The Surge in Women's Representation in the 2019 Swiss Federal Elections

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Abstract

In the 2019 Swiss federal elections, women's representation increased more than at any time before, reaching an all-time high at 42%. In this article, we offer several explanations for this. First, in almost all parties, the percentage of female candidates was significantly larger than in the previous elections. Second, on average female candidates held better positions on party lists, both compared to men and to the previous election. Third, in 2019 (but not in 2015) women were about one percentage-point more likely to be elected than men, controlling for many relevant factors. Fourth, about one third of the surge was linked to the fact that parties that won seats in 2019 (the Greens, especially) had more women on their lists compared to the parties that lost seats. Fifth, in 2019 voters (women in particular) perceived female candidates as more fit for a political office compared to 2015.

Introduction

In 2019, the proportion of women in the National Council increased by over ten percentage points compared to 2015. The second largest increase in the proportion of women, in the mid-1990s, had been just 4 percentage points (Seitz, 2020). Not only is this increase historic, the fact that the share of women in parliament is now 42% puts Switzerland in the top-five of female representation in Europe. An equal representation of women and men in the parliamentary arena is not only desirable from a normative perspective where the descriptive representation of the society as a whole is one important dimension of political equality and representation. Higher shares of women in parliament have also been shown to have a variety of positive outcomes ranging from higher political engagement of both genders (e.g. Karp and Banducci, 2008) to changes in public policies (e.g. Bratton and Ray, 2002; Hessami and da Fonseca, 2020).

In this paper, we focus on the reasons for this surge in women's representation in Switzerland. We approach the topic from various perspectives and show how supply-, demand- and situational factors have contributed to this result. To achieve high female descriptive representation, a multitude of things need to work together: First, there are factors tied to the supply of candidates and the chances of female candidates to get elected, such as good list positions. Second, there are demand-side factors that play a role, most importantly the willingness of voters to support female candidates at the Ballot box. Last, situational factors, such as party competition are important, and in particular whether winning political parties have a lot of women among their candidates. In this paper, we look at all three aspects separately in order to offer a comprehensive view on the "Frauenwahl 2019" in Switzerland.

We compare the 2019 elections systematically to the last national election in 2015 to accommodate for this large increase of ten percentage points in women's representation, and take into account both official statistics as well as the post-election study data of the Swiss Election Study (selects). A systematic inclusion of further elections back in history is not possible, due to data availability problems, especially on the demand-side.

Our analysis reveals support for a multitude of explanations for the surge of women's representation in 2019. First, regarding the supply of female candidates, we find support for three claims: in almost all parties, in 2019 the percentage of female candidates was significantly larger than in the previous elections. On average female candidates held better positions on party lists, both compared to men and to the previous election. Also, in 2019 (but not in 2015) women were about one percentage-point more likely to be elected than men, controlling for many relevant factors. Second, situational or rather factors related to "politics" played a role as well: about one third of the surge is linked

to the fact that parties that won seats in 2019 (the Greens, especially) had more women on their lists compared to the parties that lost seats. Last, regarding the voters' side, in 2019 voters (women in particular) perceived female candidates as more fit for a political office compared to 2015.

Switzerland offers an interesting case to study this since the open-list PR system offers voters a lot of freedom to change the composition of their party lists (Selb and Lutz, 2015) and thus potentially also the gender composition of the Ballot by crossing-off female candidate or on the contrary putting their name twice. With its rather short history of female suffrage of only 50 years, it is furthermore interesting to see how attitudes towards female candidates still contribute to the question of female representation.

In studying what caused an all-time high of women to become elected in the 2019 Swiss elections, we contribute to the wider literature on female representation which has noticed that increases in the female parliamentary presence have not grown in a strictly incremental fashion, but rather in punctuated and sometimes dramatic jumps (Studlar and McAllister, 2002). The literature still struggles to fully understand the nature of these surges and here the 2019 Swiss elections are a good case in point.

We begin with a short overview of the state-of-the-art of the literature on the topic before providing more empirical details on the context of the 2019 "Frauenwahl". In three short sections we then tackle the three aspects mentioned above (supply, demand and situational factors). A last section concludes in offering some more general thoughts.

Previous research

There is a vast literature trying to explain variations in the number of women elected (for reviews see e.g. Wängnerud, 2009; Childs and Lovenduski, 2013). What becomes immediately clear from this research is that if we want to understand why fewer or more female legislators are elected, the whole electoral process is important from the first thought about running as a candidate to technicalities in how votes are translated into seats. Lovenduski and Norris (1993) have worked out an encompassing model of legislative recruitment in Western Democracies that emphasizes the role of the political system and the party context on the one side and the supply and demand factors on the other. It is well established that the election of women is more likely under proportional electoral rules with large district sizes (Matland and Brown, 1992; Norris, 1996; Rule, 1987) and that gender quotas (Murray et al., 2012; Paxton and Hughes, 2015) facilitate higher shares of women in parliaments. To explain variation within *countries*, ideology seems crucial as scholars have documented that for a long time left parties have featured more female candidates than more conservative parties (Kittilson, 2006; Lovenduski and

Norris, 1993; Caul, 1999). Keith and Verge (2018) report that especially "new left" parties (Green and radical left) are front-runners for women's representation as these parties in particular promote gender equality as a core feature of their ideology.

Another recurrent finding is that political parties are important actors and the main gatekeepers in the recruitment process (Caul, 1999; Valdini, 2019; Kunovich and Paxton, 2005). Based on the observation that increases in female representation, in many cases, have not grown incrementally but rather in "punctuated and sometimes dramatic" fashion (Kittilson, 2006, p. 10), scholars have emphasized the crucial role of internal processes within parties and indeed, extant research shows that women profit from conscious acts of party leadership in promoting women's representation (Kittilson, 2006; Aldrich, 2020; Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger, 2015; Weeks, 2018). These actions can be the implementation of (implicit) gender quotas on the lists but also a general commitment to promote female representation.

A second large literature deals with the demand side of the equation and asks how female candidates are treated by voters. On the one hand ample evidence especially from the US context suggests that gender stereotypes regarding competence areas as well as character traits of politicians continue to exist (e.g. Dolan, 2014; Sanbonmatsu, 2002) and that the amount of information as well as the type of information voters search on female and male candidates differs (Ditonto et al., 2014; Andersen and Ditonto, 2020). The evidence is more mixed when it comes to the electoral choice as such. While many voters seem to have a preference to vote for a candidate of their own gender (i.e. same-gender voting) (Sanbonmatsu, 2002), these factors seem not very relevant when it comes to the actual decision whom to vote for (Dolan, 2010; Hayes, 2011; Lefkofridi et al., 2019b). Furthermore, the likelihood to vote for a female or male candidate is highly context dependent (e.g. Giger et al., 2014) and in particular, the visibility of female candidates plays a role (Gilardi, 2015). In sum, there is little evidence that voters punish women candidates at the polls, at least in recent years (Marien et al., 2017; Lutz et al., 2019) and even seem to enjoy a slight advantage according to (meta-) experimental evidence (Schwarz and Coppock, 2021), even though gender stereotypes continue to exist (Lefkofridi et al., 2019a).

The context of the "Frauenwahl 2019" in Switzerland

Before we proceed to analyzing the reasons for the increase in female representation, let us first give some context for the 2019 Swiss elections with a focus on women.

Women in the 2019 elections

The 2019 elections saw a record number of candidates running for office in the National Council: a total of 1'873 female and 2'772 male candidates in the twenty cantons with proportional representation system[1]. The overall increase in candidates compared to the last elections in 2015 was greater than ever before (+857 candidatures). The female candidates contributed significantly to this as 565 more women than in 2015 ran for election. The number of candidates rose by 292, increasing the proportion of women on the electoral lists by 5.8 percentage points and exceeding the 40 percent threshold for the first time (Seitz, 2019). It is important to note that the length of party lists varies strongly across cantons. In federal elections, cantons are the constituencies, where the number of seats in the National Council is proportional to population. Further, cantonal party sections have considerable autonomy to make electoral lists, including which specific rules to follow.[2]

The proportion of women increased in all cantons (with the exception of Schwyz) and also in all parts of the country, although more in the Latin parts of Switzerland than in the German-speaking part. Comparing the parties, however, reveals major differences (see figure 1). The 2019 elections confirmed the usual pattern in Switzerland (and elsewhere), according to which parties that are closer to the left-end of the ideological spectrum have a higher proportion of female candidates. There were even more women than men running for office on the lists of the Green Party and the Social Democrats, with a proportion of women slightly above fifty percent. The average proportion of women on the 2019 electoral lists was 40.3 percent.

Compared with the 2015 National Council elections, the proportion of female candidates increased for all parties except the BDP and EDU (Seitz, 2019).

The higher proportion of women on the electoral lists was paralleled with larger proportions of women among those elected, reaching 42 percent for the National Council.[3]. Yet, there are again major differences between cantons and parties. Compared with the 2015 National Council elections, the proportion of elected female candidates increased in 13 cantons, stagnated in 12, and it declined in the canton of Valais (-25 percentage points, to 0)[4]. In five cantons with a proportional representation electoral system, more

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[1]Switzerland has a bicameral system. For both councils, the electoral districts correspond to the 26 cantons, the units of the federal state. The National Council (lower house) elections in Switzerland are held under a PR system with the Hagenbach-Bischoff rule, which is equivalent to d'Hondt. District magnitude varies from 1 to 34, depending on the size of the population. Six cantons have single member districts due to their small populations.

[2]Both the rules and practices followed by parties tend to be intransparent. Therefore, a detailed overview of such rules and practices would require a separate project.

[3]More details can be found in the appendix, in particular Table A1 and Figure A1.

[4]More than a third of the candidates for the National Council were women, twice as many as in the

women than men won a seat. [5] The shares of male and female MPs are at parity in three cantons [6]. And in Obwalden, a canton with a majoritarian electoral system due to its small district size, a woman got elected to the National Council for the first time in its history.

The largest number of female National Councilors can be found on the left (see also table 2 and A1): the proportion of women in the National Council is 64.1% for the SP and 60.7% for the Greens. On the electoral lists of the EVP, two women and one man were elected (proportion of women: 66.7%). Equal numbers of women and men were elected for the GLP (8 each) and the small left-wing parties PdA/Sol. The strongest growth in the number of female National Councilors in 2019 was among the election winners, the Greens (+12 to 17 women) and the GLP (+5 to 8). Women also increased their representation in the FDP (+3 to 10), the SVP (+2 to 13) and the PdA/Sol (+1). In contrast, the number of women stagnated in the SP (25). While it has grown larger, the proportion of women in the FDP (+13.3 points to 34.5%) and the SVP (+7.6 points to 24.5%) is still well below the national average. The proportion of women in the CVP declined (-5.3 points to 28%); for the first time since 1999, the CVP's female representation is smaller than that of the FDP. In the BDP one woman and two men got elected to the National Council (female share 33.3%), while the two small right-wing parties EDU and Lega are each represented by one man (Seitz, 2020).

The campaign environment

One noteworthy contextual feature is certainly the initiative *Helvetia ruft!* (Helvetia is calling!), founded in 2017, which we discuss in detail in Appendix A.7. The goal of this ongoing campaign is to make women's representation a social issue and to achieve a more balanced gender distribution in all political institutions in Switzerland. The campaign is based on five pillars: a new narrative about female representation in Switzerland, a broad appeal strategy including all parties, competition between cantons and party lists, mentoring programs for female politicians, and picking up and implementing signs of the zeitgeist.

The initiative's starting point is the fact that female candidates in Switzerland need positions on the top of the party lists to get elected as on average, only around one-third of the 200 seats in the National Council do not involve an incumbent seeking reelection, and consequently, the position on the party list is of great importance for new

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2015 federal elections. A remarkable leap - which, however, remained without consequences. The top positions on the main party lists were all men, seven out of eight incumbents.

[5]The proportion of women was highest in the cantons of Basel-Landschaft (71.4%), and second highest in Basel-Stadt and Grisons (60% each). In Fribourg it was 57.1% and in Berne 54.2%.

[6]Canton of Geneva, Thurgau and Schaffhausen

candidates. Usually, nomination processes within parties are not transparent; moreover, most parties also do not have defined goals in terms of gender or minority representation on the list(see IDEA, 2021). *Helvetia ruft!* consequently aimed at positioning a high proportion of women on the lists and in particular in "eligible" positions with a well-orchestrated and media-featured campaign. For the elections to the National Council in 2019, *Helvetia ruft!* established many contacts with cantonal party board members to convince them of the necessity of recruiting as many female candidates as possible and giving them advantageous list positions by announcing a public party ranking. The campaign strategy is described in detail in the appendix. At this point, it is also worth mentioning the second national women's strike after 1991, which was held in June 2019 and has seen large demonstrations in all Swiss cities. The strike was organized by trade unions and supported by the *Helvetia ruft!* campaign. During the week of the strike, the topic of women's representation in politics and society was notably present in the media (Gilardi et al., 2020).

From party lists to election

This section documents three steps that contributed to the surge in women's representation in the 2019 elections, compared to the 2015 elections. It thus takes up features that have been described in the context section but goes beyond mere description. First, the number of women on party lists increased compared to 2015; second, on average women held better positions on party lists, both compared to men and compared to women in 2015; third, women's chances of election were higher than men's. All analyses in this section rely on official data from the Federal Statistical Office (2015; 2019).[7]

Figure 1 shows the percentage of female candidates on party lists in the 2015 and 2019 elections. Several points stand out. First, in most parties, a majority of candidates are men. Second, there are significant differences across parties. Third, between 2015 and 2019 the share of women on party lists increased significantly in most parties, including in the SVP, which had the lowest share of women in both 2015 and 2019. On average across all parties, 34.5 percent of candidates were women in 2015, and 40.3 percent in 2019—a notable increase of 5.8 percentage points, or 16.9 percent.

Table 1 shows two sets of linear regressions, estimated with OLS,[8] to establish the

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[7]Please note also that there has been a general rise in the number of candidates in the 2019 election. This is mainly due to more (party) lists being presented and in particular increases the share of "stuffing candidates".

[8]Linear regression is an appropriate choice for binary dependent variables: there are "compelling arguments of a substantive nature for preferring this approach to logistic regression" (Hellevik, 2009, 59).
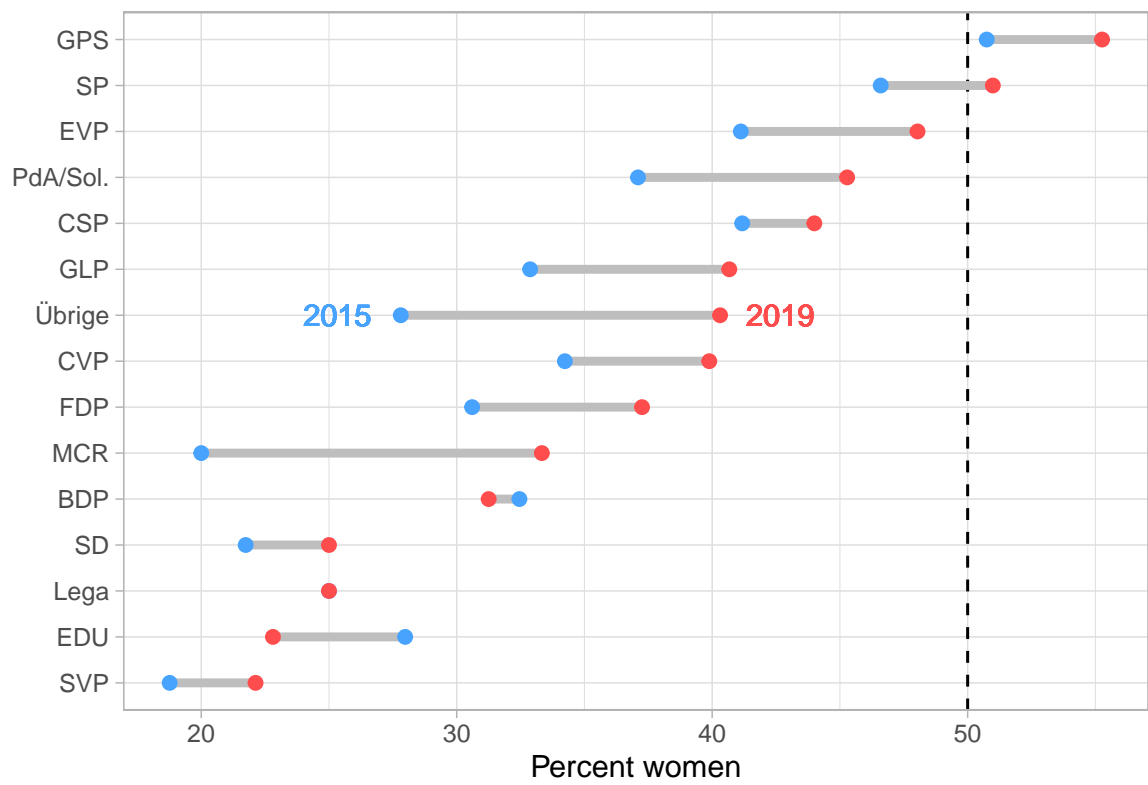
Figure 1: Percentage of women on party lists, 2015 and 2019.

relationship between the gender of candidates and the position on party lists as well as the probability of being elected, and to compare that relationship between 2015 and 2019. Appendix A.3 shows that the results are substantively unchanged when using logistic regression.[9] Appendix A.4 reports pooled models including interactions between gender and election year. This second set of models is less easy to interpret but permits a more precise measurement of the link between gender and positions on party lists as well as election, conditional on election year.

The first two columns of Table 1 consider the position of candidates on party lists (the lower the better: 1 is the top position), while in the third and fourth column the outcome variable is 1 if a candidate was elected, and 0 otherwise. The main explanatory variable is the gender of candidates, coded binarily (1 for women, 0 for men).[10] Regressions control for important variables such as the status of candidates (incumbent, former MP, or new candidate), age, and, for the second set of models, position on party lists. These variables consider factors other than gender that are likely related to the outcomes of interest, namely position in party list and probability of election, and follow quite straightforwardly from the literature. Incumbency status is an important factor for electoral prospects, while age is a proxy of experience and qualifications. In addition, the analyses include party and canton fixed effects to account for unmeasured differences across parties and cantons. Moreover, all models include both party and canton fixed effects. Disaggregated results by party are shown in Appendix A.2 as additional information for readers interested in specific parties.[11]

The regressions in Table 1 reveal several findings. First, women held better positions than men on party lists, both in 2015 and in 2019, but especially in 2019 when the difference is almost one full rank, although Table A3 shows that the difference in the "women bonus" for positions on party lists is not statistically significant between 2015 and 2019. In other words, both in 2015 and 2019 women held a roughly similar advantage on party lists, relative to men. Second, women were more likely than men to be elected in 2019, but not in 2015. In 2019, the difference is about one percentage point. Importantly, this difference is net of candidate status, age, and position on party list, which are all strongly related to election probability. Table A4 shows that the interaction between gender and election year is statistically significant, meaning that "women bonus" for

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[9]For the analysis of positions on party lists, the more appropriate model would be ordinal logistic regression, which however is hard to estimate with party and canton fixed effects. Therefore, we dichotomize the dependent variable such that it takes the value of 1 if a candidate is on one of the top 3 positions, and 0 otherwise.

[10]Gender is missing for about 0.1 percent of candidates in both 2015 and 2019.

[11]The disaggregated results by party are consistent with the main results. There is some heterogeneity across parties (which is to be expected), but this does not not contradict the fact that, on average, the effects are those shown in Tables 1 as well as A3 and A4.

	Position (2015)	Position (2019)	Elected (2015)	Elected (2019)
Woman	−0.64**	−0.91***	0.00	0.01*
	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Status: former (vs. incumbent)	1.33	2.67	−0.40***	−0.53***
	(1.73)	(1.55)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Status: new (vs. incumbent)	6.67***	6.56***	−0.80***	−0.79***
	(0.47)	(0.46)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age	0.04	−0.10**	0.01***	0.01***
	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age^2	−0.00	0.00**	−0.00***	−0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Position on party list			−0.00**	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	1.11	3.33***	0.70***	0.69***
	(1.05)	(0.97)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Canton FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.48	0.49	0.63	0.58
Num. obs.	3802	4664	3802	4664

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table 1: Position on party lists and election probability, 2015 and 2019. OLS estimates.

election was larger in 2019 than in 2015. In short, from this perspective the surge in women's representation can be explained by three related steps: there were more women on party lists than in 2015; women had better positions on those lists compared to both men and (to some extent) the 2015 election; and in 2019 women were about one percentage point more likely to be elected than men, a difference that was not present in 2015 and which is statistically significant.

We conclude by noting the close correspondence between the percentage of women on party lists and among those candidates that are elected: 34.5 and 32 percent in 2015, and 40.3 and 42 percent in 2019. As shown, the particular success of female candidates in 2019 has to do with their better positions on party lists as well as with an additional bonus among voters.

The influence of the changed party composition of parliament

The Swiss elections 2019 have also been characterized by a large increase in the Green and Green liberals vote shares. As these parties have among the highest shares of female candidates (see Figure 1), we thus ask ourselves how much the changes in the party composition of the parliament between 2015 and 2019 have contributed to the surge in women's representation. In other words, how much of the increase is simply the corollary of a different party composition and how much is really due to women having better list positions and better chances to get elected?

In table 2 we present the results of a simulation[12] that tries to separate the two above mentioned effects as in reality both are mingled together. The first two columns show the number of women elected. In 2019 there were 20 more women elected to the National Council than in 2015 leading to the all-time high score of 84 women. The next two columns show the number of women in a fictitious parliament where we first kept the party composition of 2015 but took the female success rates of 2019, i.e. the percentage of women elected in each party. This exercise isolates the influence of the factors that we have seen above: more women on the lists and higher chances of success. This simulated parliament would count 78 women and thus this factor explains a bit more than two thirds of the surge in women's representation (+14 of the total +20 seats explained). If we look at the party results in more detail, it becomes clear that especially for the Greens and Green Liberals we find large differences between reality and our simulation: For example, the Greens with their vote share of 7,1 % as in 2015 would have 7 women

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[12]The numbers shown are based on a nation-wide simulation, a simulation based on cantonal results yields a very similar distribution.

	Number of women elected in 2015	Number of women elected in 2019	Number of women predicted with party comp. 2015	Number of women predicted with fem. success rate 2015
SVP	11	13	16	9
Lega	1	0	0	1
FDP	7	10	11	6
BDP	1	1	2	0
CVP	9	7	8	8
EVP	2	2	1	3
GLP	3	8	4	7
SP	25	25	28	23
GPS	5	17	7	13
Pda/Sol.	0	1	1	0
TOTAL	64	84	78	70
Changes		+20	+14 (70%)	+6 (30%)

Table 2: Gender composition of parliament and simulation of fictitious parliament (Nationalrat) with (a) party composition of 2015 but female success rate of 2019, (b) female success rate of 2015 but party composition of 2019, number of women elected per party shown

in their party group while in reality in 2019 17 female Green parliamentarians have been elected. The last column reverses the exercise and simulates the number of women if we only take into account the changed party composition of the National Council but keep the success rate of women to the level of 2015. In this model we would predict 70 women, an increase of 6 female representatives or about 30 percent compared to 2015.

In sum, the surge in female representation in 2019 is also attributable to the changed party composition in 2019. About one third of the total increase can be explained by the changed party composition with parties winning that had higher shares of women on their lists. Female representation profited from the "Green wave", the unprecedented rise in electoral support of the Green and Green liberals but the bulk of the increase remains the result of women having had better chances to get elected in 2019 than ever before.

Determinants of voting for female candidates

In this section we discuss the demand-side, that is the factors that explain the support of women candidates. Again, we compare the two elections 2015 and 2019, using data from the Swiss Election Study (Selects).[13]

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[13]The post-election studies were fielded between October and November 2015 among 5337 Swiss voters, and between October 2019 and January 2020 among 6664 Swiss voters, who participated either via

Given the open-list PR electoral system of Switzerland[14] and based on data from the selects surveys, we focus on two questions: the gender composition of the ballot after modification, and the likelihood a voter would choose a female candidate given there are two candidates with the same qualification.[15] The exact wording of the first question was: "After you have amended the ballot list, were there more men or more women on the list?"[16] Three answer categories were given: 1) more men, 2) equal number of men and women 3) more women. We re-coded the first dependent variable as follows: -1 = the ballot paper contains more men; 0 = equal share of men and women; 1 = the ballot paper contains more women. The second dependent variable is based on the following question: "If you could choose between two equally qualified candidates, would you rather select a man or a woman?"[17] This variable is coded 1 if the voter selects a female candidate and 0 if she selects a male candidate, or is undecided.

These two dependent variables cover two different aspects of support for women candidates: The first contains a more practical or situational aspect because the gender composition of the ballot is partly a function of available candidates. The second question refers more to the ideological and long-term determinants of female votes (see Sanbonmatsu, 2002). We estimated OLS regression models to analyze the first variable and logistic regression models to study the second variable. Even though the first variable is coded in three categories only (-1,0,1), we decided to use OLS regressions for practical reasons since the results are easier to interpret. Ordered logistic analyses lead to the same results. We report the results from ordered logistic models in the appendix (Table A9). All models include fixed effects for cantons and a control variable for the share of female candidates on ballot lists.

We report the results of OLS regression models in the first two columns in Table 3.[18] Note that the number of voters who modified their lists varies between 53.8 percent in 2015 and 48.9 percent in 2019. Our results only pertain to those who changed their lists. In addition, the number of women on the lists varies considerably between cantons and parties. And it increases between the two elections: in 2015 the lists contained on average 32% female candidates (25 lists without women), in 2019 on average 36% of candidates were female (24 lists without women). Since this is likely to influence the outcome, we

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online survey or paper survey. The survey contains various questions regarding voting behavior, political preferences and socio-demographic characteristics of Swiss voters (Tresch et al., 2020; Lutz, 2015).

[14]Voters can vote twice for the same candidate and mix candidates form different parties and/or party lists.

[15]Please note that these questions have only been included since 2015.

[16]"Nachdem Sie die Liste verändert haben, waren am Ende...mehr Männer auf der Liste?...etwa gleich viele Männer wie Frauen auf der Liste?...mehr Frauen auf der Liste?"

[17]"Wenn Sie zwischen zwei gleich qualifizierten Kandierenden auswählen müssten, würden Sie eher...einen Mann...oder eine Frau wählen?"

[18]See table A9 in the Appendix for results from ordered logistic regression.

control for the gender composition of the lists in all models.

The first two models in Table 3 illustrate three main findings: first, of those who modified their lists, women became more likely to select female candidates in 2019. Second, among those who modified the lists, highly educated voters selected more women than those with lower education in 2019 (reference category: compulsory education or lower). In 2015 education was not important. Third, the share of those who were more likely to select women increases among all parties. We illustrate this result in figure 2.[19] More than 50% of the voters of the two left parties (SP and GPS) had more women on their ballot in 2019. The tendency to favor women increases among the right-wing voters as well, even though they are still more likely to vote for a majority of male candidates. We observe the smallest change among the SVP voters (see figure 2). All of this suggests that the act of modifying the ballot became more of an political act to increase women's representation in 2019 than it has been the case in 2015.

The last two columns in Table 3 report the findings of logistic regression models. The dependent variable "Choice between equally qualified candidates" is coded 1 if the voter selects a female candidate and 0 if she selects a male candidate or is undecided. Women are more likely to choose female candidates. Further, in both elections, higher education increases the tendency among voters to say they would choose the female candidate. Figure 3 shows the predicted probabilities to favor women. The changes between the two years are remarkably low in all parties except the Green Liberal Party. Again the largest differences are between the right-wing and the left voters. Compared to the more factual question "After you have amended the ballot list, were there more men or more women on the list?", the differences between the years are less pronounced if we look at the Swiss voters' preferences. These results support the findings we established in the first part: because there were more women on party lists in 2019 and they had better positions, more women were elected.

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[19]Please note that figure 2 and 3 are based on pooled models with interactions between year and party choice.

	List (2015)	List (2019)	Qualification (2015)	Qualification (2019)
Female	0.11***	0.26***	1.17***	1.16***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.07)
Age	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.03**
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age squared	0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education: vocational	0.12	−0.00	0.22	0.05
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Education: secondary	0.05	0.13	0.21	0.14
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Education: higher vocational	0.13	0.21*	0.39*	0.27
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.19)	(0.18)
Education: university	0.16	0.22*	0.57**	0.42*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Share of women on list	0.71***	0.85***	−0.01	0.47
	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.43)	(0.31)
FDP	0.11*	0.16**	0.36**	0.54***
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.13)
BDP	0.15	0.25	0.61*	0.65*
	(0.09)	(0.14)	(0.24)	(0.33)
CVP	0.10	0.18*	0.49**	0.58***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.18)	(0.15)
GLP	0.32***	0.43***	0.64**	1.25***
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.21)	(0.17)
SP	0.42***	0.56***	1.45***	1.40***
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.17)	(0.15)
GPS	0.54***	0.58***	1.53***	1.67***
	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.23)	(0.16)
Other	0.23**	0.30***	0.60***	1.03***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.16)	(0.15)
(Intercept)	−0.98***	−1.10***	−2.89***	−3.06***
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.45)	(0.38)
Canton FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.21	0.32		
Adj. R^2	0.19	0.30		
Log Likelihood			−2007.50	−2638.95
Deviance			4015.01	5277.91
Num. obs.	1403	1700	3383	4396

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

Table 3: More women on list after modification and choose female candidates if male/female have same qualifications (2015 and 2019, OLS and logit estimates)
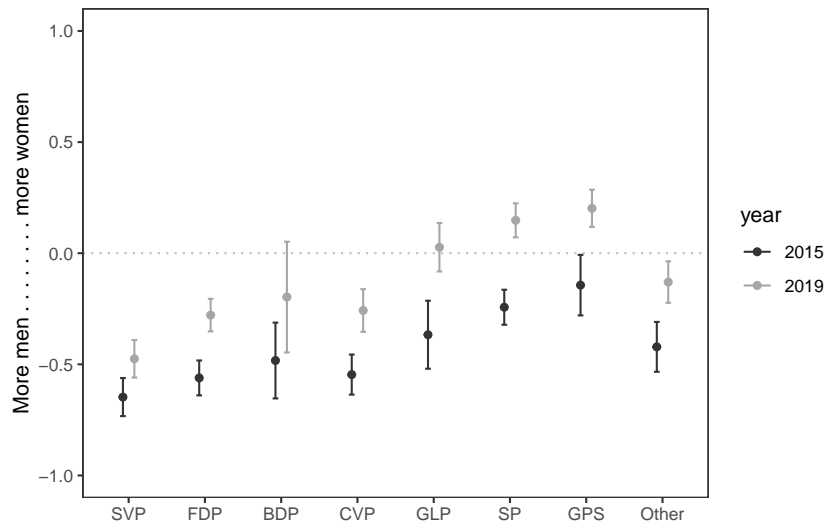
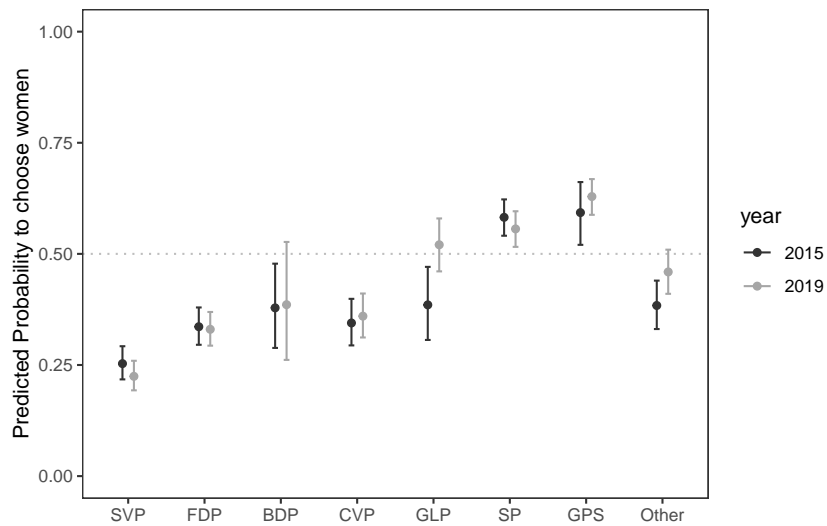Figure 2: More women or men on the list after modification?

Figure 3: Candidates with same qualifications: rather choose women

Conclusion

In this paper we looked at various factors influencing the rise of women's representation in the Swiss parliament. While it is difficult to draw a definite conclusion, our analyses show three major points at least. First, to arrive at a major surplus as we saw in the 2019 Swiss Elections, several favorable conditions need to accumulate. We saw that on the supply side women were more present on the lists, had better positions and also a slightly higher chance to get elected, at least in certain parties. Also, the shift towards Green parties in the parliament facilitated the increase as these parties feature more women on their lists and among the elected politicians. Finally, voters were also supportive of female candidates, probably more than ever before, the trend goes in the one direction only. Only the combination of these three factors made the massive increase in women elected (+ 20 compared to 2015) possible, leading to an all-time high share of 42% in the Swiss parliament. This finding has implications for the broader literature insofar as it shows that only an encompassing view, including several perspectives, allows us to understand this punctuated jumps in female representation while the literature still too often singles out one factor only. Second, having said this, it is still interesting to discuss the relative importance of the factors. While we cannot give precise estimates on how much one or the other factor contributed to the increase, we interpret the evidence as showing that supply side factors had a major influence. It cannot be repeated enough how strikingly strong the correlation between number of women on the party lists and number of women elected is. While we are unable to pin down the influence of the *Helvetia ruft!* campaign, certainly their emphasis on the list composition has shown crucial and the increase in female candidates in good list positions has significantly influenced the race whether it was due to their efforts or not. Last, while the issue of women's representation has for long been predominantly a topic of the left, this time it was different: Almost all parties have performed better than in 2015. The only exception is the CVP that did not place women in better list positions than in 2015 and the SVP whose voters remain rather sceptical of female candidates. In sum, this finding highlights the importance of approaching all parties and pushing for a general societal change of how female candidates are perceived.

What are the broader implications of our findings for the next elections? Given our conclusion that only the combination of different factors has allowed for the surge in female representation in the 2019 election, the prospects to see yet another of these drastic changes are rather slim at first sight. On the other hand, history has shown that female representation in parliaments has almost never decreased and incumbent candidates - in particular also women - have a rather high chance to get re-elected. Thus in sum, an incremental increase in women's share in the Swiss Parliament is most likely for the 2023

elections leaving Switzerland still among the front-runners in women's representation in Europe.

While quite comprehensive, our analysis has some blind spots. First, we did not consider intersectionality, that is, how gender interacts with other characteristics of candidates, such as ethnicity, in shaping political representation. Doing justice this issue would require additional theory and analyses that are beyond the scope of this article. However, we encourage researchers to address this question, for example by building on Portmann and Stojanović (2019, 2021), who show in the Swiss context that candidates with foreign names receive fewer votes. Second, we considered the role of ambition and the need for women to be asked before they decide to run as candidates in the context of the *Helvetia ruft!* campaign (discussed in detail in Appendix A.7), but should be studied more in depth. Doing so would not only require data that are currently not available but also, ideally, an experimental design (see Foos and Gilardi, 2020).

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A Online Appendix

A.1 Contextual information on the 2019 Swiss Elections

	Number of women elected in 2015	Perc. women elected in 2015	Number of women elected in 2019	Perc. women elected in 2019
SVP	11	16.9	13	24.53
Lega	1	50	0	0
FDP	7	21.2	10	34.48
BDP	1	1 14.3	1	33.33
CVP	9	33.3	7	28.00
EVP	2	100.0	2	66.67
GLP	3	42.9	8	50.00
SP	25		58.1 25	64.10
GPS	5	45.5	17	60.71
Pda/Sol.	0	0	1	100
TOTAL	64	32	84	42

Table A1: Gender composition of the 2015 and 2019 parliament (Nationalrat)

A.2 From party lists to election: Disaggregated results by party
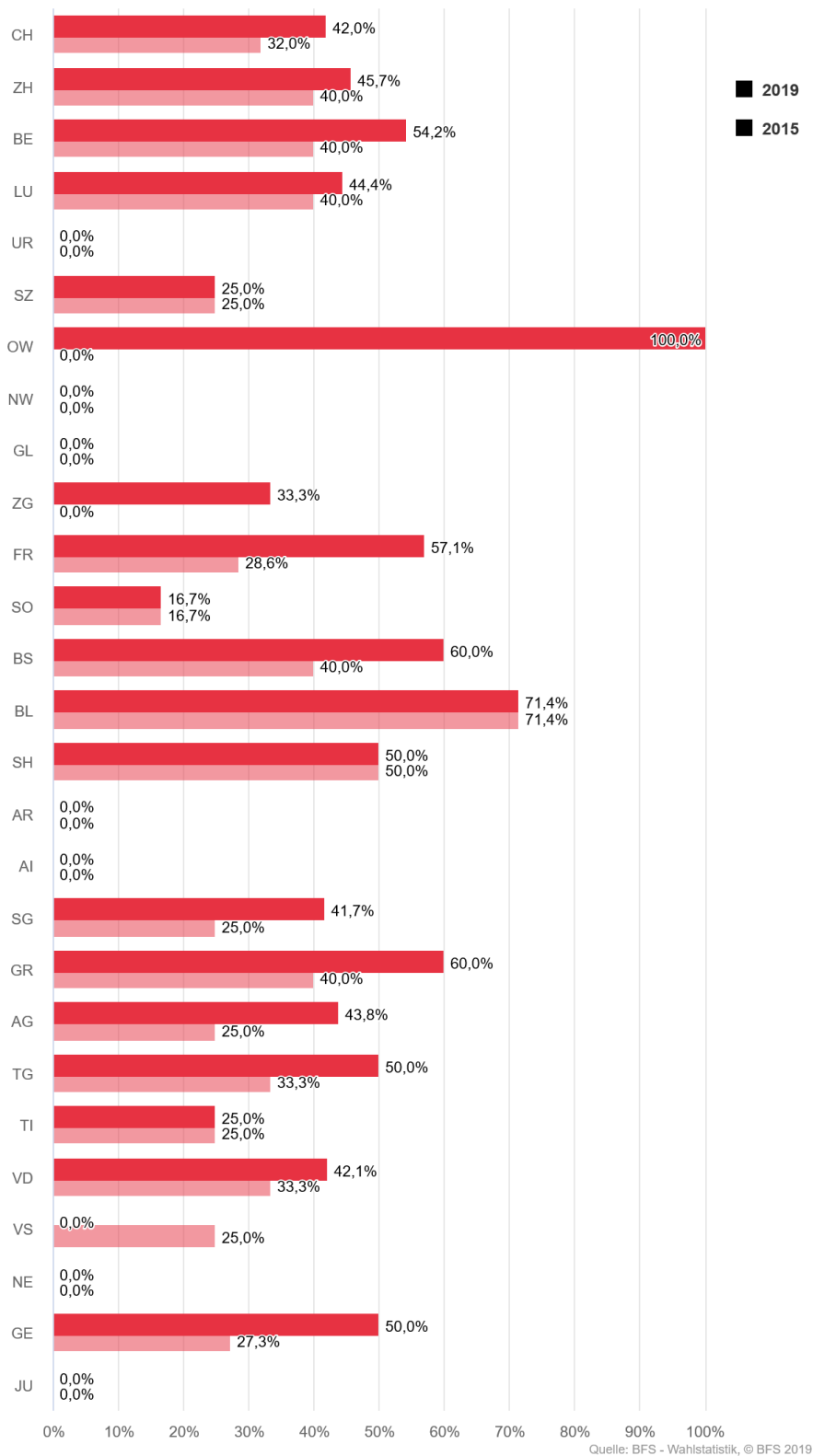
Figure A1: Share of women by cantons, source BFS
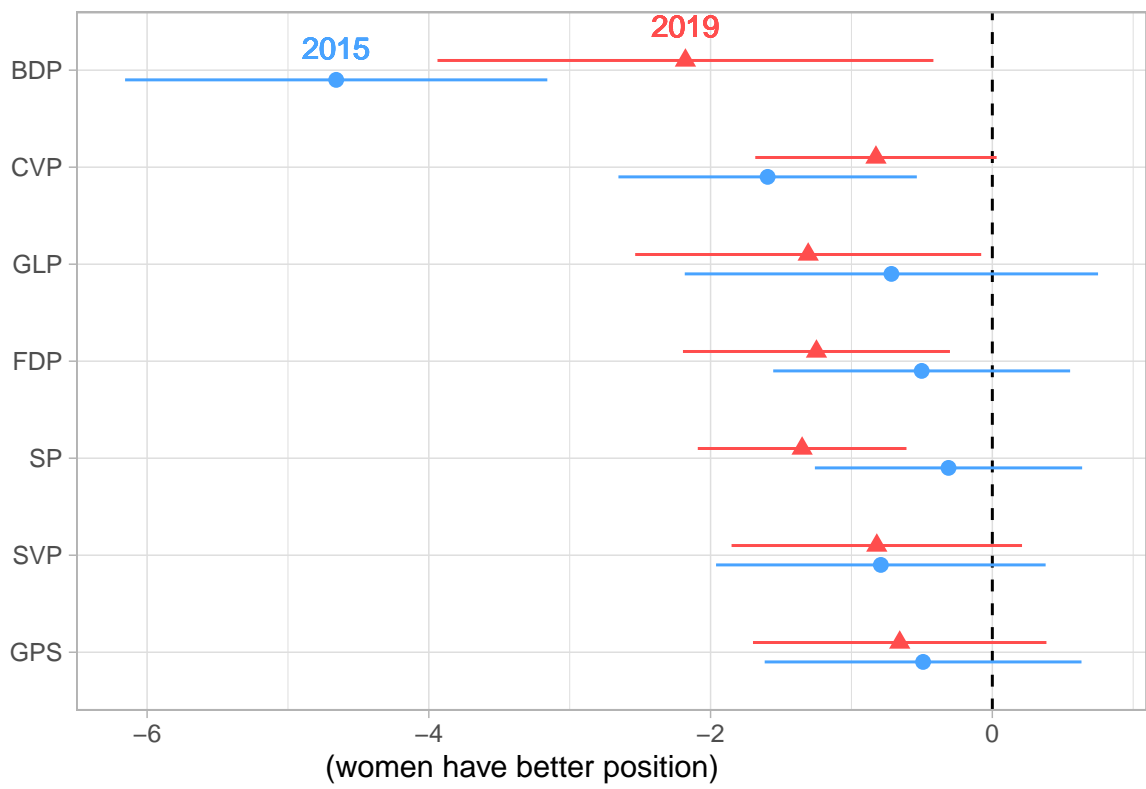
Figure A2: Position on party lists
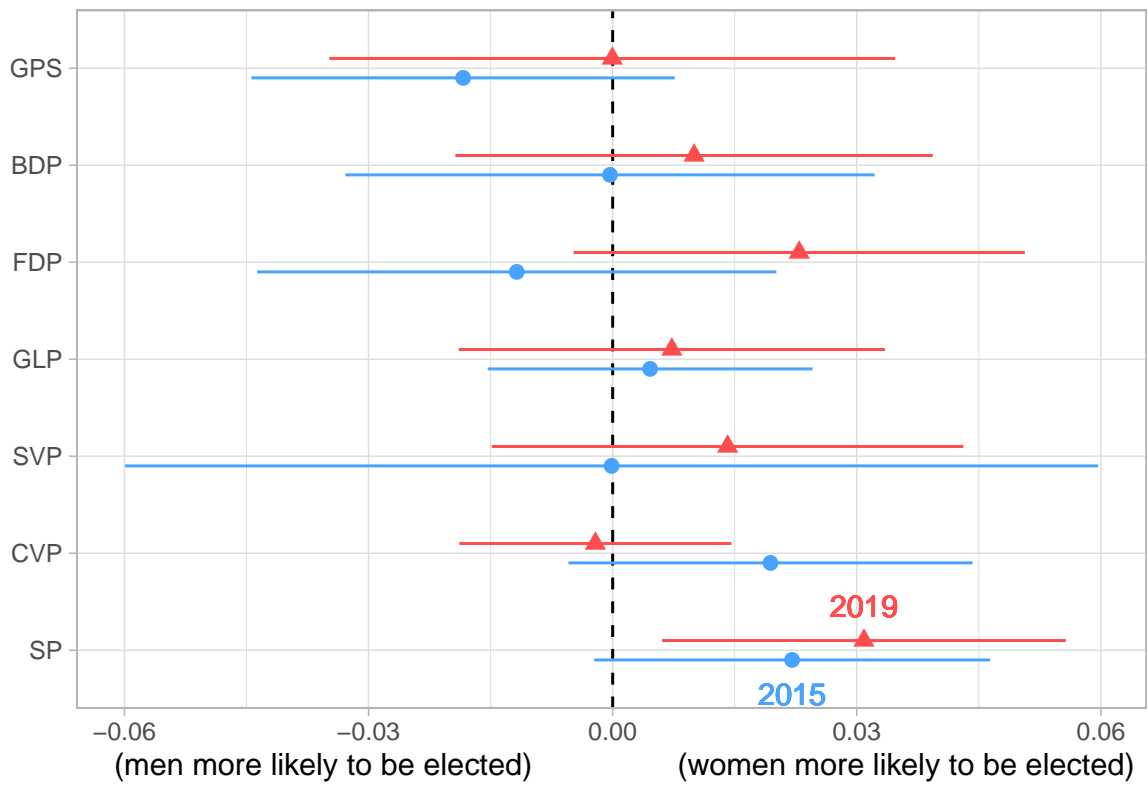
Figure A3: Election probability

A.3 Logistic regression models

	Position: Top 3 (2015)	Position: Top 3 (2019)	Elected (2015)	Elected (2019)
Woman	0.37***	0.34***	0.05	0.51*
	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.29)	(0.26)
Status: former (vs. incumbent)	−0.73	−1.58*	−1.04	−1.80*
	(0.71)	(0.63)	(0.88)	(0.83)
Status: new (vs. incumbent)	−3.16***	−3.06***	−5.39***	−5.49***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.37)	(0.36)
Age	−0.02	0.01	0.51***	0.47***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.09)	(0.08)
Age^2	0.00	−0.00	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
kandidat_nummer			−0.16***	−0.23***
			(0.04)	(0.04)
(Intercept)	2.14***	1.64***	−9.81***	−10.22***
	(0.47)	(0.44)	(2.05)	(1.91)
AIC	3178.82	3889.57	599.47	696.54
Log Likelihood	−1544.41	−1897.78	−253.73	−300.27
Num. obs.	3802	4664	3802	4664

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table A2: Logistic regression models

A.4 From party lists to election: Pooled results (2015 and 2019)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Woman	−0.40*	−0.24	−0.79***	−0.60**
	(0.18)	(0.27)	(0.13)	(0.20)
2019	0.04	0.15	0.22	0.34*
	(0.17)	(0.22)	(0.13)	(0.16)
2019 × Woman		−0.28		−0.32
		(0.36)		(0.26)
Status: former (vs. incumbent)			2.03	2.01
			(1.15)	(1.15)
Status: new (vs. incumbent)			6.53***	6.53***
			(0.33)	(0.33)
Age			−0.05	−0.05
			(0.02)	(0.02)
Age^2			0.00*	0.00*
			(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	8.78***	8.72***	2.48***	2.39***
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.71)	(0.71)
Canton FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.48	0.48
Num. obs.	8466	8466	8466	8466

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table A3: Dependent variable: Position on party list

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Woman	−0.00	−0.01	0.01*	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
2019	−0.01*	−0.01*	−0.00	−0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
2019 × Woman		0.01		0.02**
		(0.01)		(0.01)
Position on party list			−0.00***	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Status: former (vs. incumbent)			−0.47***	−0.47***
			(0.03)	(0.03)
Status: new (vs. incumbent)			−0.79***	−0.79***
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Age			0.01***	0.01***
			(0.00)	(0.00)
Age^2			−0.00***	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	0.05***	0.05***	0.69***	0.70***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Canton FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.00	0.00	0.60	0.60
Num. obs.	8466	8466	8466	8466

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table A4: Dependent variable: Elected

A.5 Determinants of voting for female candidates: Descriptives

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max
women on list after modification	1403	-0.52	0.65	-1.00	-1.00	1.00
female	1403	0.49	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
age	1403	57.78	17.01	59.00	24.00	102.00
education	1403	3.35	1.30	3.00	1.00	5.00
share women among candidates	1403	0.32	0.14	0.32	0.00	0.75

Table A5: 2015, Model 1 (List)

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max
same qualification: vote for woman	3383	0.40	0.49	0.00	0.00	1.00
female	3383	0.49	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
age	3383	57.12	17.82	58.00	24.00	102.00
education	3383	3.28	1.30	3.00	1.00	5.00
share women among candidates	3383	0.31	0.17	0.30	0.00	1.00

Table A6: 2015, Model 2 (Qualification)

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max
women on list after modification	1700	-0.05	0.74	0.00	-1.00	1.00
female	1700	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
age	1700	54.76	17.19	56.00	20.00	96.00
education	1700	3.61	1.29	4.00	1.00	5.00
share women among candidates	1700	0.40	0.15	0.44	0.00	1.00

Table A7: 2019, Model 1 (List)

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max
women on list after modification	4396	0.45	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
female	4396	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00
age	4396	54.86	17.37	56.00	20.00	101.00
education	4396	3.52	1.32	4.00	1.00	5.00
share women among candidates	4396	0.39	0.17	0.44	0.00	1.00

Table A8: 2019, Model 2 (Qualification)

A.6 Ordinal logit models

	2015	2019
Female	0.40***	0.82***
	(0.12)	(0.10)
Age	0.00	−0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education: vocational	0.42	0.00
	(0.30)	(0.28)
Education: secondary	0.14	0.44
	(0.32)	(0.29)
Education: higher vocational	0.46	0.72*
	(0.32)	(0.29)
Education: university	0.52	0.74**
	(0.31)	(0.28)
Share of women on list	3.06***	2.74***
	(0.79)	(0.58)
FDP	0.45*	0.55**
	(0.21)	(0.19)
BDP	0.62	0.78
	(0.34)	(0.44)
CVP	0.35	0.57*
	(0.27)	(0.23)
GLP	1.09***	1.34***
	(0.31)	(0.25)
SP	1.28***	1.75***
	(0.29)	(0.23)
GPS	1.62***	1.80***
	(0.35)	(0.26)
Other	0.79**	0.98***
	(0.27)	(0.24)
-1|0	2.26***	1.46***
	(0.47)	(0.41)
0|1	4.58***	4.04***
	(0.48)	(0.43)
AIC	2224.14	3086.49
BIC	2407.76	3309.46
Log Likelihood	−1077.07	−1502.24
Deviance	2154.14	3004.49
Num. obs.	1403	1700

***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$

Table A9: More women on list after modification, Ordered Logistic Models

A.7 The strategy of the *Helvetia ruft!* campaign in detail

The *Helvetia ruft!*[1] campaign was launched in September 2017 by National Councillor and co-president of Alliance F[2], Kathrin Bertschy and political entrepreneur Flavia Kleiner, former president of Operation Libero.[3]

The campaign is based on five different pillars[4]: a new narrative about female representation in Switzerland, a broad appeal strategy including all parties, competition between cantons and party lists, mentoring programs for female politicians, and picking up and implementing signs of the zeitgeist (e.g. the international debate on female representation, #MeToo, Woman's March).

A convincing and positive narrative that appeals to all women and is not based on leftist ideology

The unsatisfactory status quo of the poor representation of women in Swiss politics was the starting point for *Helvetia ruft!*. The campaign aims to improve the quality of democracy by increasing the number of women in politics. But its message was not meant to be accusatory, but to convey a positive outlook. Consequently, the campaign is not oriented towards a political ideology or gender politics per se, but simply point to the fact that women not being represented in politics according to their share in the population is, above all, a numeric problem. This narrative should also be conveyed by the chosen name *Helvetia ruft!* and is an important element of the campaign's message in order to get on board women who may be fundamentally averse to left politics. The narrative became also visible through the graphic implementation and the design of the campaign's logo.[5]

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[1]Helvetia is an allegorical female figure symbolizing Switzerland and the Swiss Confederation.

[2]Alliance F is the umbrella organisation of women's organisations in Switzerland.

[3]Operation Libero is a political movement in Switzerland, founded by members of the Foreign Policy Forum in October 2014. The movement was involved primarily in referendum campaigns fighting isolationist policies.

[4]The authors would like to thank the founders of *Helvetia ruft!* for their willingness to provide information about their strategy in detail (on Nov. 24, 2020 via zoom

[5]The logo shows the bust of a woman, Helvetia herself, with outstretched finger calling her comrades to come and join her in order to move the country forward. The colors are red and white, the Swiss

Since Switzerland is characterized by a consensus system, the integration of all parties is central in many areas of Swiss politics. The founders of *Helvetia ruft!* were aware of this fact and therefore, initially sought a female supporting person in each important party to build up the inner cercle of the campaign. These female politicians had to commit to the basic ideas of the campaign and to stand up for the campaign within their own party. It was important that they had a certain degree of public recognition, but also that they were respected and appreciated within their own party. All preliminary work to the campaign took place in spring and summer of 2018.

Putting the poor female representation on the agenda

The first major challenge for the campaigners was to get the message out. This was achieved through a public kick-off event in Berne, the capital of Switzerland, during the 2018 fall session of the Federal Parliament, one year before the national elections. The event was all about empowerment and seeking to inspire women for politics.

To make the event a success, it was necessary to attract media attention. As a first step, the campaigners created an address database of all active female politicians in the Swiss militia system. All officeholders at national, cantonal and, wherever possible, local level were contacted and introduced to the campaign's core message for the first time. With the same letter, they were invited to run for office and invited to the kick-off event. In parallel, a website was set up on which interested women could be nominated as candidates by friends, familiars and colleagues. These were then contacted by *Helvetia ruft!* and motivated to run for office. Donations for the election campaign could also be made via the website.

The campaign kick-off event, attended by several hundred guests, including many politicians, activists and journalists, was a resounding success. The national broadcasting company reported on it in all their news programs.[6] The event featured mainly

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national colours.

[6]https://www.srf.ch/play/tv/10vor10/video/helvetia-ruft?urn=urn:srf:video:a43f47a6-868f-409d-acaf-88880ec7b9ee

female speakers from outside politics. A dozen women in leadership positions known in Switzerland from various fields of activity gave a speech, including the first female Federal Councillor Switzerland has ever had. [7]

Competition and spotlight

The personal experiences of the many female politicians involved in the campaigning activities showed that, although female candidates are highly valued members in many party committees, often mainly men are placed on top list positions. *Helvetia ruft!* wanted to change this fact by putting pressure on parties to increase the share of female candidates in leading list positions.

After the kick-off event, *Helvetia ruft!* contacted the board members of all cantonal parties in Switzerland in order to invite them to nominate as many women as possible. *Helvetia ruft!* explained to them the importance of placing women on leading list positions and, to some extent, put pressure on party board members. The goal was to create a kind of competition between parties, especially between the cantonal branches of the same parties, and to force them to make a real effort.

In late Summer of 2019, the official candidates list of every party running in every canton was published. In absolute terms, the proportion of women on the electoral lists increased in Switzerland from 34 percent in the 2015 election to around 40 percent in 2019. However, there were major differences between parties. Based on the composition of the lists and the number of female candidates on top list positions, *Helvetia ruft!* asked an external expert to calculate the individual election probabilities of each candidate. Based on these calculations, *Helvetia ruft!* rated the different cantonal parties' efforts in nominating women. The better the election probabilities of female candidates on a list, the better the party's standing in the rating. *Helvetia ruft!* classified the cantonal parties into four different categories [8] and made this rating public. The strategy was to create a

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[7]In their speeches, the women shared their work and life experiences, and emphasized that politics sets the framework. And that it is therefore so important that many women have a say in the political decision-making processes in order to shape precisely these framework conditions.

[8]The four categories were *role models*, *willing to learn*, *unsensitive*, and *male bastions*

competitive situation between cantonal parties. Especially among the cantonal sections of the SVP and the CVP, lists dominated by men were submitted in majority, while SP, Greens and GLP submitted mainly balanced lists.

Support and motivation

Once nominated, *Helvetia ruft!* offered the female candidates consistent support and training during election campaign. This was particularly in the areas of media relations, rhetoric and podium participation skills, general appearance as public person as well as social media presence. *Helvetia ruft!* was able to draw on many experts who supported the campaign and offered their services free of charge.