

RESEARCH

O sister, where art thou? Theory and evidence on female participation at citizen assemblies

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This article investigates gender differences in participation at the citizen assembly of Glarus, Switzerland. We use original survey data collected among 800 citizens. We find significant gender gaps both for attending and holding a speech at the assembly. Lower female attendance is particularly pronounced among older cohorts and can largely be explained by gender differences in political interest, knowledge and efficacy. In contrast, the gender gap in speaking is substantial regardless of age and cannot be reduced to factors that typically shape participation. Hence, gender differences are disappearing in voting but persist in more public, interactive forms of political engagement.

Key words direct democracy • gender • participation • citizen assembly • *Landsgemeinde* • Switzerland

Key messages

- Original insights into female voting and speaking in one of the world's largest citizen assemblies.
- Women use their political rights in citizen assemblies significantly less often than men.
- Gender gap in citizen assemblies is decreasing for attendance but persists for holding speeches.
- The gender gap in speaking at citizen assemblies cannot be explained by age or political motivation factors.

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Introduction

Women occupy fewer elected offices, head fewer political parties, are less numerous on candidate lists, protest less often and join innovative deliberative institutions in smaller

numbers; however, they participate equally in elections and referendums (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 35f). Even in Switzerland, where the female right to vote was introduced as late as in 1971, the gender gap is about to vanish (Tawfik et al, 2012; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2015) or persists among the elderly only (Kriesi, 2005: 124f; Dermont, 2016; Sciarini et al, 2016; Heidelberger, 2018: 47). However, the most direct form of democratic participation has so far been largely ignored by systematic gender analyses: citizen assemblies.

This is problematic for three reasons. First, from a *theoretical* viewpoint, different factors might influence an individual's decision to partake in a citizen assembly compared to 'conventional' ballot-box voting. Second, the existing *empirical* evidence on citizen assemblies is scarce, contradictory and confined to the local level: while Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont (2015) detect a gender gap for one Swiss town, Haus et al (2016: 12) find none in another. Ladner's (2016: 43–5) large-scale survey among Swiss town clerks has likewise produced mixed results, as do studies on US town meetings (eg Mansbridge, 1983: 99, 106; Zimmerman, 1999: 187; Bryan, 2004: 189ff). Third, citizen assemblies are interesting *conceptually* since they offer an additional layer of political participation: citizens can not only vote, but also publicly speak and endorse, reject or modify policy proposals. Various studies provide strong evidence for a significant gender gap in this second, more 'active', form of participation (Mansbridge, 1983; Bryan, 2004; Schaub, 2008, 2016), but the reasons for these persisting inequalities remain unknown.

Accordingly, this contribution sheds light on the extent and reasons behind the (potential) gender gap in citizen assemblies, both with regards to voting/attending and speaking. We do so by providing original evidence from what is probably the largest existing citizen assembly in the world, the *Landsgemeinde* of the canton of Glarus, Switzerland, where several thousand citizens gather to take collectively binding decisions every year. The second section provides a brief theoretical debate on gender and assembly democracy. The third section introduces our data, which essentially consist of original survey data collected among some 800 residents of Glarus in the spring of 2016. We present our results in the fourth section and discuss them in the fifth section before we conclude.

Theoretical framework

Participating at a Landsgemeinde: context

Citizen assemblies are physical gatherings of voters to take binding decisions on questions constitutionally assigned to them: citizens vote on a specific time and place in the presence of their fellow citizens (Schaub, 2016: 64–8). The *Landsgemeinde* of the Swiss canton of Glarus that we study here is such an assembly. It takes place once a year and usually includes a few thousand voters – on average, some 10% of the cantonal electorate of 26,000 citizens (Schaub and Leuzinger, 2018) – to discuss and then decide political matters. Voting is by public show of hands. The open-air assembly takes place on the town square of the canton's capital.

Landsgemeinden are deeply rooted in Swiss history. In Glarus, the first documented gathering dates back to 1387 (Stauffacher, 1962: 40). Glarus and Appenzell Inner-Rhodes are the only two cantons to retain the *Landsgemeinde* to this date. Out of the 26 Swiss cantons, six more had a *Landsgemeinde* for centuries but, for diverse

reasons, abolished it in favour of ballot-box voting over the course of the two last centuries (Schaub, 2016). The *Landsgemeinde* cantons grant their citizens extensive political rights: at the *Landsgemeinde*, citizens debate and bindingly decide on the most important cantonal issues that have been prepared by their representatives in the course of the year, such as amendments of the cantonal constitution and laws, tax rates or public expenditures. All policy areas in the domain of Swiss cantons, from taxation and transport to education, health and social policy, are concerned. Every voter is empowered to go on stage and publicly deliver a speech in favour or against a certain proposal. In Glarus, usually some 20 to 35 citizens per year make use of their right to speak. Uniquely even in comparison to other (former) *Landsgemeinde* cantons, in Glarus, every single voter is also entitled to bring forward counter-proposals during the assembly (Schaub, 2012: 309). The assembled citizens can also, upon a respective motion, send government proposals back to Parliament for reconsideration or postpone the final decision. All such motions must be made on the spot, by speaking publicly, with every citizen being entitled to do so.

The *Landsgemeinde* thus represents the canton's supreme political power. The institution's political importance is largely recognised by citizens and politicians alike (Schweizer, 1981: 133; Carlen, 1996: 19, 23; Schaub, 2016: 206). Its long-standing existence, the preservation and cultivation of 'customary rules' (Stauffacher, 1962: 75), the procedure of the assembly, and the ceremonial and social surrounding have also made the *Landsgemeinde* a crucial element of the canton's political culture and tradition (eg Vischer, 1983: 70–3; Möckli, 1987: 41–4; Bendix, 1993: 61–4; Schaub, 2016).

In terms of political behaviour, attending a citizen assembly differs in several aspects from the – nowadays – more common ballot-box voting. Most notably, assembly *voting* requires: (1) the readiness to express one's political preferences in public; and (2) the availability of significantly more time without any flexibility since both place and time are fixed and the assembly can last several hours. *Holding a speech*, on top of merely voting, arguably introduces additional requirements on the part of citizens, notably, high levels of self-assuredness, courage and/or confidence in one's social acceptance.

Building on these specific assembly attributes, the remainder of this section discusses potential effects on gender-specific participation. First, we discuss motivational factors as a compositional effect, arguing that women would attend and speak at the *Landsgemeinde* as frequently as men if they displayed equal levels of motivation. Second, based on the resource and historic heritage model, we discuss two conditional effects that might explain gender differences in attending the *Landsgemeinde*: having children and a voter's age. Third, we theorise factors that might account for additional gender differences, most notably, when it comes to public speaking. Table 1 at the end of the second section summarises the theorised gender effects.

Motivational factors: political interest, knowledge and internal efficacy

Classic electoral studies emphasise the importance of motivational factors when it comes to political participation (eg Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Burns et al, 2001: 102–4). Women have been shown to be less interested in (traditional) politics (Bennett and Bennett, 1989) and to display lower levels of political information (eg Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Burns et al, 2001; Fraile, 2014; Fortin-Rittberger, 2016) and internal efficacy (see Mondak and Anderson, 2004; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 54). Several explanations have been forwarded to account for the gender gap

in motivational factors, notably, differences in political socialisation (eg Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), the lack of female role models (eg Burns et al, 2001; Norris et al, 2004; Bühlmann and Schädel, 2012) and the long-standing patriarchal political system being uninterested in reaching out to women (Hoecker, 1995: 35).

There are several reasons to expect that motivational factors play an even larger role for explaining the gender gap in assembly democracies compared to ballot-box systems. First, assembly participation is a demanding political activity. With regard to attending, citizens have to devote several hours to politics and decide on more issues than in ballot-box democracies (Schaub, 2016: 366–70). Moreover, they need to be able to decide on new demands raised at the assembly itself. Yet, assembly democracy is even more demanding when it comes to speaking (Hooghe, 1999). Communicative skills, political knowledge and information greatly facilitate holding a speech and formulating a motion. Second, voting and speaking in front of a large public presumes confidence in one's ability to contribute to the debate. Yet, gender inequalities exist in that women display lower levels of political self-confidence, as captured, for example, by measures of internal efficacy. This is more detrimental for public than secret voting and plays an even bigger role for taking the stage in assemblies since exposure is much greater for speakers (Schweizer, 1981: 193; Mansbridge, 1983: 97–118; Bryan, 2004: 140f, 166, 213; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 58; Schaub, 2016: 441, 469). Last but not least, citizen assemblies are political institutions with heavy traditional pedigree (see also later). It is particularly in such settings, designed and shaped entirely by men, that women may feel alienated from politics (Fuchs, 1994: 582; Hoecker, 1995: 35). Our first pair of hypotheses therefore states that *women participate less than men, both in terms of attendance (H1a) and speaking (H1b), to the extent that they score lower on motivational factors.*

It ought to be noted that some scholars posit contrary effects. For example, insofar as citizen assemblies contain elaborate but purely oral debates with arguments for and against (Barber, 1984: 267–73; Schaub, 2016: 342, 421), an additional, seemingly 'cheap', opportunity for information gathering, opinion formation and decision-making is provided. This could encourage particularly less informed and less competent citizens to attend. However, while this reflection might seem correct at first sight, it neglects that people still have to appear, remain present throughout the proceedings and listen to and weigh the different arguments for this compensatory effect to actually materialise.

The resource model

According to the resource model, political participation depends on time and money as well as civic skills (Brady et al, 1995; Verba et al, 1995). Participating at citizen assemblies necessitates physical presence at a particular place and time, in our case, the central square of Glarus city every first Sunday of May, from 10am to about 1pm. Prior postal voting and the delegation of one's vote to another person are excluded. Hence, to the extent that classic gender roles persist, women can be expected to participate less than men because they are more often bound by family and household obligations, in particular, taking care of children or the elderly or cooking for family members returning from the assembly (Welch, 1977; Bryan, 2004: 196–9; Engeli et al, 2006; Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2015). Given that speaking at the assembly is free of charge, we do not expect time or financial resources to affect the

readiness to speak. We thus hypothesise that *women with childcare obligations attend the Landsgemeinde significantly less often than their male peers (H2)*.

History

The history of the *Landsgemeinde* provides additional reasons why the inclusion of women in the decision-making process might be more difficult in ‘old pure democracies’ (Inglehart, 1983: 146). *Landsgemeinden* have sometimes been labelled an almost sacred tradition, even liturgy, associated strongly with appearance, rituals and form (cf Bendix, 1993: 108f).¹ Their ancient character and underlying rituals – in Appenzell, for example, the custom to carry a rapier at the assembly (Möckli, 1987: 41) – contributed to the pride among men of *their* citizen assembly. This may have perpetuated their reluctance to open up the assembly to women (Bendix, 1993; Senti, 1994: 82) since modifying the composition of the participants meant changing – or, for some, breaking – the very character of this symbolically and emotionally charged event.

In addition to cultural reasons, the reluctance to include women in the decision-making process might also have political roots. Voters at the *Landsgemeinde* are equipped with more political rights than at the ballot box. Besides approving or rejecting government proposals, the citizens of Glarus can also modify them. Thus, the men from cantons with such an assembly may have been more ‘determined to safeguard their monopoly of political power’ than elsewhere (Inglehart, 1983: 147; Studer, 1998: 56; Schaub, 2016: 449). Indeed, it was two *Landsgemeinde* cantons that were uniquely late to introduce women’s right to vote.² In Glarus, however, women’s suffrage was introduced the same year as it was on Switzerland’s national level and in most other cantons, that is, in 1971.

However, despite the fact that women are now allowed to vote, and have been so for almost 50 years in Glarus, resentment for breaking the quasi-sacred tradition may have persisted. Thus, to the extent that, in Glarus, the pre-1971 period still lingers on in people’s minds, history itself might constitute an impediment for women to make use of their rights (and for men to encourage or at least accept them). We expect these effects to be particularly strong among older cohorts who personally experienced the pre-1971 period when voting was male-only. Therefore, we formulate the following pair of conditional hypotheses: *older women are less likely to participate in the Landsgemeinde, both in terms of attending (H3a) and speaking (H3b), than men of their age.*

Other factors

The (potentially) conflictive nature of citizen assemblies

Assembly decisions often (or, in the case of Glarus, always) mean voting publicly. This implies exposing oneself to all fellow voters and involves the readiness to potentially be addressed about one’s vote choice – by friends and foes alike (Brennan and Petit, 1990). At the same time, others also expose their often conflicting views, both in the public vote and the preceding debate. While such conflicts exist in all democracies, secret voting distances voters from one another, as well as from the polity at large. This makes it easier to withstand differences. In face-to-face assemblies, by contrast,

conflictive situations are experienced first-hand and thus harder to bear (Mansbridge, 1983: 34, 59–76, 273; Bryan, 2004: 122, 167; Schaub, 2016: 223, 439–40).

In this regard, Mondak and Halperin (2008: 346, 357f) demonstrate that confrontational politics makes highly agreeable, conflict-averse people reluctant to join political discussions. Mansbridge (1983) further found this mechanism to deter people from both attending and speaking at town meetings. There are two reasons why we expect this to discourage women more than men: first, members of politically marginalised groups – such as women – are usually particularly closely observed and particularly critically evaluated by fellow citizens (cf Mansbridge, 1983: 60–5, 97–118; Bryan, 2004: 202–14; Schaub, 2016: 441); and, second, several studies suggest women to be more averse to conflict (cf Mansbridge, 1983: 106; Norris, 1996; Bryan, 2004: 202; Childs, 2004; Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 62ff).

Role models

The importance of role models in encouraging women to run for office is well known (eg Bühlmann et al, 2010, Bühlmann and Schädel, 2012; Gilardi, 2015). Role models could be crucial for attending and speaking at the *Landsgemeinde*, too. Even once granted the right to vote in 1971, women were confronted with a centuries-old legacy of the political sphere confined to and shaped by men. While this historical burden applies to both ballot-box and assembly contexts, it is more difficult to overcome in the latter: at the assembly, the electorate's composition and, even more so, the type of speakers are visible to all. Physically experiencing the initially inevitably low share of female speakers and the lack of female role models may perpetuate the view that politics is male territory and thus maintain gender differences in participation. Furthermore, given the *Landsgemeinde's* centuries-old tradition and political importance, it is often regarded as symbolising the continuity of a polity's history (Küng, 1990; Kreis, 2010). Traditional and male-dominated norms and habits are thus further evoked and reproduced through each *Landsgemeinde*.

The deliberative tradition of citizen assemblies

Finally, like any institution, citizen assemblies develop their own norms of appropriate behaviour over time, including speaking styles. When the Glarus *Landsgemeinde* was still male-only, Stauffacher (1962: 306), for example, explained that successful interventions were usually 'factual, duly balanced, short speeches with a bit of wit'. When women eventually obtained the right to participate, they thus encountered long-standing norms shaped entirely by men. This arguably constituted a significant entrance barrier for them in that speaking styles were (viewed to be) gendered (cf Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 59ff).

For Young (2002: 39–40), too, the reasoned, calm and dispassionate style of expression commended by Stauffacher and required by classic deliberation may rather suit (privileged) men. Women, like other political minorities, might thus fear that they are unable to live up to the long-established standards of (male) discourse, resulting in greater reluctance to speak (Young, 2002) or their claims being ignored (Sanders, 1997: 354). Childs (2004) also concludes that female styles of politics are viewed as less legitimate and effective, putting female representatives under pressure to conform to more masculine, or traditional, styles of politics. Even adopting a more

‘masculine’ speaking style by becoming more assertive and aggressive may not – due to deeply rooted stereotypes – guarantee women more influence and may even prove counterproductive (cf Karpowitz and Mendelberg, 2014: 59 ff). In sum, faced with the dilemma to either speak in a ‘female manner’ and be ignored, or speak in a more ‘masculine way’ and be ridiculed, women may decide to abstain altogether. Thus, ‘verbal self-confidence’ in male-shaped settings is arguably lower among women than men and might be a crucial factor causing women’s lack of presence at the speaker’s desk in citizen assemblies (Mansbridge, 1983: 192).

Table 1 summarises the theoretical discussion thus far and lists all our expectations. We distinguish between compositional and conditional effects (see Engeli et al, 2006). *Conditionality* means that a particular factor (eg having children) plays out differently for men and women, while a *compositional effect* disappears as soon as men and women exhibit the same individual characteristics (eg internal efficacy). In addition, we have provided further explanations that can, due to their systemic nature, not be properly tested here.

Table 1: Synthesis of expected gender effects for attending and speaking at the *Landsgemeinde*

	Attending	Speaking
	Hypotheses	
<i>Motivational factors^a</i>	H1a: With an equal level of motivation, equal attendance will result.	H1b: With an equal level of motivation, equal readiness to speak will result.
<i>Resource model^b</i>	H2: Women with children are less likely to participate.	NA
<i>History^b</i>	H3a: Older women are less likely to attend.	H3b: Older women are less likely to speak.
	Further potential effects	
<i>Conflictive nature</i>	Women attend less due to the conflictive nature of the event.	Women speak less due to the conflictive nature of the event.
<i>Role models</i>	Women attend less due to a lack of female role models.	Women speak less due to a lack of female role models.
<i>Deliberative tradition</i>	NA	Women speak less due to the male deliberative tradition.

Notes: a Compositional effect; b conditional effect; NA = not applicable.

Data and methods

Data

The real-world case that we chose to study female participation at citizen assemblies is the Glarus *Landsgemeinde*. Our data stem mainly from an online survey that we conducted among a non-probabilistic sample of some 800 citizens of Glarus in the spring of 2016. Survey participants were recruited with the help of the cantonal authorities, who promoted the survey on their homepage and provided an extensive email list collected for a previous marketing study. In addition, we drew attention to our survey via coverage in regional and social media, as well as emails sent to all cantonal associations listed on the government’s homepage.³ Throughout this process, we emphasised that we were

also interested in the opinion of people who are not interested in politics, never or only rarely attend the *Landsgemeinde*, or want to reform it.

Our sample is not fully representative (see Table 2). Most importantly, but not uncommonly for survey research (Diekmann, 2011: 39f), it scores above average with regard to education, political interest and engagement in politics. Men are over-represented, as are citizens of the municipality of Glarus (the capital). As a consequential disadvantage of online surveys (see, eg, Chang and Krosnick, 2009: 649), people aged 75 or older are heavily under-represented. However, all other age groups are adequately represented and survey respondents cover the whole political spectrum: self-placement on an 11-point left–right scale rendered a normal distribution with a mean of 5.3, in line with the composition of the Swiss electorate (Lutz, 2016). We complemented our survey data with information on speakers extracted from the official assembly protocols (1972–2018).

Some two thirds of respondents indicated having attended the *Landsgemeinde* in 2015 (64.2%). Thus, we have strongly oversampled *Landsgemeinde* participants given that usually around 10% of the electorate attend (Schaub and Leuzinger, 2018). Although established surveys on ballot-box participation in Switzerland display even higher reported figures, they can also be contrasted with higher actual turnout.⁴ With regard to gender, where our main interest lies, we detect considerable differences in reported turnout between men and women.⁵

Since no registry data exist on *Landsgemeinde* attendance, we cannot tell to what extent these gender differences reflect actual participation patterns. Yet, this finding is of particular concern given that political involvement is likely to influence not only response propensity, but also misreporting (Sciarini and Goldberg, 2016). Thus, the validity of our results might be hampered if women misreported either more or less than men. Some findings from ballot-box contexts, indeed, suggest that men over-report their turnout more than women, but only to a small extent (Hill and Hurley, 1984; Belli et al, 2001: 495). Others conclude that over-reporting ballot-box turnout is not significantly linked to gender (Traugott and Katosh, 1979; Silver et al, 1986; Stocké and Stark, 2006: 14). Moreover, social desirability concerns are less of an issue in online surveys where perceived anonymity is higher (Chang and Krosnick, 2009: 646f; Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010).

Identification strategy

We assess the hypothesised relationships by running multiple logistic regressions for attending and speaking at the *Landsgemeinde*. For both dependent variables, we first ran a basic model including, besides gender, basic socio-economic status (SES) variables (income, education, employment status), age, political orientation and *Landsgemeinde*-specific controls. These include residence (citizens of peripheral municipalities need to travel further) and whether there are children living in one's household (potentially in need of care on assembly day). Furthermore, we control for respondents' social network (number of close friends and family members living in the canton, single versus partnership status,⁶ association membership) since social motivational factors might also play a role in one's decision to participate at the citizen assembly (Mansbridge, 1983; Bendix, 1993: 61–4). We also control for holding public office in the canton of Glarus as office-holders are basically required to attend the *Landsgemeinde*. We further control for party membership.

Table 2: Variable description

Variable	Description	Statistics	Sign
Attending the <i>Landsgemeinde</i>	Did you attend the <i>Landsgemeinde</i> in 2015? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 33.2% (1) 66.8%	***m ^a
Readiness to speak at the <i>Landsgemeinde</i>	Have you ever spoken at the <i>Landsgemeinde</i> or would you eventually be prepared to do so? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 55.6% (1) 44.4%	***m ^a
Female	Gender: (0) Men; (1) Women.	(0) 60.3% (1) 39.7%	–
Age	Age in years	Mean: 48.2 SD: 15.9 Min: 18 Max: 85	***m ^c
Income	Net household income per month: (1) below 4,000 CHF (2) 4,001–8,000 CHF (3) 8,001–12,000 CHF (4) 12,001–16,000 CHF (5) more than 16,000 CHF	(1) 8.9% (2) 41.5% (3) 30.0% (4) 13.0% (5) 6.7%	***m ^b
Education	Highest educational qualification: (1) Mandatory school or no qualification (2) Apprenticeship (3) High school (<i>Matura</i>) or primary school teacher (4) Higher professional training (5) Higher education (<i>Höhere Fachschule</i>) (6) Tertiary education (university or <i>Fachhochschule</i>)	(1) 2.7% (2) 34.7% (3) 11.4% (4) 15.5% (5) 10.5% (6) 25.3%	***m ^b
Municipality	Place of residence: (1) Municipality of Glarus (2) Municipality of Glarus North (3) Municipality of Glarus South	(1) 37.8% (2) 36.8% (3) 25.4%	NS ^a
Work	Current employment situation: (0) Not working (1) Working part or full time	(0) 27.2% (1) 72.8%	+m ^a
Kids	Children below 16 living in same household? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 75.9% (1) 24.1%	NS ^a
Political ideology	On a scale from (0) left to (10) right, where would you position yourself?	Mean: 5.3 SD: 2.2 Min: 0 Max: 10	***m ^c
Single adult	Is a single adult responsible for the household? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 84.9% (1) 15.1%	*w ^a

Variable	Description	Statistics	Sign
Friends	Number of friends and family members living in the canton of Glarus: (1) None; (2) 1–5; (3) 6–10; (4) 11–20; (5) 21–30; (6) 31–40; (7) 41+	(1) 0.7% (2) 10.6% (3) 11.7% (4) 17.9% (5) 17.3% (6) 6.2% (7) 35.6%	+w ^b
Club member	Are you currently a member of an association located in Glarus? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 34.3% (1) 65.7%	***m ^a
Party member	Membership in a political party? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 73.6% (1) 26.4%	***m ^a
Public office	Office-holder at the cantonal or local level (government, Parliament, court member)? (0) No; (1) Yes.	(0) 87.2% (1) 12.9%	**m ^a
Political interest	On a scale from 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (very interested), how interested are you in politics?	(1) 0.7% (2) 8.4% (3) 25.4% (4) 43.3% (5) 22.2%	***m ^b
Knowledge	Number of correct answers to three knowledge questions related to cantonal politics.	(0) 0.3% (1) 6.9% (2) 27.0% (3) 65.7%	*m ^c
Internal efficacy	On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very well), how well can you understand important political issues?	Mean: 7.5 SD: 1.9 Mode: 8	***m ^c
Public vote	At the <i>Landsgemeinde</i> , bystanders can observe your vote. Do you find this disturbing? (0) No, never. (1) Yes, at least rarely or even more often.	(0) 83.3% (1) 16.7%	*w ^a

Notes: All statistics are calculated with the sample included in the complete models (Model 2) in Table 3 ($N = 677$). Sign: bivariate tests of significance for gender differences. NS = not significant; $p > 0.1$, + $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. 'm' indicates that men show higher values on the respective variable; 'w' indicates higher values for women. ^a Chi-square test; ^b Kruskal Wallis test; ^c paired t-test.

We then extended our model by including motivational factors, namely, political interest, knowledge and internal efficacy. Women display significantly lower values on these variables than men (see Table 2).⁷ In addition, we include a measure that assesses whether respondents ever felt disturbed by others seeing how they vote. We treat this variable as indicative of conflict aversion and/or low confidence in one's opinion. Table 2 summarises the operationalisation of all variables, informs on their distribution and lists the results of bivariate gender analyses.

The latter reveal highly significant differences between men and women with regard to both attending and readiness to speak at the *Landsgemeinde*. While 73% of male respondents included in the full attendance model (Model 2, Table 3) said that they participated in 2015, only 58% of women did so. For readiness to speak, differences are even more pronounced: among respondents included in the full speech model (Model 4, Table 3), 59% of men but only 23% of women indicated a general readiness to ever speak at the *Landsgemeinde*. The next section examines whether these differences remain significant when controlling for various explanatory factors – on most of which women and men also significantly differ (see Table 2).

Results

Motivational factors: political interest, knowledge and internal efficacy

Table 3 shows the results of our logit models for participating at the *Landsgemeinde* in 2015 (Models 1 and 2) and the general readiness to speak at any *Landsgemeinde* (Models 3 and 4). With regard to female participation, a significant gender gap is revealed in our basic model (Model 1). However, after introducing additional factors such as political interest, knowledge and efficacy, that is, indicators on which women generally score lower, the effect is only marginally significant (Model 2). Regarding hypothesis H1a, we thus conclude that if women displayed similar levels of motivation to engage in (traditional) politics, the gender gap in attending the *Landsgemeinde* would largely disappear.

Looking at our controls, voting at a particular time and place apparently poses difficulties for certain groups of people, such as those with children living in their household and residents of peripheral municipalities. By contrast, a large social network and party membership raise the chances of participating.

Turning to readiness to speak (Models 3 and 4 in Table 3), however, we find that the gender gap remains highly significant even *with* controls. We therefore reject hypothesis H1b. Other factors seem to account for the willingness to actively contribute to the public debate. The large size of the coefficients further suggests that gender inequalities in speaking are far more pronounced than the ones (partly) detected for attendance.⁸ The following sections explore the reasons for the encountered gender effects in greater detail.

Table 3: Determinants of *Landsgemeinde* attendance and readiness to speak

	Attending (2015)		Readiness to speak	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Female	-0.462 [*] (0.188)	-0.340 ⁺ (0.199)	-1.564 ^{***} (0.232)	-1.413 ^{***} (0.244)
Age	0.010 ⁺ (0.006)	0.004 (0.006)	-0.026 ^{***} (0.007)	-0.033 ^{***} (0.008)
Glarus (Centre)	Baseline category			
Glarus North	-0.490 [*] (0.206)	-0.460 [*] (0.215)	-0.869 ^{***} (0.243)	-0.834 ^{**} (0.259)
Glarus South	-0.429 ⁺ (0.226)	-0.424 ⁺ (0.234)	-0.267 (0.256)	-0.296 (0.273)
Income	0.056 ⁺ (0.097)	0.036 (0.102)	0.189 ⁺ (0.114)	0.126 (0.122)
Education	0.107 (0.058)	0.071 (0.061)	0.190 ^{**} (0.067)	0.098 (0.072)
Work	0.486 [*] (0.211)	0.458 [*] (0.220)	-0.306 (0.255)	-0.205 (0.274)
Kids	-0.597 ^{**} (0.210)	-0.606 ^{**} (0.218)	0.188 (0.248)	0.282 (0.267)
Political ideology	-0.062 (0.042)	-0.080 ⁺ (0.044)	-0.050 (0.048)	-0.054 (0.052)
Single adult	-0.142 (0.259)	-0.104 (0.268)	0.567 ⁺ (0.317)	0.410 (0.330)
Friends	0.162 ^{**} (0.050)	0.136 ^{**} (0.052)	0.108 ⁺ (0.059)	0.083 (0.063)
Club member	-0.003 (0.185)	0.020 (0.193)	0.472 [*] (0.221)	0.477 [*] (0.234)
Party member	0.957 ^{***} (0.246)	0.658 [*] (0.257)	1.095 ^{***} (0.241)	0.749 ^{**} (0.257)
Public office	0.955 [*] (0.372)	0.738 ⁺ (0.377)	1.307 ^{***} (0.348)	1.009 ^{**} (0.360)
Political interest		0.216 ⁺ (0.124)		0.489 ^{**} (0.151)
Knowledge		0.393 ^{**} (0.144)		0.312 ⁺ (0.186)
Internal efficacy		0.080 (0.059)		0.183 [*] (0.075)
Public vote		-0.386 (0.238)		-0.201 (0.305)
Constant	-0.985 (0.681)	-2.491 ^{**} (0.803)	-0.590 (0.781)	-3.420 ^{***} (0.973)
Pseudo R2	0.109	0.134	0.240	0.290
Log likelihood	-393.020	-372.653	-294.162	-269.136
N	691	677	564	552

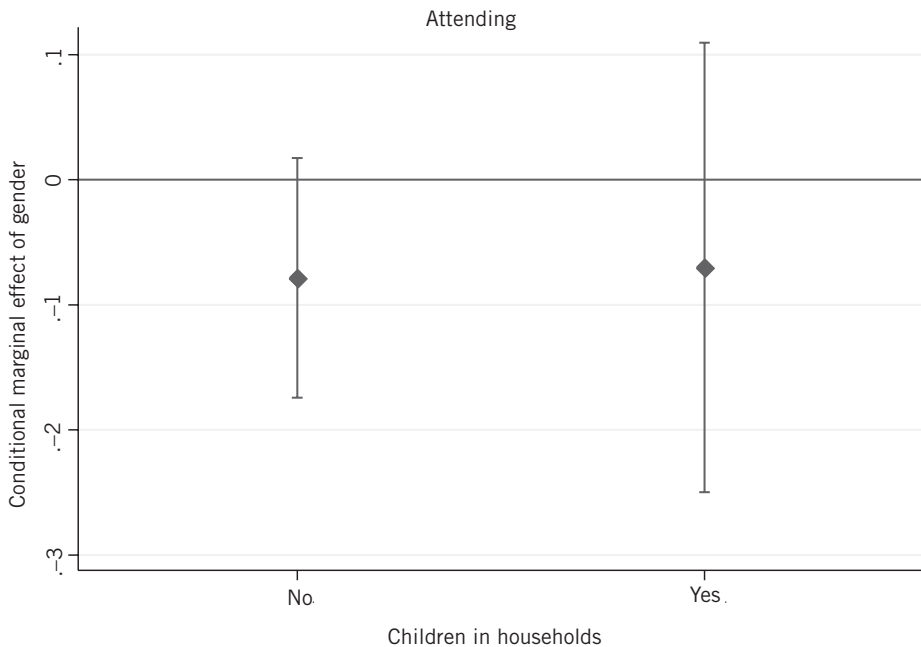
Notes: Coefficient of logistic regression models with standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; + $p < 0.1$.

The resource model

Based on the resource model, we expected women with family obligations – such as childcare – to more frequently stay away from these Sunday meetings (H2). To assess this, we calculated an interaction between gender and children in the household. The results, shown in Figure 1, dispel the assumption that women living with children are less likely to attend the *Landsgemeinde* than their male counterparts. While the availability of time does matter for attending the *Landsgemeinde* (see Table 3), it does not work particularly against women. We thus reject hypothesis H2.

Two reasons might explain this: first, societal modernisation may have reached the point where men are equally likely to be involved in childcare as women and thus stay at home on *Landsgemeinde* Sunday to fulfil their task if need be; and, second, the canton of Glarus offers a day-care facility at a symbolic cost during *Landsgemeinde* hours precisely to enable parents to attend. To the extent that parents avail themselves of this offer, the question of a gendered role allocation has become obsolete in this regard.

Figure 1: Gender and children: attendance



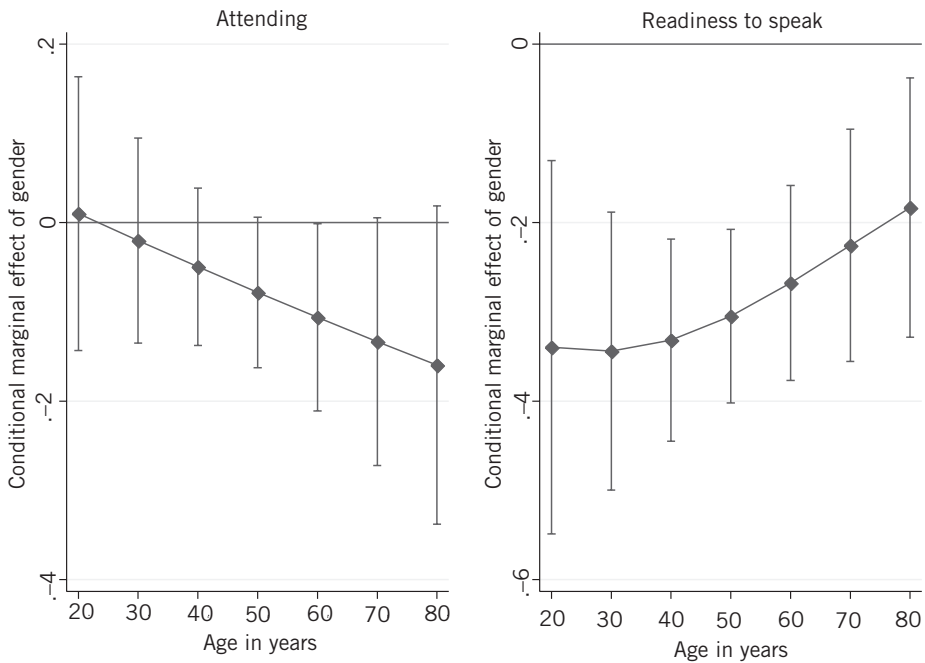
Notes: Based on an interaction between gender and children in the household, including the same controls as Model 2 of Table 3. 95% confidence intervals are displayed. The horizontal line at the 0 value of the y-axis represents no difference between men and women with regard to the probability to attend the *Landsgemeinde*. Negative values indicate that women (tend to) attend less.

History

We further argued that older women might be particularly reluctant to participate because when they were socialised, no female suffrage existed in Glarus.⁹ To examine hypotheses H3a and H3b, we interacted gender and age for attending and readiness to

speak, respectively. The left side of Figure 2 confirms hypothesis H3a in that women aged 50 or more are particularly less likely to attend the *Landsgemeinde* than men of the same age. In contrast, we do not identify a gender gap for attendance among younger citizens. This suggests that the history of the *Landsgemeinde* as a male-only assembly and its strong linkage to rituals and tradition does not continue to influence the attendance rates of those who grew up after 1971, when female suffrage was introduced. By contrast, when it comes to speaking, we do not find younger women to catch up with their male peers – women are less likely to speak regardless of their age group (right side of Figure 2). Hypothesis H3b is thus confirmed as well, but the gender bias is not confined to the older age groups – gender differences in speaking occur independently of age.

Figure 2: Gender and age: attendance and speaking



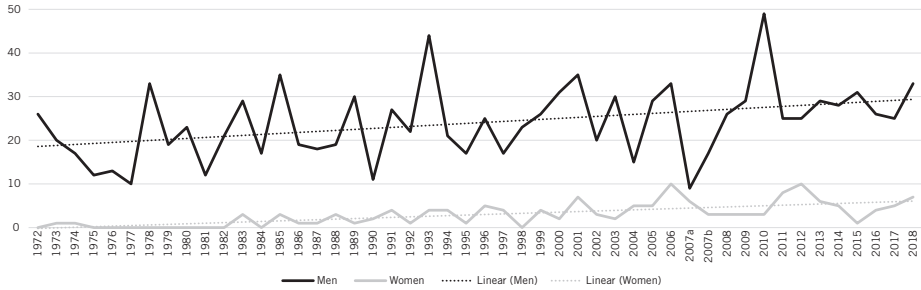
Notes: Based on an interaction between gender and age, including the same controls as Model 2 (*Attending*) and Model 4 (*Readiness to speak*) of Table 3. 95% confidence intervals are displayed. The horizontal line at the 0 value of the y-axis represents no difference between men and women with regard to the probability to attend the *Landsgemeinde* or to speak at it. Negative values indicate that women (tend to) attend/speak less.

One explanation for this might be that there has not been any substantial increase in female speakers since the introduction of the female voting right, as Figure 3 reveals: even though the number of female speakers has somewhat increased over time, so has the number of male speakers, and the former is still far from reaching parity. Only once, in May 2007, did the six female speakers come relatively close to matching their nine male counterparts. So, the persisting gender gap even among younger cohorts might be connected to the fact that there are not enough role models on the stage.

Furthermore, Figure 4 shows that significant gender differences in the readiness to speak also persist among office-holders. Thus, even women who have gained

public office are significantly more reluctant than their male colleagues to speak at the *Landsgemeinde*. This suggests that the gender gap for speaking at the *Landsgemeinde* is unrelated to differences in political experience or success.

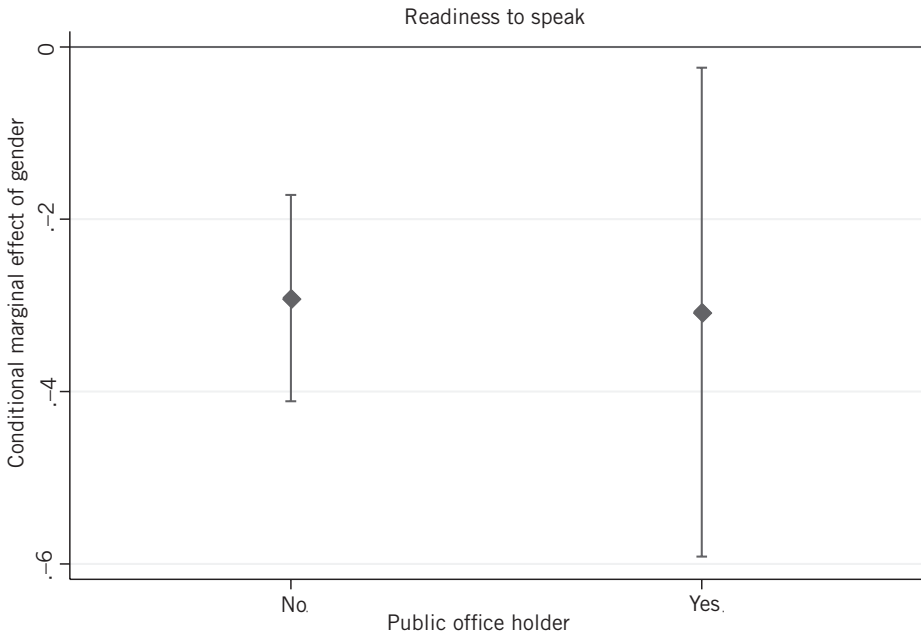
Figure 3: Number of female and male *Landsgemeinde* speakers, 1972–2018



Note: Exceptionally, two assemblies took place in 2007.

Source: Own compilation based on *Landsgemeinde* protocols.

Figure 4: Gender and public office: speaking



Notes: Based on an interaction between gender and public office-holders, including the same controls as contained in Model 4 in Table 3. 95% confidence intervals are displayed. The horizontal line at the 0 value of the y-axis represents no difference between men and women with regard to the probability to speak at the *Landsgemeinde*. Negative values indicate that women (tend to) speak less.

Discussion

How do our findings inform the larger debate on gender, political participation and assembly democracy? At the most general level, attending a citizen assembly needs to be distinguished from speaking at it. *Attending* – and even more so speaking, see

later – requires a much bigger personal effort than simply casting a ballot. This puts motivational factors centre-stage and amplifies persisting gender differences on them. On top of this, women might feel alienated from traditional political institutions that were designed entirely by men and that therefore display a lower interest and motivation to engage with and include them (eg Hoecker, 1995: 35). However, things look somewhat brighter when we focus on the younger cohorts. Among citizens below age 40, the participation rates of men and women do not significantly differ. This suggests that at least a part of the gender gap in attendance is due to the socialisation of older cohorts in a context when voting used to be restricted to men. However, the historical legacy of the *Landsgemeinde* does not appear to reproduce that gender gap in younger generations.

Our findings on *speaking* as the more active form of political participation are different yet again. Among actual speeches held at the citizen assembly of Glarus, the gender gap is – and remains – vast. While the number of female speakers has slowly increased since the 1980s (but not any more since 2012), the ‘critical mass’ that might spur a self-reliant dynamic to overcome the long-standing male imprint on *Landsgemeinde* debates has apparently not yet been reached. In line with this observation, we found a large gender gap for the readiness to speak that we can only partially account for. Differences in motivational factors only marginally reduce that gap. Even if we limit the analysis to holders of public offices, that is, those who arguably dispose of high levels of political motivation and resources, the gender gap in the readiness to speak persists. Moreover, the gender gap in speaking also exists among younger cohorts, so it cannot be attributed to socialisation processes that took place before women obtained the right to vote. We thus conclude that additional factors are at work that cause women to speak less frequently than men.

Yet, caution is warranted when interpreting these findings. Most importantly, because of financial constraints, our sample is non-random and based on self-selection. Also, while the fact that responses were gathered online may increase the internal validity of answers – for example, there is no interviewer bias and social desirability effects might be reduced due to perceived anonymity (Chang and Krosnick, 2009: 646f)¹⁰ – we do have a particularly interested, politically active, rather male and young sample. Since no registry data exist on the *Landsgemeinde*, we cannot tell to what degree our data match the actual gender gap in political participation and we lack information on whether misreporting played more (or less) of a role for women than men. Nevertheless, our data are in line with the only study that disposed of registry data on participation in a Swiss municipal citizen assembly, which revealed a significant and large gender gap (Stadelmann-Steffen and Dermont, 2015). Schaub and Leuzinger’s (2018: 9–10) picture-based attendance estimations also suggest a gender gap in participation at the *Landsgemeinde* of Glarus since turnout dropped significantly when women’s suffrage was introduced. Also, while we cannot draw conclusions on the exact magnitude of the detected effects, we can at least state that different forces are at work for attending the *Landsgemeinde* compared to actively contributing to it.

The lack of female speakers at the *Landsgemeinde* is particularly puzzling given that the formal entry costs are basically nil since anybody with the right to vote can speak without any need for organisational or other resources. This makes citizen assemblies – in theory – a radically inclusive arena. Furthermore, if Hoecker (1995: 25f, 160f, 175f) is correct in assuming women to prefer taking direct, pragmatic influence on single issues rather than striving for public office and general sway, then assemblies

would allow them exactly that: getting involved with specific questions without party membership or prior electoral success. In turn, the fact that even a group that is strongly under-represented in all elected institutions of Switzerland does not avail itself much of the right to speak suggests that significant obstacles remain.

Several possible explanations can be advanced. Some maintain that women pursue a kinder, gentler style of politics, emphasising cooperation instead of conflict (eg Norris, 1996: 91). Exposing oneself and one's position through public speaking may also be particularly intimidating for members of politically marginalised groups, who are more closely watched. Moreover, the reasoned, calm and dispassionate style of expression demanded by the *Landsgemeinde* may put female citizens in a dilemma as to whether to conform to more 'masculine' styles of speaking and be ridiculed, or to maintain their own style and be ignored (cf Childs, 2004: 11). Faced with this choice, not to speak at all would only seem rational.

However, women who *do* speak do not argue differently than men, nor are they less successful. Gerber and Mueller (2018) demonstrate that at the *Landsgemeinde* in Glarus, gender has no impact on the success of a motion and women justify their positions with equally rational arguments as men (see also Verba et al, 1995: 434; Siu, 2009). However, whether and to what extent women did so due to conformity pressure is yet another question.

A more positive interpretation of women's silence would be that they only stand up to offer *new* perspectives or arguments but remain silent when there is nothing to add. This may be of greater value than simply striving to match the number of male contributors who might be fond of hearing themselves speak – even if it simply means repeating others (Childs, 2004: 6). While the experiments by Karpowitz et al (2012: 544) have produced findings contrary to this hypothesis, it has not yet been examined in the context of a real-world assembly. Moreover, other evidence from our survey suggests that although women spoke substantially less, female attendees were equally or even significantly more satisfied with the decisions taken at the *Landsgemeinde* in 2016 – including one intensely debated item on which only men spoke.¹¹ Although this finding is neither conclusive nor systematic, it does suggest that women may feel that male speakers sufficiently cover their views.

Additional analyses lend support to this more positive interpretation: between 2000 and 2012, demands challenging the (male-dominated) Parliament were particularly successful when at least one woman spoke in favour of such a demand.¹² This backs the idea that when women decide to speak, they do so because they want to introduce a new perspective, which may then result in enlarging the support base. Against this background, and with a perspective on political outcomes, the numeric under-representation of women among public speakers *per se* does not necessarily mean that women's interests are inadequately defended. Nevertheless, we not only found women to speak significantly less often, but also discovered that they are substantially less *willing* to speak. If this willingness even remains low when the necessity to speak and defend their claims is high, in the long run, a neglect of women's interests will inevitably result.

Conclusion

This article has investigated the extent of and reasons for the gender gap in participating at a Swiss citizen assembly. Even 50 years after finally obtaining the right to vote at the

Landsgemeinde of the canton of Glarus, women still attend and speak less often than men. Gender differences in attending only lose some significance¹³ once we control for political interest, political knowledge and internal efficacy. However, those in speaking remain strongly significant and large in magnitude. Furthermore, we found the gender gap to be absent among the younger cohorts with regard to attending, but not so with regard to the readiness to speak at the assembly.

Although almost unique in terms of political institution, these insights into participation at the highly traditional and formal citizen assembly of Glarus are relevant for both the gender and politics, as well as the political behaviour, literatures. Our results show that ‘informal impediments to participatory parity’ can persist even if women are formally empowered (Fraser, 1994: 119; see also Young, 2002). Gender biases remain pronounced despite extremely low formal entry costs at the *Landsgemeinde*. This supports a Foucaultian view on power as being internalised and reproduced through social relations and processes of normalisation, rather than depending merely on law (cf Hayward, 1998).

We also found that the gender gap is more pronounced when social interaction is crucial, namely, when it comes to holding a public speech that is then subject to critical scrutiny by the assembled electorate. In such moments, existing power relations can most directly be observed and experienced. This makes their reproduction both easier and more likely. Our results are thus fully aligned with recent evidence from the political behaviour literature, suggesting that the gender gap is about to disappear in the more private act of voting but persists in other, more public and interactive, forms of political engagement, such as contacting politicians, joining a political party or engaging in campaign work (Kittilson, 2016). Distinguishing attending the Glarus assembly from actively speaking at it adds further nuance to this insight.

Last but not least, we identified a persistent and substantial gender gap in the readiness to speak at citizen assemblies even after controlling for factors that usually explain lower female turnout rates, that is, resources, political motivation and social capital. Although speaking as such is more strongly dependent on motivational factors than voting, these factors contribute less to explaining gender differences. Therefore, we conclude by calling for further research into the types and persistence of power relations in institutional politics. Both scholars and policymakers should also think about how informal hurdles to equal participation can be eliminated so that women acquire equal voice and recognition.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. Compared to other assembly democracies in Switzerland, however, ‘pomp and ceremony’ are marginal in Glarus (Vischer, 1983: 69).
2. In Appenzell Outer-Rhodes, the men’s *Landsgemeinde* finally decided to introduce women’s suffrage in 1989 after repeatedly having rejected it before. Appenzell Inner-Rhodes even had to be forced to do so by a ruling of the Federal Supreme Court as late as in 1990 (Mock, 1999). Among the other cantons with a *Landsgemeinde* in those days, Nidwalden and Obwalden granted women the right to vote in 1972.
3. The largest group of survey respondents was recruited via the email list of the cantonal authorities. Furthermore, a considerable share of respondents was recruited via reports and articles on the survey in various local media (TV, radio and newspaper). While at least some respondents could also be gained via emailing associations, the share of respondents recruited via social media and the canton’s *Landsgemeinde* homepage was minimal. More information is available on request.
4. Reported participation rates are as follows: 70.1% (Swiss Electoral Study Selects 2015) and 74.1% (average from VOX post-vote surveys 2015/16). Actual participation rates are as follows: 48.5% (Selects 2015) and 49.1% (average from VOX 2015/16).
5. Most importantly, 53.4% of our male respondents indicate that they attended each of the last five *Landsgemeinden*, while only 38.6% of women reported having done so. No such differences exist when resorting to the Selects (2015) sample for ballot-box elections.
6. In order to keep the survey within realistic bounds, we did not gather data on marital status. We are therefore unable to validate findings from other contexts where widowhood was shown to reduce female participation (Ballmer-Cao and Sgier, 1998; Sciarini et al, 2001).
7. The wording of questions included in this survey may be prone to capturing the motivation to engage in institutionalised, that is, male-dominated, politics and inquire about ‘male’ knowledge. We thank an anonymous reviewer of the *EJPG* for highlighting this point. However, given our interest in explaining participation precisely in a traditional political institution and viewing motivational factors as a compositional effect, these variables serve our purpose.
8. Also note that the explanatory power of our model on attending is clearly inferior to the one for speaking, and both are rather low in general. An important reason for this difference might be that – contrary to the decision to speak in front of several thousand co-citizens, which is a highly demanding act of political participation and thus strongly dependent on political motivational factors – attending the open-air assembly is also

- influenced by other, contextual and/or non-political factors, such as the salience of items tabled, the company of friends or family members, and the weather (eg in 2015, it rained) (cf Gerber et al, 2016: 18–19). These are factors that we could not properly integrate into our logit models.
9. In Glarus, all women born in or after 1952 got the right to vote at the same time as their male peers. Thus, all women who were at least 64 years old at the time of our survey (in 2016) had received their right to vote *after* their male peers, and all women aged 54 years or more at the time of the survey had reached their 10th year of life in an environment where women were disallowed from voting.
 10. According to Chang and Krosnick (2009), online non-probability samples even tended to provide more accurate answers than online probability samples. See also Breton et al (2017), who conclude that online surveys might be the choice for subsequent (Canadian) election studies.
 11. Detailed results are available on request.
 12. Detailed results are available on request. See also Schaub (2008: 103–6), who finds, in a long-term perspective since the 1970s, that gender has no influence on the success of demands at the *Landsgemeinde*. For similar results on the success of parliamentary affairs in a Swiss canton, see Fuchs (1994: 587).
 13. The effect remains marginally significant.

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