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*Themed Section: New Perspectives on Gender and Political Mobilization*

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Gender, politics, and the market: evidence from Finland

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We extend work on political consumerism by examining pre-behavioral stages and including people who have not yet engaged in a politically motivated boycott (opposition) or buycott (support). We analyze the effect of gender on both attitudes and behavior using data from four Finnish National Election Studies (covering 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019). Finland constitutes a rigorous test of the gender gap hypothesis: Scandinavia generally exhibits high rates of political consumerism and gender equality; combined, these conditions make a gender gap in Finland highly unlikely. Our data reveal the opposite, however. In gender-equal Finland, gender is a key predictor of political consumerism, both as attitudes toward future action and as past behavior. Moreover, attitudes toward both variants (buycott/boycott) are systematically gendered: among those who have never practiced political consumerism, men are systematically less likely and women are more likely to view the market as a channel of political expression.

**Keywords** political consumerism • gender gap • boycotting and buycotting • socialization theory • women's political engagement • political attitudes and behavior

**Key messages**

- Although there is no gender gap in voter turnout, Finnish women consistently engage more than men in political consumerism, including boycotts and buycotts.
- The gender gap in political consumerism is both behavioral and attitudinal, and it persists across groups, including singles and those with lower education levels.
- Socialization, rather than life situation, shapes gender differences in political consumerism.
- Women's market-based political engagement in complex, globalized markets challenges stereotypes of political incompetence.

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## Introduction

Although many "established" democracies have seen citizens lose interest in formal politics (for example, political party membership and voting), research reveals a rise in other forms of political participation (for example, lifestyle politics) (Bennett, 1998; Zhang, 2022). This article focuses on an increasingly popular form of political engagement outside formal, institutional channels, that is, political consumption, where individuals express political preferences through consumer choices (Micheletti et al, 2004; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). In contemporary globalized markets, citizens can engage in market-based politics and make political decisions using their money (Lorenzini, 2019). Unlike traditional forms of political participation associated with citizenship laws, which are confined to territorial boundaries, consumer-related rules have become increasingly transnational (Durovic, 2020; Izaguerri, 2020). Against this backdrop, existing research on political consumerism has highlighted significant gender differences, with women typically engaging more than men (Stolle et al, 2005; Gundelach and Kalte, 2021). This finding stands in stark contrast to gender patterns in other forms of political participation, where women generally participate less than men (Norris, 2002; Burns, 2007; Gallego, 2007; Paxton et al, 2007). Given these discrepancies, we are interested in exploring not only if women are more likely than men to engage in buycotting and/or boycotting but also if gender differences extend to attitudes towards these practices.

In this article, we ask: does gender impact political consumerism as an act (past behavior), or can we speak of a gendered predisposition toward this specific type of political participation? To what extent are women more likely than men to boycott and/or buycott products? Do men, who have not engaged in political consumerism, hold more negative attitudes toward engagement in buycotts/boycotts compared to women? Seeking answers to these questions, we inquire about whether gender differences concern the entire spectrum of political consumerism: boycott (opposition) and buycott (support). We derive hypotheses about gender and political consumerism from situational and socialization models, whereby we also consider structural factors for political participation (see Gundelach and Kalte, 2021). Moreover, we distinguish between attitudes and behavior. This distinction allows us to empirically explore different theoretical scenarios.

We tackle these questions with a study of gender and political consumerism in Finland, a most-likely case for political consumerism and a least-likely case for a gender gap in political consumerism. Finland was the first country in the world to extend the right to vote and stand for elections to all women and men in 1906. According to European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) 2023 data, Finland (along with other Nordic countries) features among the most gender-equal countries of the European Union (EU). Where household chores are less gendered, men and women have equal opportunities to engage in politically motivated consumer choices, which should not differ between men and women. Given the general lack of gender differences in institutional political participation (for example, turnout[1]), the likelihood of observing gendered differences in the non-institutional mode is correspondingly low. The high overall rates of political consumerism in Finland, where one out of two citizens consumes with a political motivation (Ferrer-Fons and Fraile, 2013), are likely to dampen a potential effect of gender on consumer choices. Since a large part of citizens are expected to engage in it, the likelihood of

the gender gap is low. In sum, we select a country case where we expect to find high levels of political consumerism but no detectable gender gap.

We test our hypotheses using data collected by four Finnish National Election Studies (FNESs) conducted in 2007 (Paloheimo, 2008), 2011 (Borg and Grönlund, 2012), 2015 (Grönlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2016), and 2019 (Grönlund and Borg, 2020). Unlike most surveys, the FNESs include items of sufficient detail to allow a rigorous test of the gender gap in political consumerism. Early research faced limitations regarding the operationalization and measurement of the concepts. On the one hand, fine-grained survey data that include both types of measures—attitudes toward political consumerism and self-reported political consumer behavior—have been lacking. On the other hand, surveys typically include questions about whether someone has either buycotted or boycotted products (see, for example, Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Lorenzini and Bassoli, 2015). Yet, boycotts and buycotts are not identical activities, and the motives for these behaviors may be different (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al, 2004; Stolle et al, 2005; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Not only do the longitudinal FNES data allow for distinguishing between boycotts and buycotts, but they also enable us to measure the effect of gender on both behavioral and attitudinal prospective political consumerism. Our empirical analysis portrays gender as a key predictor for political consumerism in gender-equal Finland; crucially, gender predicts political consumerism as both actual (past) behavior and a predisposition for future action.

In what follows, we begin by introducing the broader debate about gendered patterns of political participation and then focus on gender differences to derive specific hypotheses about men's and women's likelihood of considering/actually engaging in this behavior. We then elaborate on our methodology as well as the data we use to operationalize and measure our concepts and test our hypotheses. We continue with the presentation of our results and conclude by reflecting on the implications of our findings and a discussion of avenues for further research.

## Gendered patterns in political participation

Citizens' engagement in politics is important because it conveys messages to policymakers: only the demands of active participants are likely to be heard (Burns et al, 1997; Verba et al, 1997). Political participation encompasses a diverse range of activities, constituting a multifaceted phenomenon. While scholars may differ in their definitions of political participation, there is a consensus that any action citizens undertake to influence politics can be classified as such (Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Van Deth, 2014; Talò and Mannarini, 2015). Although voting in elections stands out as the most obvious form of political participation, it is by no means the sole method citizens employ to exert their influence on politics. Within the realm of institutional politics, there are various avenues available to citizens. For instance, individuals can support a political party by making financial contributions or attempt to influence political representatives between elections by engaging in direct communication with them (Van Deth, 2014).

For decades, scholars have examined the existence of a gender gap in political participation, recognizing that if women participate less than men, their interests are less likely to be represented in political decision making (Dingler et al, 2019). Numerous studies have shown that women participate at lower rates than men in

certain institutional political activities, such as membership in political associations (Norris, 2002; Burns, 2007; Gallego, 2007; Paxton et al, 2007; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Additionally, a significant body of research has explored the gender gap in voting. Early studies consistently found that women were less likely than men to vote (see, for example, Almond and Verba, 1963; Verba and Nie, 1972; Engeli et al, 2006; Desposato and Norrander, 2009; Stadelmann-Steffen and Koller, 2014; Córdova and Rangel, 2017). However, more recent studies have challenged this notion, either showing no gender gap (Harell, 2009; Alexander and Coffé, 2018) or even a reversed one (see, for example, Burrell, 2005; Beauregard, 2018; Carreras, 2018). The most recent research by Dassonneville and Kostelka (2021) and Coffé and Lago (2020) further highlights the complexity and context dependency of the traditional gender gap, suggesting that the gap may vary based on the type of election, the salient issues, and the prevailing gender norms in a given political context. Moreover, Stockemer and Sundström (2023) caution that survey data on voting may not accurately reflect the turnout gap, as men are more likely than women to overreport their participation.

One dominant explanation for why women might be less politically active revolves around the availability of resources. Scholars like Brady et al (1995) and Verba et al (1978) argue that resources are vital for political participation, influencing an individual's capacity to engage in political activities. Beyond financial resources, civic skills and time are crucial assets for political engagement (Campbell, 2002; Wattenberg, 2002; Lassen, 2005). Compared to men, women often face significant time constraints, especially after becoming mothers. Many women must balance work and family responsibilities, leading to a "second shift" that leaves little time for political involvement (Hochschild, 2003; Hochschild and Machung, 2012). Although most women are employed outside the home, they still bear a disproportionate share of housework and caregiving duties, making time a scarce resource for political participation that requires significant commitments, such as working for a political party. Research indicates that marriage and parenthood negatively affect women's participation in institutional politics (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Bellettini et al, 2023), a pattern not observed among men.

However, resource availability is not the sole factor influencing political participation. Political ideology also plays a significant role in shaping participation patterns. Left-leaning individuals, who value inclusivity and challenge authority, are more likely to engage in elite-challenging forms of participation, while right-leaning individuals, who prioritize hierarchy and tradition, tend to prefer conventional, representational modes of engagement (Bernhagen and Marsh, 2007; Van der Meer et al, 2009; Torcal et al, 2016; Kostelka and Rovny, 2019). Furthermore, attitudes toward the political system, such as perceptions of corruption or electoral fairness, impact participation, often reducing it when distrust is high (Birch, 2010; Hooghe and Quintelier, 2014).

In this vein, the institutional political arena, which is traditionally dominated by men, may be perceived as women-unfriendly; in fear of obstacles like gender discrimination, women may opt for staying outside these political spaces. Furthermore, women's more limited presence in "traditional" forms of political participation may be due to their socialization, whereby they are encouraged to a lesser extent than men to aspire to leadership roles and to become public authorities (Wolak, 2020; 2022). This raises the question: might women prefer alternative, less conventional

forms of political participation that align more closely with their political attitudes, socialization patterns, and available resources?

The landscape of political participation is indeed evolving. As engagement in institutional forms of participation declines, there is a growing trend toward political activities conducted outside the traditional representational system (Norris, 2002; Wattenberg, 2002; Dalton, 2008; Li and Marsh, 2008). Regarding protest participation, studies offer diverse findings on whether men are more likely than women to engage in confrontational activities. Early quantitative studies suggested that men were more likely to protest (see, for example, Almond and Verba, 1963; Jennings and Niemi, 1974), while later research (Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Schussman and Soule, 2005) indicated that this gender gap was closing. However, more recent studies present conflicting evidence. For instance, Dodson (2015) confirms earlier findings, showing that men are more likely to engage in confrontational activism, whereas newer evidence on youth political participation (Grasso and Smith, 2022) challenges this notion by suggesting that gender differences in confrontational protest are minimal or absent. Despite these conflicting results regarding protest participation, there is a consistent finding that women outperform men in another increasingly politicized arena: the market. Both Grasso and Smith (2022) and Dodson (2015) find that women are significantly more active in non-confrontational forms of political protest, such as consumer boycotts and buycotts.

## Gender, politics, and the market

Economic globalization and the liberalization of markets have brought a wide and diverse range of choices to consumers; products vary not only in terms of quality and price but also in their manufacturers' degrees of respect for labor, human, animal, and environmental rights (different countries, different regulations). With markets not being regulated by governments, the responsibility for the punishment/reward of companies' behavior is left more in the hands of citizens. Political consumerists perceive private interests pursued by private actors in the market as connected to (rather than separated from) public interests pursued through political means (Micheletti et al, 2004).

"Political consumerism" constitutes the "use of the market as an arena for politics" to influence institutional or market practices found to be ethically, environmentally, or politically worthy of support or opposition (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 39). Political consumerism refers to using consumption to protest against objectionable policies, such as the neglect of children's rights or environmental protection, and as a way to reward desirable policies, such as fair-trade practices (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti et al, 2004; Stolle et al, 2005). Individuals employ this behavior to advocate specific policy goals. Nowadays, a prevalent motivation for political consumerism is the desire to adjust one's consumption patterns to be more environmentally sustainable, though this is not the sole reason. Various political and social issues, such as child labor or the outsourcing of jobs to low-wage countries, can instigate political consumerism.

Political consumerism is not a singular activity but comprises at least joining a consumer boycott and considering social and political factors in one's consumer choices, that is, purchasing products based on these considerations. Market-based politics encompasses diverse activities, including purposeful buying (politically motivated product choices) and participating in consumer boycotts (the politically

motivated rejection of products). Hence, there are two main pathways as to how the arena of the market can be used to express political preferences: buycott and boycott. Despite the astonishing popularity of both boycotting and buycotting, little research has been conducted so far on political consumerism (for exceptions, see Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Marien et al, 2010; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Gundelach and Kalte, 2021).

Although many studies have been devoted to female participation rates in representational modes of political participation like voting, party membership, and donating money to a political organization (Norris, 2002; Fox and Lawless, 2004; Burns, 2007; Gallego, 2007; Paxton et al, 2007), our knowledge about the potential gender gap in political consumerism stems from few studies (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Marien et al, 2010; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Gundelach and Kalte, 2021). This research has taken up the topic of gender and extra-representational political engagement and examined it quantitatively on a representative sample of the population. This work studies acts like signing petitions, demonstrating, and boycotting. The most consistent finding is that the gender gap is reversed: Stolle and Hooghe (2011), examining various forms of political engagement from 1974 to 2002, discovered that while men had higher rates of boycotts in 1974, the situation had reversed by 2002. Similarly, the findings of Marien et al (2010) align with this trend, indicating an overrepresentation of women among political consumers. Even though Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010) did not conduct fine-grained analyses of political consumerism, their results are largely consistent with the aforementioned studies. They suggest that women tend to prefer "private activism," which includes political consumerism. Some suggest this type of activism aligns well with society's traditional expectations for women's behavior, not men's (Lovenduski, 2005; Norris et al, 2005; Stolle et al, 2005; Fridkin and Kenney, 2007). In addition, this activity may be perceived as a relatively safe and socially acceptable way for girls and women to participate in the public sphere, an experience they may find liberating (Micheletti et al, 2004; Stolle et al, 2005).

In sum, several studies show that when it comes to using the market as a political outlet, the gender gap in political participation is reversed: male citizens perform this type of political engagement in significantly lower numbers than their female counterparts (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010; Marien et al, 2010; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Gundelach and Kalte, 2021). However, the puzzle regarding why men do not engage in political consumerism as a means for expressing political stances remains unresolved. In what follows, we explore the differential implications of prevalent theories (for a discussion, see Gundelach and Kalte, 2021) for political consumerism.

### *Situations versus socialization: research hypotheses about gender gaps in political consumerism*

The situational model suggests that gendered differences in political consumerism reflect the different situations in which men and women are placed, which offer them different opportunities to make politically motivated consumer choices. According to this theory, men and women in identical life and family situations are equally likely to engage in this kind of activity (that is, no gendered predisposition toward political consumerism), yet men find themselves less frequently in life situations where opportunities to engage in political consumerism are present. International research

on consumer behavior points to an increasing presence of men in food shopping since the 1980s (Davis and Bell, 1991; Polegato and Zaichkowsky, 1994; Mortimer and Clarke, 2011). However, other works emphasize the persistence of gendered patterns: in the US, women are on average more likely to be the ones doing the food shopping for their family (Brommer and Lombardo, 2022); in Belgium, while the collection of online grocery shopping is equally divided, the ordering is mainly a woman's task (Van Droogenbroeck and Van Hove, 2020).

If women are more involved in care, including buying everyday necessities for their families, they get more chances to make politically motivated consumer choices compared to men (Micheletti, 2003; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010). The situational model explains gender differences in behavior as situational or context dependent rather than connected to deeply entrenched mindsets. In other words, the gender gap is assumed to be mainly behavioral, not necessarily attitudinal. Rather than stemming from a predisposition (men's negative and women's positive attitudes toward political consumerism), the phenomenon of women's overperformance and men's underperformance is a reflection of men's and women's behavioral responses to coping with the life situations they are in. In this reading, the gender gap is inevitably linked to situations of the gendered distribution of paid work and (unpaid) domestic work (care and household chores, including shopping, cooking, feeding, and so on); where this division is not gendered, men and women should manifest equal likelihood to engage in political consumerism.

If political consumerism is the result of life situations, then it is malleable to change if the situation changes. If men's lower engagement in political consumerism (compared to women's) is not deeply rooted, then it can be easily altered, provided that men are given equal opportunities to engage in grocery or children's clothes shopping and so on. Especially in highly gender-equal contexts like Nordic/Scandinavian countries, where childcare and domestic chores are more evenly distributed between men and women[2] (according to the European Institute for Gender Equality[3]), attitudes toward political consumerism should not vary along gender lines. This is especially relevant for individuals in similar living situations, such as singles without children, where there is no option to delegate tasks, thereby potentially providing equal opportunities for political consumption regardless of gender. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1a: There is a gender gap in self-reported political consumption behavior, with men being less likely to engage in such behavior compared to women.

H1b: There is no significant gender gap in attitudes toward political consumption.

H1c: There is no gender gap in self-reported political consumption behavior among single men and women.

In contrast, the socialization model implies much deeper gendered divisions in market politics than the situational explanation would suggest. This model explains not only behavioral but also attitudinal differences: men and women not only behave differently but also have different attitudes toward this behavior, and men's higher and women's lower tendency to hold dismissive attitudes toward political consumerism stems from early childhood socialization. This means that even if life situations change, predispositions may prove stickier. This theory posits a very strong association between gender roles and the specific types of political engagement

one finds appealing. Building upon this theory, gender differences are due not to gaps in situational or context-dependent opportunities but to men's and women's distinct socializations, whereby women are expected to be active in the private sphere, that is, engaging in chores like shopping. Research emphasizes women's and men's socialization outside politics (Wolak, 2022), while men and women are also socialized into gendered politics (the perception that institutional politics is a men's arena). These are two sides of the same coin: since the origins of democracy, men's activity in public spaces has been cherished as much as women's activity in private spaces; and men's domain was the public space, while women's domain was the household and the family. This gender segregation of public (public forums and decision making) and private spheres (private households and caregiving duties) has been sustained for centuries. Men have dominated political institutions and public spaces for the largest part of the history of humanity (for example, for centuries, parliaments were all-male). According to Arendt (1958), this was important for the (self-)perception and development of women as political beings, as the public sphere is also the place where one takes risks, seeks justice, and so on. In her work, Arendt (1958) makes it clear that a healthy public life presupposes that we perceive ourselves as public actors—which, due to the separation of spheres, women for a long time could not do.

Traditional gender norms cherish the presence and activity of men in the public sphere (political decisions and work), as well as the presence and activity of women in the private sphere (care and household activities). The feminist claim that the "personal is political" is interesting in the context of political consumerism and the recognition of this economic behavior as a form of political participation. Political consumerism seems to be an activity that does not challenge the gender norm of women's private roles. This activity offers the opportunity to be active in the sphere that society expects from women (not from men) while engaging in politics at the same time (through private activities). In this reading, men are socialized into perceiving the informal path of political influence (the market) as less attractive compared to the formal, institutionalized channels for expressing political preferences, which men have historically dominated. This is because contrary to other avenues of political influence that concern public spaces (for example, protest) and/or formal political institutions (voting and party membership), political consumerism concerns private activities, which are typically associated with women's social roles. Based on the model of gendered socialization, men will have a higher likelihood of outward rejection of consumerism as a method of political action. This theory predicts gender differences in both attitudes and behavior.

If the reversed gender gap in political consumerism emerges due to profound differences and gendered perceptions about the appropriate mode of political participation for men and women, then we expect distinct gender-based attitudes toward potential future political consumption. If men perceive the politics of the supermarket as "unsuitable" (for men), then among those who have not engaged in this behavior before, men should be more likely to dismiss it as a potential future act of political influence. In this scenario, pronounced differences should be observable among not-yet-political consumers. It follows that when studying people's attitudes toward political consumerism, among those who have not engaged in it, we should observe the following: on the one hand, men should be more inclined to reject this form of political behavior; on the other hand, women should be significantly

more open to considering political consumerism in the future. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H2a: There is a gender gap in self-reported political consumption behavior, with men being less likely to engage in such behavior compared to women.
H2b: There is a gender gap in attitudes toward political consumption, with men being less likely to hold positive attitudes compared to women.
H2c: There is a gender gap in self-reported political consumption behavior among single men and women, with men being less likely to engage in such behavior compared to women.

### *Structural barriers to participation: is political consumerism a tool for the "happy few"?*

Economic globalization and liberalization since the 1970s have radically changed the market as an important space of human activity, where transactions, exchanges, and choices are made. In the era of globalized capitalism, it is unsure whether it is politics shaping markets or the other way around. Digitalization and globalization may have rendered consumption easier, but they have also blurred the connections between consumer choices and socioeconomic and/or ecological outcomes. Understanding the connection between contemporary markets and politics is not easy. Education is a resource that increases the capacity to understand the complex relationships between politics and markets, as well as one's positioning in this context.

Education is an established determinant of political participation (but for a critical discussion, see Persson, 2015). Lower participation rates among individuals with lower levels of education are a well-established finding in participation research. Higher-educated citizens participate to a greater extent because they possess a better understanding of political processes and recognize the importance of active engagement in a democracy. Previous research pointed to inequalities observed in institutional modes of political engagement, which may extend to political consumerism. Previous work indicates that educational inequality exists not only in institutional modes of participation but also in non-institutionalized forms, such as political consumerism. Marien et al (2010) and Stolle and Hooghe (2011) have found that educational inequality is even more pronounced in political activities outside representative systems, as they require more cognitive skills and material resources than institutionalized forms.

Education is relevant in many ways for political consumerism. First, since the link between consumer choices and political outcomes is complex, it is easier for people with higher levels of education to understand how they can use their money to make political choices compared to those with lower levels. Engaging in political consumerism demands awareness of different company names, labeling schemes, and underlying issues related to specific products. Hence, people with higher education should be more inclined than those with lower education to consume politically (Micheletti, 2003; Gundelach and Kalte, 2021; Hooghe and Goubin, 2022); with education, citizens can appreciate the socioeconomic and ecological consequences of their market choices. Indeed, in their recent meta-analysis of existing literature,

Copeland and Boulianne (2020) reveal that political consumers tend to be middle-aged, well-educated, politically interested individuals; they are also distinguished by a skeptical attitude toward traditional institutions, strong (left-wing) ideological leanings and organizational ties, and a higher tendency to use digital media.

Second, education matters for one's life chances and thus shapes life situations; it affects one's income, which, in turn, affects one's capacity to consume in general and politically in particular. Many of these products are expensive and may be unaffordable for individuals with limited education and corresponding incomes. In this reading, political consumerism could be a weapon of the "happy few". It follows that women with higher levels of education should thus be the most likely to engage in political consumerism because they have the capacity to do so, in terms of budget and cognition. Through its effect on income, education affects the capacity to engage in such activity; through its effect on knowledge/information processing, it affects the perception of political consumerism as a worthwhile/effective activity, as educated citizens understand why and how market behavior may affect politics and policies (compared to those with lower levels). Research has found that a reluctance to boycott is underpinned by a lack of faith in the effectiveness of such actions (Caputa, 2024).

If political consumerism is the product of a sophisticated approach to exerting political influence (among others, through consumption), it is less likely to be found at lower levels of education of both men and women. Education provides both women and men with skills that boost their political engagement, including political consumerism, which requires knowledge of the interconnections between the individual, society, and economy. If this resource is lacking, neither men nor women will be able to seize the market as an outlet for political influence. In other words, we should find no gender differences among lower-educated individuals, as in this group, women as well as men are likely to lack the necessary means to engage in political consumption. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: There is no gender gap in self-reported political consumption behavior among lower-educated men and women.

## Research design

*Data and variables*

To put our hypotheses to empirical scrutiny, we make use of individual-level survey data provided by four different waves of the FNES. The survey is fielded before every national election in Finland and draws on a sample representative of the Finnish population. Since 2007, the questionnaire has included detailed questions about political consumerism, differentiating between different forms (buycotting versus boycotting). For this article, we draw on data from the 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 FNESs. Each wave represents a sample of the voting population in Finland at the time. However, the same respondents are not surveyed in every wave, so it is not a panel study. We pool observations from the different waves into one sample but include fixed effects in all our analyses in order to control for potential time-specific effects unique to data from a certain wave.

Given the significant increase in political consumption over the past few decades, we recognize the substantial value in drawing on data from all four waves. This comprehensive approach allows us to examine whether a gender gap can be observed throughout the entire period. Additionally, the detailed distinction between boycotting and buycotting enables us to investigate whether gender differences persist across the full spectrum of political consumerism. This inquiry is particularly important, as several studies (for example, Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Hoffmann et al, 2018; Zorell, 2019; Kam and Deichert, 2020) suggest that the profiles of consumers engaged in buycotting versus boycotting are not identical. In fact, in some cases, the predictors for these two types of activities appear to differ.

The specific wording of the questions regarding consumerism in the FNESs is particularly valuable, as it allows us to examine which of the two proposed theoretical models—situational or socialization—finds greater empirical support. A key distinction between these models lies in their explanation of gender differences in political consumption. The situational model posits that these differences arise primarily from the varying circumstances to which men and women are exposed. In contrast, the socialization model argues that such differences are deeply ingrained through early socialization, thereby influencing distinct attitudes toward political participation in consumerism (H1b versus H2b).

Therefore, having detailed information on how individuals, even those who have not engaged in political consumption, perceive this form of political behavior is key. Not-yet-political consumers may differ in their attitudes toward political consumerism from those who actually engage in it. While some outright reject this mode of political participation, others might consider it in the future. While most studies lack such detailed information, the FNES asks about predispositions for using these tools for political participation in addition to past behavior. Table 1 provides an overview of how we utilize the survey questions on buycotts and boycotts to measure actual engagement in political consumerism in the past (H1a, H2a, and H3) and attitudes toward doing it in the future (H1b and H2b). This will help examine whether both types of political consumerism (buycotting and boycotting) are gendered and thus offer a more nuanced picture of the phenomenon.

As the influence of gender on political consumerism is the focus of our study, gender is the central independent variable of interest. It is dichotomous in the FNES; we code 0 for female respondents and 1 for male ones. Besides gender, we test the effect of additional socio-demographics (education, age, marital status, and children), as well as political variables (political interest, left–right self-placement, participation in last parliamentary elections, and attitudes toward the EU), which previous research has highlighted as driving factors of political consumerism. For a detailed overview of how we operationalize each control variable please, see Online Appendix 1. Online Appendix 2 provides a detailed description of the descriptive statistics for all control variables. The sample is well balanced in terms of respondents' educational levels, with 50.8 percent having no higher education and 49.2 percent possessing higher education. However, there is a noticeable overrepresentation of politically interested individuals within the sample, with 69.47 percent indicating that they are "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in politics.

**Table 1:** Measuring engagement in and predisposition toward political consumerism: operationalizing the dependent variable using the 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019 FNESs

| Variable | Operationalization |
|---|---|
| Buycott (act in the past)<br>DV in H1a, H2a, and H3 | Have you done during the past four years any of the following?…<br>• Try to influence political or social issues through my consumer choices.<br>Have not done over the past four years = 0<br>Have done over the past four years = 1 |
| Boycott (Act in the past)<br>DV in H1a, H2a, and H3 | Have you done during the past four years any of the following?…<br>• Join a consumer boycott.<br>Have not done over the past four years = 0<br>Have done over the past four years = 1 |
| Buycott (Positive predisposition)<br>DV in H1b and H2b | If you felt an issue was important, which of these might you do?…<br>• Try to influence political or social issues through my consumer choices.<br>Have not done but might do = 1<br>Would not do under any circumstances = 0 |
| Boycott (positive predisposition)<br>DV in H1b and H2b | If you felt an issue was important, which of these might you do?…<br>• Join a consumer boycott.<br>Have not done but might do = 1<br>Would not do under any circumstances = 0 |

*Note*: DV = dependent variable.

### *Descriptive frequencies*

Online Appendix 3 presents a concise overview of the frequency with which respondents in our sample have engaged in political consumerism in the past. The descriptive statistics indicate that although political consumerism appears to be an attractive avenue for expressing political views, a substantial majority of Finnish citizens do not actively embrace the opportunity to wield the market as a political platform: about 40.78 percent of the respondents have endeavored to influence political or social matters through their consumer choices (buycott) over the past four years; consequently, more than half of the participants have not deliberately selected specific products as a means of exerting political influence (no buycott, 59.22 percent). Moreover, the proportion of survey participants who have participated in a consumer boycott in recent years is notably lower, standing at a mere 17.51 percent. This statistic highlights a significant disparity between individuals who have chosen to support a specific cause through their purchasing decisions (buycott) and those who have refrained from purchasing certain products as a form of protest (boycott). In essence, when individuals opt to employ the market as a medium for expressing their political preferences, buycott appears to be significantly more appealing than participating in a consumer boycott. Online Appendix 3 presents the percentage of respondents who have engaged in boycotting or buycotting, categorized by wave. As anticipated, it is noteworthy that both subtypes of

political consumption have increased in popularity over time (that is, buycott amounted to 38.29 percent in 2007 and 47.25 percent in 2019, while boycott amounted to 15.89 percent in 2007 and 21.09 percent in 2029).

Moreover, these frequencies underline the findings of several earlier studies on the subject, including works by Dalton (2008), Marien et al (2010), Micheletti (2003), Micheletti et al (2004), and Stolle et al (2005). The majority of citizens do not actively participate in political consumerism. Moreover, the disparities in the popularity of buycotting and boycotting, with the former being significantly more prevalent, align with the research conducted by scholars like Baek (2010), Copeland (2014), Hoffmann et al (2018), Kam and Deichert (2020), and Zorell (2019). These scholars emphasize that distinct dynamics are at play in the various acts associated with political consumption.

However, our results sharply contrast with the perspective presented by Neilson (2010: 222), who argues that boycotting is "more accessible and widespread than buycotting because it is easier to abstain from buying something rather than seeking specific products." Neilson contends that buycotting demands more thought and effort than boycotting. Despite the plausibility of this reasoning, our data do not corroborate it. The descriptive frequencies enhance our confidence in the imperative need to study political consumerism in a nuanced manner, meticulously distinguishing between its different subtypes.

When comparing the frequency of political consumption to other forms of political engagement (see Online Appendix 5), it is evident that political consumption occurs significantly more often on average than participation in party activities (10.8 percent of the sample) and demonstrations (8.9 percent of the sample). However, over 80 percent of respondents reported participating in the most recent parliamentary elections, indicating that voting remains much more widespread than both boycotting and the more common form of political consumption of buycotting. Nonetheless, the substantial margin by which political consumerism exceeds other political activities, such as party involvement and participation in demonstrations, highlights the importance of examining potentially gendered consumption patterns and understanding the underlying dynamics.

Since both the actual practice of and attitudes toward political consumerism are crucial to our theoretical models, Online Appendix 3 provides an overview of the prevalence of various attitudes toward buycotting and boycotting. It presents the frequencies of positive versus negative predispositions toward each mode of political consumerism. This detailed analysis focuses on individuals labeled as "not-yet-political consumers," that is, those who have not actively engaged in political consumerism in the past four years. The figures delineate the proportion of these "not-yet-political consumers" who unequivocally state that they would not engage in political consumption under any circumstances from those who express potential openness to such practices in the future.

Among respondents who have refrained from both buycotts and boycotts recently, more than two thirds, or over half, respectively, indicate a willingness to consider these practices in the future. However, a substantial portion, specifically 26.73 percent, outright reject integrating political considerations into their consumer choices (buycott). In the context of consumer boycotts, this percentage escalates to 40.49 percent. In summary, a significant proportion of all "not-yet-political consumers" disapprove of both buycotts and, especially, boycotts as means of political expression and influence.

## Findings

The objective of our study is to enhance the understanding of why gender gaps in political consumerism persist. To achieve this, we first identify the factors predicting actual engagement in political consumption and negative predispositions toward it within the full sample (see Table 2, Models 1–4). In the second phase, we examine the influence of gender on political consumption patterns among specific theoretically relevant subgroups, including single men and women (Models 5–6) and individuals with lower education levels (Models 7–8), as shown in Table 3 later. Table 4 then later synthesizes the implications of our findings for theoretical models and assesses support for various hypotheses related to different theoretical scenarios.

Our analysis reveals a significant gender gap in political consumerism, encompassing both behavior and attitudes. Women consistently outperform men across the entire spectrum of political consumption. For instance, when examining past participation in consumer boycotts, the gender gap between men and women is 3.8 percentage points. This gap widens to 9.2 percentage points regarding buycotting, with men being significantly less likely to engage in this activity. Furthermore, attitudes among individuals who have not engaged in political consumption in the past also reflect a pronounced gender disparity. Men are 4.7 percentage points less likely than women to hold a positive predisposition toward future boycotting and 8.8 percentage points less likely to view buycotting as a form of political involvement.

In summary, despite Finland being considered a least-likely case for detecting a gender gap in political consumption, our observations reveal a significant gender gap

**Table 2:** Logistic regression results with study fixed effects for the association between gender and political consumerism

| | DV: Act in the past | | DV: Positive predisposition | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boycott | Buycott | Boycott | Buycott |
| | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 |
| Male | –0.286*** (0.0843) | –0.384*** (0.0663) | –0.200*** (0.0747) | –0.498*** (0.101) |
| Higher education | 0.650*** (0.0933) | 0.713*** (0.0711) | 0.306*** (0.0812) | 0.188* (0.108) |
| Age | –0.0132*** (0.00257) | –0.0107*** (0.00202) | –0.0255*** (0.00229) | –0.0229*** (0.00300) |
| Political interest | 0.774*** (0.110) | 0.882*** (0.0795) | 0.515*** (0.0811) | 0.485*** (0.102) |
| Left–right self-placement | –0.236*** (0.0185) | –0.101*** (0.0148) | –0.146*** (0.0177) | –0.0482** (0.0226) |
| Kids | 0.175* (0.103) | 0.159* (0.0852) | 0.315*** (0.104) | 0.234 (0.152) |
| Married/cohabiting | 0.0868 (0.0878) | 0.235*** (0.0692) | 0.209*** (0.0769) | 0.373*** (0.101) |
| Study fixed effects | YES | YES | YES | YES |
| Constant | –0.532*** (0.198) | –0.216 (0.156) | 2.152*** (0.184) | 2.661*** (0.246) |
| Observations | 4,409 | 4,389 | 3,604 | 2,555 |

*Notes*: Standard errors in parentheses. DV = dependent variable. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

**Table 3:** Logistic regression results with study fixed effects for the association between gender and political consumerism in different subgroups

| | SinglesDV: Act in the past | | Individuals without higher educationDV: Act in the past | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boycott | Buycott | Boycott | Buycott |
| | M5 | M6 | M7 | M8 |
| Male | –0.268** (0.132) | –0.354*** (0.105) | –0.405*** (0.133) | –0.283*** (0.0966) |
| Higher education | 0.688*** (0.140) | 0.834*** (0.108) | | |
| Age | –0.0112*** (0.00345) | –0.00939*** (0.00275) | –0.0267*** (0.00408) | –0.00985*** (0.00302) |
| Political interest | 0.866*** (0.171) | 0.806*** (0.122) | 0.737*** (0.154) | 0.831*** (0.108) |
| Left–right self-placement | –0.214*** (0.0284) | –0.0861*** (0.0228) | –0.174*** (0.0288) | –0.0491** (0.0210) |
| Kids | 0.000573 (0.201) | 0.0664 (0.166) | –0.0634 (0.175) | 0.0941 (0.135) |
| Married/cohabiting | | | 0.182 (0.140) | 0.312*** (0.101) |
| Study fixed effects | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Constant | –0.777*** (0.297) | –0.330 (0.234) | 0.0389 (0.304) | –0.477** (0.236) |
| Observations | 1,929 | 1,892 | 2,239 | 2,215 |

*Notes*: Standard errors in parentheses. DV = dependent variable. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

**Table 4:** Overview of which theoretical models are corroborated by the empirical results

| | |
|---|---|
| **Empirical implications of the situational model** | |
| H1a | ✓ |
| H1b | ✘ |
| H1c | ✘ |
| **Empirical implications of the socialization model** | |
| H2a | ✓ |
| H2b | ✓ |
| H2c | ✓ |
| **Empirical implications of potential structural barriers to political consumerism** | |
| H3 | ✘ |

in both buycotting and boycotting. This gap is evident in both actual behavior and attitudes toward potential future engagement in these activities. Our first step was to replicate the established finding that women outperform men, whereby we distinguish between buycotting and boycotting. This way, we validate that a gender gap in political consumption is indeed present in our representative sample of the Finnish voting population. Moreover, our data also corroborate past research in the sense that political consumers in our sample are more educated, younger, more politically interested, and more left-wing compared to individuals who have not consumed politically. This pattern is almost identical for both sides of political consumerism (buycott and boycott). Notably, no such gap is observed in other political activities—neither in non-institutionalized

forms like protest (demonstrations) nor in institutionalized forms like engagement in political party organizations (see Online Appendices 3 and 4).

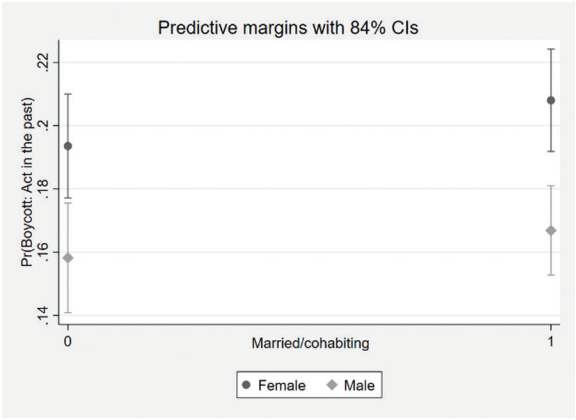
We also conduct a series of robustness checks to ensure that the patterns we observe are not merely statistical artifacts resulting from specific operationalizations of variables. To this end, we re-estimate Models 1–4 using voter turnout in the last parliamentary elections as an alternative measure of political interest, instead of self-reported political interest (see Online Appendix 7). Furthermore, we conducted our analyses separately for each wave of the FNES (see Online Appendices 11–14). The main substantive effects of gender and the influence and direction of the replaced variable remain consistent. Additionally, we re-evaluate all four models using an alternative operationalization of political attitudes, substituting self-placement on the left–right spectrum with agreement with the statement that Finland's EU membership is beneficial, as detailed in Online Appendix 8. We selected EU membership as a proxy for Green-Alternative-Libertarian-Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (GAL-TAN) attitudes because it reflects an individual's openness to international, multilateral cooperation and sociocultural diversity. This choice was made to ensure the robustness of our results without relying on subjective self-assessments of political orientation (for example, left- or right-wing attitudes). We opted for this specific variable because other indicators of GAL–TAN attitudes, such as views on gender-related issues (for example, same-sex marriage [see Jolly et al, 2022]), were not consistently available in a comparable manner across all waves of the FNES. As for the results, the observed patterns remain largely unchanged.

Furthermore, we repeat our analyses on two subsamples of least-likely political consumers to verify that our findings are not driven by a specific subgroup of the Finnish population. In Online Appendix 9, we re-estimate Models 1–4 using a sample of respondents with more right-wing political attitudes, who are generally less likely to engage in political consumption. Even within this subgroup, a pronounced gender gap in engagement and attitudes toward buycotting and boycotting persists. Similarly, Online Appendix 10 includes analyses of a subsample of individuals without children, where substantive gender gaps are evident, with men significantly less likely to engage in either form of political consumption and considerably less likely to hold positive predispositions toward such activities in the future.

Additionally, Models 5 and 6 in Table 3 reveal that among singles—defined as individuals who are neither married nor cohabiting with a partner—men have a significantly lower likelihood of practicing political consumption. This finding underscores that the gender gap in boycotting and buycotting is not confined to traditional heterosexual couples, where women often assume more domestic responsibilities. Models 7 and 8 further demonstrate that within another subgroup initially less likely to engage in political consumption—individuals with lower educational attainment and corresponding socioeconomic resources—women still outperform men by a substantial margin. Figures 1–4 illustrate the predicted probabilities based on the interaction effects between gender and marital status (single or not), as well as gender and educational attainment (completion of higher education or not). The full models, including the interaction terms upon which the plots are based, can be found in Online Appendices 15 and 16.

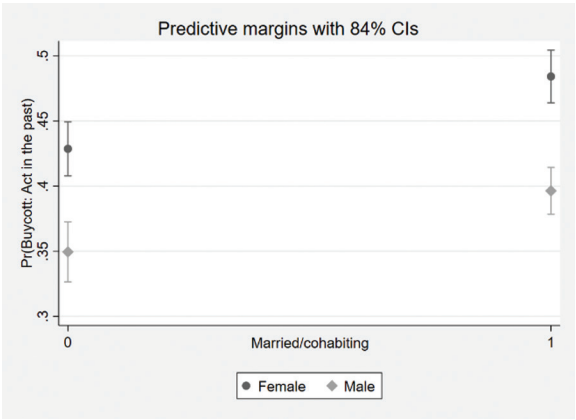
What do these findings imply for the hypotheses derived from the theoretical models presented? The central question addressed in this article is whether there is stronger support for situational or socialization explanations for the gender gap in political consumption. Table 4 clearly indicates that while only one of the empirical

**Figure 1:** Predicted probabilities of the interaction effect between gender and marital status (single or not) based on Model 1 (Online Appendix 15)




*Note*: Dependent variable is participation in a boycott in the past.

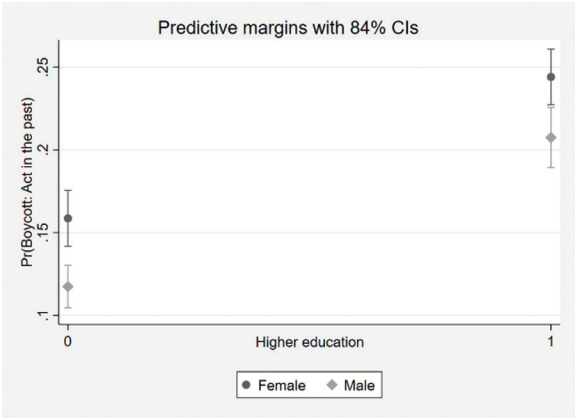
**Figure 2:** Predicted probabilities of the interaction effect between gender and marital status (single or not) based on Model 2 (Online Appendix 15)




*Note*: Dependent variable is participation in a buycott in the past.

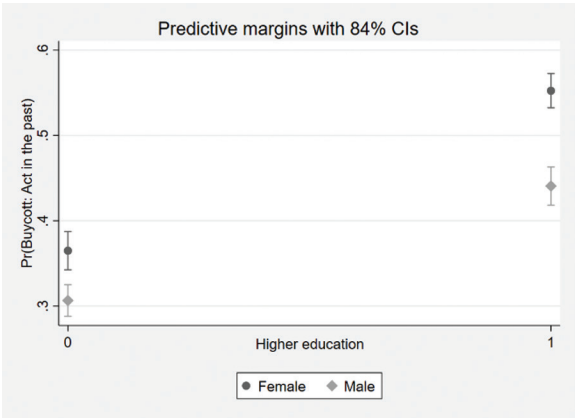
implications of the situational model is supported by the results, all three testable implications of the socialization model are validated. Specifically, H2b and H2c suggest that if gendered consumption patterns are driven by factors beyond the disparate life situations to which men and women are exposed, we should observe a gender gap in attitudes and consumption patterns even in contexts where traditional gendered distributions of chores are not present. Our findings corroborate this: attitudes toward political consumption are indeed gendered, with men exhibiting significantly more negative predispositions toward future engagement in both buycotting and boycotting. Additionally, even among individuals living alone—where grocery shopping cannot be outsourced to a partner—men are less likely than women to engage in politically conscious consumption.

**Figure 3:** Predicted probabilities of the interaction effect between gender and higher education attainment based on Model 1 (Online Appendix 16)




*Note*: Dependent variable is participation in a boycott in the past.

**Figure 4:** Predicted probabilities of the interaction effect between gender and higher education attainment based on Model 2 (Online Appendix 16)




*Note*: Dependent variable is participation in a buycott in the past.

Furthermore, contrary to what structural explanations of political participation that emphasize the importance of resources might predict, women outperform men in political consumption even within lower-educated segments of society. This suggests that women without higher education may utilize political consumerism as a means to address their marginalization in other forms of political engagement.

## Conclusion

Gender affects not only the quantitative dimension of political engagement (how much citizens participate in politics) but also its qualitative dimension (how they participate in politics) (see, for example, Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010). If women

engage in politics differently than men (see, for example, Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010), more attention should be paid to non-institutional forms of political participation. In this study, we have thus focused on political engagement through the market—the only form of political participation where women outperform men. Political consumerism entails buycotts as well as boycotts, which have been shown to be successful in inflicting substantial financial losses on target firms (Pruitt and Friedman, 1986; Pruitt et al, 1988). Our study extends knowledge of the reversed gender gap in political consumerism and speaks to a wide range of academic fields, including economics, marketing and consumer research, political sociology, political economy, and psychology.

Several previous studies have identified a gender gap in political consumption, with women consistently exhibiting higher levels of engagement than men. Various explanations have been proposed for this phenomenon. Situational explanations suggest that women are more frequently placed in circumstances that offer opportunities for political consumption. In contrast, socialization theory posits that this pattern arises from deeply ingrained gendered attitudes regarding what constitutes appropriate political participation. Our study of Finland demonstrates that predispositions toward political consumption—whether through buycotting or boycotting—are systematically gendered. Among individuals who have never engaged in political consumerism, men are consistently less likely to view the market as a viable channel for political expression, whereas women are more inclined to consider market-based expressions of political views. Crucially, the presence of gender differences even among those who have not yet engaged in political consumerism in Finland, a country where gendered life situations (such as caregiving and household responsibilities) are less disparate than in other countries, suggests that these predispositions have deeper roots. We would like to highlight that the gender gap in political consumerism exists not only in traditional heterosexual couples, where women often assume more domestic responsibilities, but also among singles, who, by default, must do the necessary shopping on their own. Combined, these findings lend support to the socialization model, which predicts gendered predispositions toward political consumption, regardless of specific life situations. While our fine-grained analysis of the Finnish case indicates that the gender gap in political consumerism is both behavioral and attitudinal and that it persists across groups, including singles and those with lower education levels, more confidence in these findings could be gained by using different research designs and/or methods of data collection and analysis. For instance, comparisons across generational cohorts would provide valuable perspectives on the effects of socialization versus situational factors. Moreover, longitudinal designs could generate additional insights into how social norms and values evolve and how they influence men's political consumerism. Also, future research could use experimental designs to explore how perceptions of masculinity connect to attitudes toward political consumerism and whether the latter could shift using different framings. Additional insights into the causal mechanisms underlying gendered predispositions toward political consumerism could be gained through comparisons of countries with varying levels of gender equality and men's involvement in caregiving and household chores or through qualitative analyses. Qualitative interviews would be particularly valuable for understanding men's persistent aversion to political consumerism in an era of globalized and liberalized markets.

To be sure, women are right in including the market in their reservoir of paths to political influence. Given evidence of parties' responsiveness to market actors (versus voters) in open economies (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014), we should thus rethink the gender gap in political participation as a "women's deficit": with political consumerism being a transnational form of political participation that allows citizens "to target actors other than the state, including multinational corporations, brands, and retailers" (Copeland and Boulianne, 2022: 13), the question of who engages in this political behavior becomes all the more crucial. Women, long assumed to be unfit or incompetent for politics, may in fact be much more politically skilled than previously thought.

## Notes

[1] Finnish female voters participate in elections at equally high rates as their male counterparts (for data on turnout by gender, see Official Statistics of Finland (nd)).

[2] Finnish men's time spent on childcare and other unpaid domestic work increased over time from the late 1980s until 2010 (Ylikännö et al, 2014).

[3] Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/compare-countries/.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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