence women's political participation in Switzerland. First, Switzerland was the last developed democracy to extend suffrage to women. In 1971, Swiss women were finally granted the right to vote. The delay in suffrage was largely a product of the constitutional rule that required 2/3 of all eligible voters to vote in favor of constitutional reforms. Since this time, women have been better represented in parliament than most Western European countries, and almost as well as women in Scandinavian countries. For example, in January 2000, the first year of our

sample, Switzerland ranked 19th in the world for women's numeric representation in parliament. Women held 23% of seats in the lower house and 19% in the upper house. This was considerably higher than the European average where women held 11% and 14% respectively. By 2015, these percentages in Switzerland had increased to 32.5% in the lower house, still above the European average of 26.6%.

Despite being well represented in parliament, Swiss women face other obstacles. Switzerland did not provide mandate parental leave provisions until 2005 and it is extremely common for Swiss women to work part-time. Other than the Netherlands, women are more likely to pursue part-time employment in Switzerland than in any other OECD country (OECD Employment Outlook 2015). Combined, these contextual factors may influence women's political participation in Switzerland. Still, Switzerland has many qualities that make it an ideal setting to examine how changes in martial status influences voter turn out.

First, statistically speaking, Switzerland's divorce rate is similar to that of the Scandinavian countries and to England's. The rate is high, however, compared to the rest of Europe. Like other developed democracies, the divorce rate has increased significantly over the past several decades. In 2000, the first year of our study there were 1.5 divorces per 1000 inhabitants. By 2010, the last year of our study, divorces had increased to 2.8 per 1000 inhabitants.[1] This is consistent with patterns across Western Europe and the U.S.

Like other countries, most divorces in Switzerland take place in the sixth year of marriage, and over half of all divorces take place prior to the ten year mark. Divorce patterns in Switzerland are unique, however, in that since 2005 the divorce rate has increased among old marriages. In most countries, divorce is disproportionately concentrated among new marriages. While new married couples are still likely to get a divorce, the increased divorce

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[1] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Marriage_and_divorce_statistics

rate among couples who have been married longer means that we can have more confidence that our findings are generalizable to all women who experience divorce, and are not limited to people at a given stage in their life.

When studying how change in martial status influences political participation – particularly voting – it is important to consider that many people move to a new residence when they get married or get divorced. As a result, they may not update their voter registration in time to vote. This may create a spurious relationship between change in martial status and voting. But this is not a problem for Swiss voters as there are no registration requirements. Rather, each resident is required to register their address with the state within two weeks of relocating. Ballots are mailed directly to the individual residents. Voters receive a ballot at home and can vote at their own convenience by mail or at the poll. This form of low-cost voting is also advantageous for studying the impact of change in marital status on voting because it offsets high cost of voting in a country that holds multiple national elections every year.

Switzerland hosts nation-wide elections multiple times a year. In addition to parliamentary elections, it is not uncommon for the Swiss to vote on multiple referendums every year. On average, Swiss citizens head to the polls once about every three months, and this number further increases when elections and referenda at the local level are counted. This is important because, given the frequency of national polls, we do not have to be concerned about lapsed time between changes in marital status. Rather, each respondent who experiences a change in marital status during our sample periods has the opportunity to vote multiple times the year before they change their status, as well as the year directly following the change in status.

Participation Marriage Gap: A Descriptive Analysis

Although research on political participation typically control for marital status, the political participation marriage gap is not well documented. It is unclear if changes in marital status impacts political participation of men and women in the same way. Further, we do not know what impact divorce has. Is there a marriage gap for both men and women; or does change in marital status disproportionately impact one sex? One of the primary goals of this paper is to document the political participation gap for men and women separately.

The SHP dataset provides one question about electoral participation: "Let's suppose that there are 10 federal polls in a year. How many do you usually take part in?" Respondents can choose an option from zero to ten. This question wording is a bit different from the items for electoral participation employed in other cross-country or national electoral surveys, which usually assumes the election is cyclical or a rare event and comes around less than once a year. Given the fact that the federal polls at local and national levels are not rare events in Switzerland, the wording and responses to this question are an appropriate measure to capture the strength of the intention to participate in public sphere.

The nature of the answering option for this question is usually treated as ordinal or interval measure, justifying the use of OLS regression model on the continuous outcome variable in statistical analysis. However, as seen in Figure 1, the distribution of our outcome variable is highly skewed toward full intention of participation (i.e., respond with 10) in the federal polls (right-skewed). Almost half of the female respondents answered they will participate all ten polls. It is clear from the figure that this data violates the normality assumption of the OLS regression. Some scholars maintain that least-squares linear regression do not require any assumption of normal distribution in sufficiently large samples (e.g., Lumley et al. 2002). Indeed, our sample size is quite large when pooling the ten waves

of survey respondents.[2] While it is likely that an OLS is appropriate, we also adopt additional modeling strategies.

First, we use a logistic regression model with dichotomously recoded outcome responses – 0 for the original responses less than 10, 1 for the value of 10 (full intention to vote). Second, a censored regression model. While it is clear that the survey item asks the respondents to suppose ten polls a year, one may suspect that there might be two different meanings underlying the category ten. One is the case that those who set the maximum number of participation at sheer number of ten, another is the case that one interprets the number as the proportion of her full intention to vote, including the case that the number of polls goes further than ten times.[3] If the latter is measured in the same way as the former case, the estimates can bias the impacts of explanatory variables.

In summary, we estimate three different statistical models to examine the presence of the participation marriage gap: a OLS regression, a logistic regression (on our recoded dichotomous outcome variable), and a censored regression model on our dependent variable, the intention to participate, with upper censoring point at ten. Each model accounts for the panel data structure, and the right-hand side of the equation includes lagged dependent variable.[4]

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[2] However, it is not clear from Lumley et al. discussion if this sample size is sufficiently large to attenuate the concern.

[3] That is, as a proxy of the strength of the intention, the measure can address the censoring issue because we observe the intention only if it is below ten. That is, even if someone has an stronger intention than the maximum (e.g., intend to participate twenty times if there are that many chances), what we can observe is censored at ten.

[4] We execute random-effect models for OLS and logistic regression models. However, it does not converge for the Tobit models in Stata analysis. For this reason, we include year fixed effects in tobit model, instead of using the model (-xttobit-) that considers individual-specific errors natured in the structure of panel dataset. Note that the estimates for the year fixed effects are not reported in the Table 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of dependent variable
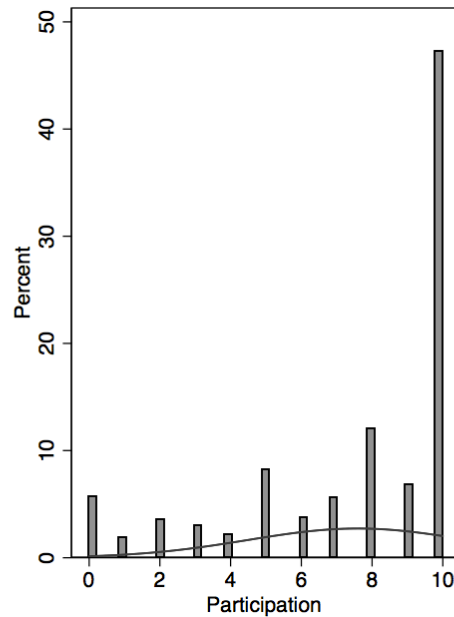
To address the independent effects of marital status on the intention to participate, we include dummy variables for non-married, separated, widowed, and divorced population (baseline group is married group). Also, we include a set of individual characteristics that are known to influence political participation, a set of resource variables in order to control for the effect of resource on political participation argued (Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995), and a group of other political activities and psychological variables.

The results from the pooled participation models are reported in Table 1. The first two columns are the results from OLS regressions, the second two are from logistic regression models, and the last two are from tobit models. The first, third, and fifth columns are the tests for women, and the second, fourth, and sixth are for men.

In all models, married men and women are more likely to participate than their non-married counterparts. Another interesting finding is that the divorced (and widowed) women are much less likely to participate than the married women while the status of being

divorced does not influence the men's intention to participate compared to being married. This result clearly demonstrates the participation marriage gap among women, that is, different marital status influences the likelihood of political participation among women: The divorced women are least likely to participate, whereas the married women are most likely to participate.

This finding that divorce does matter for women's political participation but not for men's is the starting point of this study. In the section follows, we discuss theoretical foundations that explain why this would happen, and examine our expectations. Before going forward, however, there is one important caveat that we need consider to validate this finding. As found in some other electoral setting (e.g., U.S.), one may think that the reason male divorcees report higher levels of participation intention than female divorcees might be the overreporting tendency of male voters.[5]

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[5] This gender gap in overreporting is not universal. While Silver et al. (1986) found that men were more likely to overreport voting than women in 1964, other studies found similar differences but not statistically significant in other time in the US (e.g., Presser et al. 1990; Stocke and Stark 2007) and in comparative setting (Karp and Brockington 2005). However, it is at least worth testing such gender gap in overreporting among Swiss voters since no previous study addressed the evidence whether there is gender gap in overreporting in Switzerland.

Table 1: Effects of Marital Status for Women and Men.

	OLS Regression		Logit		Tobit	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
L.Participation	0.471***	0.470***			0.916***	0.918***
	(0.006)	(0.006)			(0.008)	(0.010)
L.Participation (dichotomous)			1.945***	1.890***		
			(0.064)	(0.071)		
Never Married	-0.175**	-0.167**	-0.212*	-0.291**	-0.155*	-0.219**
	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.099)	(0.112)	(0.068)	(0.077)
Divorced	**-0.452***	**-0.048**	**-0.554***	**-0.083**	**-0.390***	**0.012**
	(0.068)	(0.074)	(0.119)	(0.145)	(0.078)	(0.105)
Separated	-0.270*	-0.103	-0.287	-0.226	-0.029	-0.062
	(0.119)	(0.117)	(0.225)	(0.238)	(0.173)	(0.192)
Widower/Widow	**-0.449***	**-0.142**	**-0.612***	**-0.050**	**-0.628***	**-0.306**
	(0.082)	(0.126)	(0.140)	(0.255)	(0.099)	(0.176)
Age	0.012***	0.012***	0.029***	0.031***	0.026***	0.022***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Education	0.029***	0.016*	0.047***	-0.007	0.020*	-0.017
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Political Interest	0.226***	0.238***	0.290***	0.322***	0.264***	0.306***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Political Efficacy	0.021***	0.036***	0.009	0.052***	0.010	0.046***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Ideology (Left-Right)	-0.015	-0.002	-0.037*	-0.029	-0.037**	-0.012
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Trust in Government	0.016*	0.003	-0.033*	-0.046**	-0.014	-0.038**
	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Full-time Job	-0.203***	-0.136**	-0.402***	-0.583***	-0.268***	-0.555***
	(0.051)	(0.042)	(0.093)	(0.087)	(0.068)	(0.065)
Part-time Job	-0.109**	-0.002	-0.412***	-0.313*	-0.344***	-0.306**
	(0.039)	(0.067)	(0.070)	(0.136)	(0.051)	(0.105)
Number of Children (under 18)	-0.060	-0.026	-0.216***	-0.106	-0.144***	-0.140**
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.056)	(0.063)	(0.039)	(0.045)
Income, household	0.076*	0.077*	0.108*	0.149*	0.147***	0.162**
	(0.030)	(0.031)	(0.055)	(0.063)	(0.043)	(0.050)
Religious Events Attendance	0.026**	0.025**	-0.001	0.001	-0.009	-0.003
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.012)
Party Membership	0.102	0.130**	0.593***	0.461***	0.687***	0.629***
	(0.055)	(0.044)	(0.105)	(0.093)	(0.085)	(0.075)
Environmental Group Member	0.107**	0.040	0.116	0.029	0.122*	0.037
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.068)	(0.076)	(0.053)	(0.061)
Women Group Member	0.035	-0.226*	0.017	-0.197	-0.000	-0.474*
	(0.041)	(0.112)	(0.078)	(0.248)	(0.062)	(0.233)
Neighbor Contacting	-0.005	0.004	0.005	0.014*	-0.003	0.020***
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Friends Contacting	0.007*	0.001	0.014*	0.007	0.023***	0.010*
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.004)

Suffering from Termination of Close Relationship	-0.006	-0.005	-0.003	0.009	0.000	-0.004
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.022)	(0.015)	(0.020)
Suffering from Conflicts with Related Persons	-0.007	-0.002	-0.020	0.001	-0.010	0.004
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.019)	(0.012)	(0.018)
Depression (Frequency)	-0.012	-0.023**	-0.018	-0.046**	-0.006	-0.054***
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.012)	(0.015)
Optimism (Frequency)	0.030***	0.009	0.046**	0.049**	0.064***	0.041*
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Constant	0.970**	0.966*	-5.300***	-5.823***	-2.345***	-2.205***
	(0.374)	(0.380)	(0.686)	(0.781)	(0.532)	(0.606)
Observations	20062	16903	20062	16903	20062	16903
Log-likelihood			-8483.509	-7082.031	-30020.24	-23115.49

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; Baseline marital status is Married; in random effects models (1), (2), (3), and (4), panel level estimates are not reported; in models (5) and (6), estimates for year dummy variables not reported.

To attenuate this concern, we examine whether our preliminary finding is a product of male respondents' overreporting tendency. If male voters in Switzerland generally tend to report their intention to participate at higher rate than female voters, we should observe that "gender" matters for the intention to participate in federal polls – i.e., the variable "female" should significantly negative effect on participation – not only among the divorcees but also all groups by marital status (e.g., among non-married, married, widowed, etc.). To test for this possible spurious relationship, we ran a voting model for each group of respondents in different marital status (married, non-married, and divorced), adding a "female" variable in the typical electoral participation (voting) models.

The test results confirm that "divorce" has its own effect on women's political participation but not men's, and it is not a artifact of overreporting tendency of male voters. As reported in Table 2, in all models "female" has significantly negative effect on participation only among the divorced group. Interestingly, in other groups women has rather positive coefficients while not always statistically significant. This finding validates our research question that why the discourating effect of divorce on political participation only appears to divorced women.

Table 2: Testing for Overreporting Tendencies among Men in Switzerland

	Logistic regression model			Censored regression (Tobit) model		
	Married	**Non-married**	**Divorced**	**Married**	**Non-married**	**Divorced**
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
L.Participation (dichotomous)	1.876***	2.245***	2.071***			
	(0.063)	(0.084)	(0.159)			
L.Participation				0.960***	0.824***	0.923***
				(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.019)
Age	0.041***	0.021***	0.041***	0.028***	0.022***	0.039***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.007)
Female	**0.127**	**0.125**	**-0.438***	**0.126***	**0.123**	**-0.317***
	(0.088)	(0.089)	(0.181)	(0.060)	(0.067)	(0.138)
Education	0.044**	-0.002	0.038	0.018*	-0.004	0.022
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.032)	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.025)
Full-time Job	-0.268**	-0.453***	0.038	-0.302***	-0.431***	0.049
	(0.092)	(0.092)	(0.217)	(0.067)	(0.075)	(0.178)
Part-time Job	-0.302***	-0.408**	0.079	-0.312***	-0.392***	0.030
	(0.079)	(0.125)	(0.222)	(0.057)	(0.102)	(0.181)
Ideology (Left-Right)	-0.023	-0.063**	-0.056	-0.011	-0.059***	-0.037
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.034)	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.029)
Income, Household	-0.000	0.000**	-0.000	0.000	0.000***	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Political Interest	0.302***	0.290***	0.306***	0.265***	0.313***	0.270***
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.035)	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.027)
Trust in Government	-0.022	-0.062**	-0.048	-0.008	-0.040*	-0.050
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.034)	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.030)
Political Efficacy	0.030**	0.030	0.003	0.026**	0.040**	0.021
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.028)	(0.009)	(0.015)	(0.026)
Party Membership	0.536***	0.485**	0.304	0.587***	0.714***	0.746**
	(0.081)	(0.160)	(0.261)	(0.062)	(0.148)	(0.244)
Attend Religious Events	-0.013	0.018	0.027	-0.026**	0.021	0.011
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.035)	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.030)
Friends Contacting	0.009	0.013	0.005	0.014**	0.016*	0.018
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.012)
Neighbor Contacting	0.009	0.011	0.009	0.012*	0.000	-0.002
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.016)

Constant	-4.785***	-3.693***	-4.892***	-1.016***	0.136	-1.478**
	(0.255)	(0.247)	(0.665)	(0.177)	(0.212)	(0.518)
Observations	23282	8388	2937	23282	8388	2937
Log-likelihood	-9746.298	-3626.346	-1285.179	-30830.636	-14340.746	-4613.248

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; Baseline marital status is Married; in models (1), (2), and (3), random part estimates are not reported; in models (4), (5), and (6), estimates for year dummy variables not reported.

An Explanation of the Political Participation Marriage Gap

The marriage gap presents a puzzle for political participation. Women who change their marital status from married to divorced are significantly less likely to participate in politics. Typically, scholars of political behavior find that personal political attitudes such as interest in politics, and demographic characteristics such as age and education, are the strongest factors to explain political participation (e.g., Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995). Yet, our data indicates that after divorce personal political attitudes among women do not change. As our longitudinal panel data enable us to trace the changes in personal characteristics before and after a woman get divorced, we test the difference of means between pre and post divorce periods of women who changed marital status during the ten year survey periods.[6] According to our t-test reported in Table 3, both men and women after divorce are just as likely to maintain political party affiliation, be interest in politics, and preserve the same level of political efficacy and trust in government as before divorce. But, women divorcees participate less than when they were married. If personal political attitudes are not changing with divorce, what can explain the marriage gap?

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[6] To prevent possible interventions from year-specific effects and the unbalanced observation between the periods before and after the divorce, we select women and men who participated in more than ten waves between 1999 and 2009 and who changed their marital status from married to divorced in the middle of the study years (i.e., 2003-2005). This sample includes 19 female and 18 male respondents.

Table 3: Difference of Means Tests for Personal Characteristics Before and After Divorce

	Before vs. After Divorce	
	Women	Men
Turnout (Intention)	Married > Divorced*	no difference
Environmental Org. Membership	no difference	no difference
Womens' Organization Membership	no difference	no difference
Voluntary Organization Membership	no difference	no difference
Interest in Politics	no difference	no difference
Political Efficacy	no difference	no difference
Attendance in Religious Events	no difference	Married < Divorced**
Trust in Government	no difference	no difference
Party Membership	no difference	no difference
Ideological Self-placement	no difference	no difference
Obs.	206	190

Note: *p<.10, **p<.05

We believe that research on marriage and divorce itself may help to explain why married women are more likely to participate than divorced women. Sociologists have theorized that married people benefit from task specialization (Becker 1991; Hadfield 1999). That is, individuals in a relationship are responsible for different tasks (e.g., different household duties, child care, and income). This division of labor permits each individual to be more efficient at his/her task and allows both individuals to benefit from the other's contribution. To the extent that individuals in a relationship have different strengths, interests, responsibilities, and networks, specialization can help explain why married individuals may be exposed to a broader array of ideas and information than they otherwise encounter in their day to day life.

Why is marriage specialization important for political participation? Previous research indicates that informed voters are more likely to turn out at the polls than uninformed voters. As such, marriage specialization can increase the probability that individuals vote by providing information shortcuts about politics and voting to otherwise uninformed citizens.

In particular, we argue that information shortcuts may be obtained by discussing politics with one's spouse. Mates spend a considerable amount of time together discussing a number of topics. Given that men are more likely to discuss politics with friends in almost every measured context (Atkeson 2003, Desposato & Norrander 2008, Huckfeldt & Sprague 1995), it is likely that they will also spend time discussing politics at home with their spouse. In this way, for women who are less likely to discuss politics outside of the home, marriage is more likely to offer information shortcuts, and hence more likely to encourage to vote by reducing information costs. Indeed, this is consistent with the political participation marriage gap we document earlier in the paper.

If marriage helps to reduce the information costs by partners transmitting political information to one another, then traditional explanations of political participation may be less important for understanding married women's probability of participation. This is because, regardless of their involvement in other activities or political networks, married people are more likely to get information from their partner. We can call this the "marriage bonus." Since marriage effectively lowers the cost of information, they are more likely to vote than divorced women, regardless of their involvement in political parties or political networks.

Upon divorce, however, this information shortcut is no longer available to them. As a result, they must rely on other types of information shortcuts to obtain costly political information. Unlike married women, access to this information should serve as a strong predictor of vote intention for divorced women. Thus, we hypothesize that factors that can offset the benefit from the marriage bonus in reducing the information costs will be

important for determining vote intention for divorced women than women in other marital status.

For divorced women, who lack the information shortcuts provided by marriage, other avenues of obtaining information necessary to vote may be more important. Namely, divorced women may rely more directly on information shortcuts provided by affiliation with a political party or other explicit political networks. Networking more frequently with family, friends, and neighbors can also provide easier access to information. This type of networking is not inherently political, and hence, many not be important for every individual. Nonetheless, to the extent that it does include some political content, it maybe have a bigger influence on divorced women than on married women. Along these same lines, affiliation and participation in other activities in one's day to day life, such as religious attendance or volunteer work, may encourage individuals to maintain civic and political engagement. Again, we do not expect that information obtained through these networks are unimportant for married women, rather, we simply suggest they may be more important for divorced women who do not have marriage bonus that are frequently provided in a marriage environment, where partners frequently exchange information on a regular basis. Following this logic, we develop the following three hypotheses.

H1: Information shortcuts, such as *political party membership*, will be more important for determining vote intention for divorced women than women with other marital status.

H2: *Networking* will be more important for determining vote intention for divorced women than women with other marital status.

H3: *Other participatory actions* such as religious attendance and volunteer activities will be more important for explaining vote intention for divorced women than women with other marital status since they help to keep holding the participatory habit.

Analysis

This section provides empirical analyses to test the three hypotheses. Our primary sample is the female respondents in the Swiss Household Panel survey (2000/2001 - 2009/2010). As before, our dependent variable measures respondents' intention to vote. To test our hypothesis we include a dichotomous variable for whether an individual has party affiliation (H1), the frequency of contacting neighbors and friends (H2), and three variables that measure individuals' participatory activities in religious events, environmental and women's organizations (H3). We also include a set of variables to control for demographic characteristics and political attitudes (such as age, educational attainment, political interest, political efficacy, etc.), resources (such as income, employment status, and number of children to care) and psychological constraints.

Given our hypotheses, we expect to see the differential effect of our main independent variables for divorced women compared to other women, on their intention to participate. Thus, we run two separate models for divorced and non-divorced female respondents. We report our results in Table 4, where the first two columns report estimates from censored regression models and last two from logistic regression models due to the skewness in the distribution of our outcome variable as we addressed earlier. In doing so, we also consider the panel structure of our data by including lagged dependent variable and using random effects specific to each panel wave and specific to individual respondents.

Table 4: Estimates from Censored Regression (Tobit) and Logistic Regression Models

	Censored Regression		Logistic Regression	
	Non-Divorced	Divorced	Non-Divorced	Divorced
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
L.Participation	0.924***	0.884***		
	(0.009)	(0.023)		
L.Participation (dichotomous)			1.990***	1.995***
			(0.066)	(0.206)
Age	0.023***	0.032***	0.028***	0.031*
	(0.002)	(0.010)	(0.003)	(0.013)
Education	0.019	0.008	0.042**	0.066
	(0.010)	(0.031)	(0.014)	(0.045)
Political Interest	0.258***	0.309***	0.278***	0.363***
	(0.011)	(0.032)	(0.015)	(0.047)
Political Efficacy	0.007	0.028	0.012	-0.012
	(0.011)	(0.030)	(0.013)	(0.036)
Ideology (Left-Right)	-0.038**	-0.057	-0.035*	-0.050
	(0.013)	(0.035)	(0.016)	(0.044)
Trust in Government	-0.007	-0.090*	-0.027	-0.112*
	(0.013)	(0.037)	(0.016)	(0.045)
Full-time Job	-0.308***	0.077	-0.432***	-0.198
	(0.072)	(0.232)	(0.097)	(0.295)
Part-time Job	-0.323***	-0.013	-0.385***	-0.091
	(0.053)	(0.207)	(0.072)	(0.267)
Number of Children (under 18)	-0.119**	-0.093	-0.192**	-0.227
	(0.041)	(0.095)	(0.058)	(0.125)
Income, household	0.209***	0.119	0.191***	0.104
	(0.043)	(0.132)	(0.055)	(0.163)
Religious Events Attendance	-0.012	0.021	-0.003	0.032
	(0.011)	(0.037)	(0.015)	(0.046)
Party Membership	0.687***	0.993**	0.602***	0.926*
	(0.088)	(0.336)	(0.108)	(0.398)
Environmental Group Membership	0.112*	0.028	0.110	-0.088
	(0.056)	(0.172)	(0.070)	(0.214)
Women Group Member	0.052	-0.163	0.042	-0.088
	(0.065)	(0.226)	(0.081)	(0.273)
Neighbor Contacting	-0.001	-0.011	0.007	0.000
	(0.006)	(0.019)	(0.007)	(0.021)
Friends Contacting	0.024***	0.016	0.016*	0.004
	(0.006)	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.014)
Suffering from Termination of Close Relationship	-0.008	0.015	-0.005	-0.005
	(0.016)	(0.038)	(0.018)	(0.044)
Suffering from Conflicts with Related Persons	-0.008	-0.024	-0.018	-0.039
	(0.013)	(0.034)	(0.015)	(0.039)
Depression (Frequency)	-0.006	0.001	-0.020	0.000
	(0.013)	(0.036)	(0.016)	(0.044)
Optimism (Frequency)	0.066***	0.097*	0.042*	0.118*
	(0.016)	(0.044)	(0.018)	(0.053)
Constant	-3.364***	-3.106	-6.276***	-6.617**
	(0.516)	(1.653)	(0.671)	(2.116)
Observations	18107	1955	18107	1955
Pseudo-R^2	0.212	0.227		

| Log-likelihood | -26842.291 | -3240.741 | -7689.719 | -815.043 |

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001; in models (1) and (2), estimates for year dummy variables not reported; in models (3) and (4), random part estimates are not reported.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of this analysis is to contribute to our understanding of why divorced women are less likely to vote than married women. This is an interesting puzzle because previous research argues that interests in politics, which does not change when women get divorced, is the most important factor in determining vote turnout (e.g., Burns, Schlozman & Verba 1997). Indeed, our model demonstrates that interests in politics is important for everyone, married and divorced women alike. And the same can be said with age, showing that the older the more participatory in general, regardless of marital status.

Our main argument specified in the hypotheses is that activities that reduce information costs will be more important to determining female divorcees' intentions to participate in federal polls because they can substitute the marriage bonus which female divorcees lack. Therefore, we expect more significant role of partisan affiliation, contacting neighbors and friends, and other voluntary activities in reducing information costs among divorced women.

Given this, we first hypothesized that affiliation with political parties, another potential shortcut, would be more important for divorced women (H1). Since divorced women do not benefit from information shortcuts stemming from marriage, their affiliation with political parties will play as an important role as information shortcuts. Our results support this argument. The results show that political party membership increases vote intention for all women. It increases vote intention for divorced women, however, at higher rate than it increases the vote intention of married women. For example, having an affiliation with political party increases the probability that a divorced woman to report the

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full intention of participation (coefficient estimates increase from 0.60 to 0.93 in the models 3 and 4 in Table 4). We suggested that this is because married women are more likely to be exposed to other information shortcuts via their domestic relationship, rendering political party affiliation be a less important source of information than it is for divorced women. The other sources of reducing information costs we expected in the second and third hypotheses, however, do not seem to have significant effect on divorced women's intention to participate.

In addition to the tests of our hypotheses, this test provides an interesting implication that resources scarcely matter for divorced women's political participation but are really important for non-divorced women. As we see in the first and third column in Table 4, married women who have a job and child rearing responsibilities are less likely to participate, and married women with higher household income are more likely to participate. This is not surprising in that it is consistent with what the resource theory tells us. An interesting point is that those resources do not have significant influence on political participation of divorced women. This reflects the importance of marriage bonus which is hard to capture with responses to typical survey questions. In addition, this finding calls the need to extend the research that seeks to answer how different types of resources play a different role to encourage or discourage women at different marital status.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to contribute to our understanding of how divorce impacts political participation. We have two objectives. First, we want to know if marriage and divorce are correlated with political participation and if they impact both men and women. Using Swiss

Household Panel data, we demonstrate that a participation gap exists between married and single women. That is, married women are more likely to participate than are divorced women while there is no such gap for men.

The second goal is to understand why divorce has a negative impact on women's political participation. We first demonstrate that women's personal political attitudes do not change when they change their marital status. This presents an interesting puzzle as previous research shows that those personal characteristics are the most important indicators of vote intention while those traits rarely change when women get divorced. Given this, we develop expectations about how different information shortcuts can play a significant role in driving divorced women's intention to vote. We argue that the reason why divorced women participate less is because they might have to incur higher information costs to cast an informed vote. However, access to certain activities to reduce that costs can help offset these costs. Specifically, we argue that women who have affiliations with political parties, more contacts with neighbors and friends, and more voluntary activities may have more chance to obtain costly information needed to encourage political participation and to vote correctly. We test our expectations using ten waves of the SHP data. We find support for the critical role of party membership to induce female divorcees participatory behavior by seemingly serving as a substitute for the marriage bonus which they lose upon divorce. This may be because these women can use their partisan affiliation to offset demands on time and efforts to obtain political information and drive to participate.

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