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Are Parties Equally Responsive to Women and Men?

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This article explores (1) whether policy makers are equally responsive to the preferences of women and men and (2) whether the increased presence of women in parliament improves responsiveness to women's preferences. Using a time-series cross-sectional analysis of 351 party shifts by sixty-eight different parties across twelve Western European countries, the study finds that parties respond to the preference shifts of women and men. However, parties are more responsive to the preference shifts among men than among women – a finding that is not affected by the share of female politicians in parliament. The findings question the implicit assumption that substantive political representation of women necessarily follows from their descriptive representation in legislatures.

Keywords: party responsiveness; subconstituency representation; women, men

Recent research shows that political elites are disproportionately more responsive to the preferences of highly educated, politically active and affluent voters.[1] In this article, I build on this literature and explore party responsiveness to the preferences of women – arguably one of the most salient subconstituencies in Western democracies but one that has been largely overlooked in the responsiveness literature. Specifically, I examine whether European mainstream party rhetoric responds equally to the preference shifts of women and men. Furthermore, borrowing insights from the literature on the representation of women, I also examine whether the share of women in national parliaments affects party responsiveness to women's preferences.

Previous studies of subconstituency representation suggest that parties are likely to be more responsive to preference shifts among men, since they are, on average, more politically active, wealthier and more highly educated.[2] However, current research on women's descriptive and substantive representation in parliaments commonly assumes an implicit link between the two, suggesting that an increase in the share of female politicians in parliament will lead to a stronger impact of women's preferences on actual policies.[3] The steadily increasing number of women in European parliaments over the last five decades therefore implies that parties should be increasingly responsive to women.

The analysis reported in this article challenges the idea of the link between descriptive and substantive representation. Using data on twelve Western European countries from 1973 to 2012, I find that parties' policy programs respond to the preference shifts of both women and

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[1] Adams and Ezrow 2009; Bartels 2008; Enns and Wlezien 2011; Ezrow et al. 2011; Gilens 2005; Griffin and Newman 2005.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Bratton 2005; Greene and O'Brien 2016; Kittilson 2011; Mansbridge 1999; Wängnerud 2009.

men, which is in line with earlier studies of representation.[4] However, I also show that parties are more responsive to preference shifts among men than women. The share of female politicians in parliament does not affect this asymmetry in responsiveness.

I argue that the disconnect between descriptive and substantive representation arises because in European democracies, parties – not single members of parliament (MPs) – are responsible for representing citizens. The combination of parties' gate-keeping power, socialization effects and party discipline prevents women from behaving significantly differently from men once they are elected to parliament.[5] In other words, despite the growing descriptive representation of women in parliaments and the significant differences between the preferences of women and men in the electorate, we do not observe an improved responsiveness to women's preferences, because female MPs are expected to vote along party lines just like male MPs.

The results have a number of important implications. First, they contribute to the research on unequal representation and party responsiveness,[6] which has previously largely ignored the role of gender at both the elite and mass levels. Secondly, they extend the literature on women's substantive representation,[7] which has not considered Left–Right positioning as a form of substantive representation and does not often consider the congruence between voters' preferences and elite behavior. Most importantly, since the share of female politicians in parliament does not condition the responsiveness of parties to either men or women, the analysis suggests that descriptive representation may not always be linked to substantive representation. In other words, while descriptive and substantive representation might be linked in other ways, within the setting of the analysis presented here, men seem to represent women's interests in parliament as well or poorly as women do.[8]

PARTY RESPONSIVENESS TO WOMEN AND MEN: THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

Macro-level studies have repeatedly shown European mainstream parties to react strongly to changes in an electorate's mean voter position.[9] Those findings are independent of the underlying assumptions regarding parties' motivations. Whether they are aiming for office, policy or votes, policy makers will generally have incentives to closely track changes of the mean voter's preferences. At the subconstituency level, opinions as to whether parties respond equally to shifts of different subgroups of the electorate diverge slightly. Focusing on more and less affluent voters, Bartels and Gilens argue that policy shifts are best explained by the preferences of high-income voters, and that parties and politicians are particularly unresponsive to the preferences of low-income citizens.[10] Griffin and Newman show that office holders are disproportionately responsive to the preferences of the politically active.[11] Education and

[4] Adams et al. 2004; Erikson, MacKuen, and Stimson 2002; Ezrow et al. 2011; Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson 1995.

[5] Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Fox and Lawless 2004; McAllister and Studlar 1992; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Osborn 2012.

[6] Bartels 2008; Enns and Wlezien 2011; Gilens 2005; Gilens 2009; Soroka and Wlezien 2008.

[7] Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset 2015; Inglehart and Norris 2003; O'Brien and Rickne 2016; Osborn 2012; Wängnerud 2009.

[8] O'Brien 2012; Osborn 2012.

[9] Adams et al. 2004; Adams et al. 2006; Adams and Ezrow 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011; McDonald and Budge 2005.

[10] Bartels 2008; Gilens 2005; Gilens 2009; but see Soroka and Wlezien 2008.

[11] Griffin and Newman 2005.

political sophistication have been shown to affect party responsiveness,[12] and Adams and Ezrow also find that European parties are particularly responsive to preference shifts among citizens who regularly engage in political discussions and persuasion (so-called opinion leaders).[13]

Based on these previous findings, parties are likely to be more responsive to preference shifts among men than women. This is because men are, on average, more politically active than women, earn more, are more highly educated and more likely to act as opinion leaders within their respective social contexts – all characteristics that have been shown to lead to higher party responsiveness.[14] At the same time, there is a crucial difference that distinguishes income- or knowledge-related subconstituencies from the subconstituencies of women or men as a whole: the latter are almost perfectly equally distributed among the electorate. Since women make up roughly half of all potential voters, the mean voter literature would clearly predict at least a certain degree of responsiveness regarding their preferences as well. As a result, I arrive at the following two hypotheses.

HYPOTHESIS 1: European mainstream parties respond to shifts in the preferences of both men and women.

HYPOTHESIS 2: European mainstream parties are more responsive to shifts in the preferences of men than of women.

A second crucial distinction that differentiates the female subconstituency from those of the poor, politically inactive or uneducated, is that female representation has been steadily increasing in European parliaments over the last five decades,[15] which should provide female parliamentarians with opportunities to actively shape policies in a way that would be congruent with women's preferences.

Analyzing whether this is the case, scholars have long studied the descriptive representation of women to analyze differences in the number of women in national parliaments,[16] as well as the substantive representation of women, which focuses not on the quantity but the *quality* of female representation. One of the key findings that has frequently been confirmed in the United States and comparative contexts is that women tend to be responsible for introducing a

[12] Bartels 2008; Enns and Wlezien 2011; Erikson, MacKuen and Stimson 2002.

[13] Adams and Ezrow 2009. More specifically on the question of female representation, Bernauer, Giger, and Rosset (2015) find that in a given election, party positions tend to be closer to men's ideal points.

[14] Evidence for this is provided in Appendix Tables A1–A3. Based on Eurobarometer data from the 1970s to 2010, these tables present descriptive statistics that show consistent and significant gender differences in levels of income, education and political opinion leadership. Moreover, Nir and McClurg's (2015) study of thirty-eight countries also finds a consistent gender gap in political discussion, which is closely linked to political engagement and therefore also likely to decrease responsiveness to women's preferences.

[15] Whereas the average seat share of women in single or lower houses worldwide was only 10.9 per cent in 1975, this number had more than doubled to 23.1 per cent by December 2016. The development becomes even more obvious when focusing on Western European countries. In January 1998, only eight countries of the fifteen that made up the European Union at that point had a female seat share in parliament of at least 20 per cent. In December 2016, women made up more than 25 per cent of the seats in all countries of the EU-15 apart from Ireland (22.2 per cent) and Greece (19.7 per cent; IPU 2016). Appendix Figure A1 depicts the average seat share of women in the national parliaments of the twelve countries that are included in the analysis below since 1960. Illustrating the worldwide and Europe-wide trend, it shows a clear and continuous increase in the female seat share, which starts at around 6 per cent in the 1960s and quintuples to more than 30 per cent in the new millennium.

[16] Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Duverger 1955; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2012; Norris 1996; Roberts, Seawright, and Cyr 2012.

disproportionate amount of women-related legislation.[17] Wängnerud, for example, concludes her analysis of parliamentary survey studies of the Swedish Riksdag with the finding that 'women's interests are primarily represented by female politicians'.[18]

While this might imply a link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women, few studies have explicitly analyzed this relationship.[19] Most of the existing analyses that do study the interplay of the two concepts rely on Phillips's theory of the politics of presence, which argues that there is a link between descriptive and substantive representation because women are better equipped to represent the interests and needs of women than men.[20] As a consequence, more women in parliament should lead to better responsiveness to women's preferences. These normative considerations and empirical findings directly lead to the third hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 3: European mainstream parties' responsiveness to women's preferences increases with the seat share of women in the respective national parliament.

However, summarizing the findings of studies analyzing the link between women's descriptive and substantive representation in a review of the field, Wängnerud carefully concludes that the 'safest position would be to say results are "mixed" when it comes to empirical support'.[21] This assessment also seems to be in line with the fact that, apart from differences regarding clearly gender-related legislation, most studies find only very limited differences between male and female politicians. Instead, party membership is often found to be the best predictor of values, attitudes and actions; once party-level variation is accounted for, differences between women and men in parliament often become insignificant.[22] Given the significant role of party discipline in Europe's parliamentary democracies, this is hardly surprising.[23] After all, both women and men are organized into parties with common policies and will usually be bound to support their party line, regardless of their gender. This in turn will significantly limit female parliamentarians' opportunities to make an impact that is decisively different from that of their male counterparts.

Another argument is that of socialization. Since most societies are still largely male dominated, women in leadership roles are often found to share 'male' characteristics such as toughness, aggression and determination.[24] This applies to both jobs in business and politics. Fukuyama discusses the phenomenon and describes Margaret Thatcher as the quintessential example: she was 'far tougher and more determined than any of the male politicians she came up against [and] had beaten men at their own game'.[25]

[17] Bratton 2005; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Swers 2005; Vega and Firestone 1995.
[18] Wängnerud 2000, 84.
[19] But see Greene and O'Brien 2016; Kittilson 2011; O'Brien 2012; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005.
[20] Phillips 1995. A crucial difference in empirical studies of the link between descriptive and substantive representation is the operationalization of substantive representation. Most scholars study bill introduction (Bratton 2005; Osborn 2012; Schwindt-Bayer 2006; Swers 2005), while others look at levels of participation by male and female parliamentarians in different debates (Catalano 2009; Celis 2006, see also Crisp et al. 2016), or the effects on the political agenda (Devlin and Elgie 2008; Greene and O'Brien 2016; O'Brien 2012), while again others analyze the actual presence of policies related to women's issues (Berkman and O'Connor 1993; Kittilson 2011). In the analysis below, I analyze party positions and compare those to changes in public opinion data for women and men.
[21] Wängnerud 2009, 51.
[22] Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; McAllister and Studlar 1992; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Osborn 2012.
[23] Carey 2007; Hix, Noury, and Roland 2005; Sieberer 2006.
[24] Koenig et al. 2011; O'Neill and O'Reilly 2011.
[25] Fukuyama 1998, 32.

Moreover, gate-keeping is an additional party-level phenomenon that hinders women's political ambitions. Whether in the form of (still mostly male) party leadership or parties' institutional rules, gate-keeping makes women less likely to be promoted, recruited or encouraged to run for office, especially if they are likely to go against existing party lines and ideas.[26]

In other words, if women who succeed in politics often act like men and share some of their characteristics, one would not expect an increase in the descriptive representation of women to also improve their substantive representation. In fact, a non-existing link would be in line with Osborn's study of US state legislatures, which shows that party identity prevails over gender differences.[27] Focusing on Western Europe, O'Brien's comparative analysis equally challenges the notion that an increase in women's descriptive representation will necessarily lead to improved substantive representation.[28] Recent studies in psychology come to similar conclusions as well, showing that both male and female university faculty members are consistently biased against female applicants, regardless of their own gender or existing levels of women's representation in the faculty or student body.[29]

Therefore, if women do not behave significantly differently from men once they are elected to parliament, because they share character traits and are equally bound to follow a party line, there is no reason to assume that a change in levels of female parliamentarians should lead to any measurable change in responsiveness to women's preferences. These considerations motivate the fourth and final hypothesis.

HYPOTHESIS 4: European mainstream parties' responsiveness to women's (and men's) preferences is not conditioned by the seat share of women in the respective national parliament.

DATA, MEASURES AND MODEL SPECIFICATION

To arrive at a longitudinal measure of public opinion across Western Europe, I utilize the Eurobarometer surveys conducted on behalf of the European Commission. On average, the surveys ask more than 3,600 respondents per year in each country to place themselves on a 1–10 Left–Right ideological scale (where 1 indicates an extreme left position and 10 is extreme right).[30] For the time period from 1973 (the first year that the Left–Right self-placement item appears on the Eurobarometer survey) to April/June 2002, I rely on the Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File 1970–2002,[31] which compiles the Eurobarometer surveys for these years. For the subsequent period from September/October 2002 to November 2012, I collected the missing Eurobarometer data myself and created an updated Eurobarometer Trend File 1973–2012. While the original Mannheim Trend File already compiled Left–Right self-placement data for 742,123 respondents

[26] Cheng and Tavits 2011; Fox and Lawless 2004; Kittilson 1999; Lawless and Fox 2005; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; O'Brien 2015.

[27] Osborn 2012.

[28] O'Brien 2012.

[29] Milkman, Akinola, and Chugh 2015; Moss-Racusin et al. 2012.

[30] More specifically, the Eurobarometer surveys ask, 'In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale?' Since the surveys do not consistently ask questions on more specific policy dimensions, the Left–Right item is the only one that lends itself to the following time-series analysis. Some of the early Luxembourg surveys have less than 1,000 respondents, but over 86 per cent of all country-years feature at least 2,000 respondents; more than 60 per cent have at least 3,000 respondents. Consequently, the number of respondents per country-year is reasonably high and allows for the assumption of representative samples.

[31] Schmitt et al. 2008.

TABLE 1 *Eurobarometer Respondents' Left-Right Self-Placements, 1973–2012*

		Left-Right self-placement			Willingness to place		
Country	First year	(1) Women	(2) Men	(3) Δ	(4) Women	(5) Men	(6) Δ
Austria	1995	5.01	5.22	**–0.21**	74.80	81.78	**–6.98**
Denmark	1973	5.39	5.72	**–0.33**	91.27	95.12	**–3.84**
Finland	1993	5.71	5.66	**0.05**	83.24	87.82	**–4.58**
France	1973	4.95	4.89	**0.06**	81.84	85.39	**–3.54**
Greece	1980	5.60	5.50	**0.10**	73.06	77.85	**–4.79**
Italy	1973	4.98	4.91	**0.07**	68.72	76.66	**–7.93**
Luxembourg	1973	5.36	5.22	**0.14**	72.48	80.92	**–8.44**
Netherlands	1973	5.14	5.32	**–0.19**	91.68	94.91	**–3.23**
Portugal	1985	5.29	5.12	**0.17**	69.34	76.09	**–6.75**
Spain	1985	4.67	4.56	**0.11**	72.12	78.02	**–5.90**
Sweden	1995	5.21	5.44	**–0.23**	93.65	95.39	**–1.74**
UK	1973	5.35	5.40	**0.05**	81.85	88.65	**–6.80**
Average		5.22	5.26	**–0.04**	79.62	85.30	**–5.68**

Note: 'First year' indicates the first year for which Left-Right self-placements are available for a given country. The summary statistics in Columns 1–2 and 4–5 are based on the full set of Eurobarometer surveys administered between 1973 and 2012. The average number of respondents per country that were used to compute these figures was over 112,500. Columns 1–2 report the average Left-Right self-placements of women and men and Columns 4–5 report the percentage of women and men willing to place themselves on the Left-Right scale in a given country. In Columns 3 and 6, Δ reports the differences between women and men, and presents the results of corresponding t-tests. All differences are significant at the 99 per cent confidence level.

across 78 Eurobarometer surveys for the twelve Western European countries of the analysis, the extension of the dataset to late 2012 adds an additional 611,481 respondents from fifty-one surveys.

Based on this total of 129 Eurobarometer surveys, Table 1 presents summary statistics of the Left–Right measure across the twelve countries included in the analysis and compares the responses from women and men. These statistics are based on the full set of Eurobarometer surveys administered between 1973 and 2012, which leads to huge sample sizes. Apart from Luxembourg, the results for all other countries are based on over 80,000 respondents.[32] Columns 1–2 report the average Left–Right self-placements of women and men, and Column 3 presents the results of a series of t-tests to determine if the differences between these placements are significant. Relying on the same Eurobarometer question, Columns 4–5 report the percentage of women and men willing to place themselves on the Left–Right scale in a given country, and Column 6 reports the results of the respective t-tests.

The results show that women are significantly less likely – on average, about 6 percentage points – to place themselves on the scale across all twelve countries. The variation of differences ranges from just below 2 percentage points in Sweden to over 8 percentage points in Luxembourg. These patterns are in line with existing survey research that demonstrates that women tend to exhibit lower levels of political knowledge than men on traditional knowledge questions, and that women are less likely to guess when they do not know the answer to a specific question.[33] Turning to the summary statistics on average Left–Right placements, the

[32] For Luxembourg, the summary statistics are based on over 60,000 respondents.
[33] Dolan 2011; Mondak and Anderson 2004.

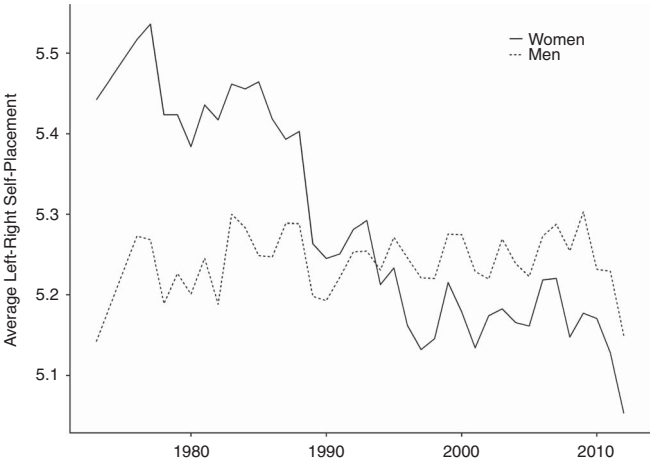

Fig. 1. Eurobarometer Left-Right Self-Placements of Women and Men, 1973–2012

results are less clear. Women are found to be placing themselves, on average, just to the left of men, but this result is strongly driven by only four of the twelve countries included in the analysis: Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden. In the other eight countries, women place themselves to the right of men, on average.

The main reason for the rather mixed findings regarding Left–Right self-placement might be due to what Inglehart and Norris call *gender realignment*.[34] They show that *female conservatism* was a widespread and well-established phenomenon during Western Europe's post-war era; women would routinely position themselves to the right of men. However, this tendency was first succeeded by a process of *gender dealignment* during the 1980s and then eventually replaced by a new *gender realignment*. Whereas the traditional gender gap in post-war Europe and the United States saw women as more conservative and to the right of men, this started to change during the 1980s when the ideological gap between men and women started closing. In the 1990s women realigned to the left of men. As Inglehart and Norris point out: 'by the mid-1990s, the [initial] position had reversed – women had moved [from the right] to the left of men'.[35]

Extending the time-series that Inglehart and Norris use by almost fifteen years, Figure 1 supports their argument. In the 1970s and early 1980s, women clearly place themselves to the right of men on the Left–Right scale. Beginning in the mid-1980s their positions start to converge, and by 1994 women in the twelve European countries analyzed here are, on average, more leftist than men. Only in the early 2000s does the average position of women start to stabilize again (apart from a sharp shift to the left by both women and men post-2010). The figure also confirms another one of Inglehart and Norris' findings: while women shifted their average position significantly from the right to the left over the last few decades, the self-placements of men have remained remarkably stable during the same period. These findings are relatively consistent across all twelve countries in this study and are mostly driven by changes among right-leaning women, who have moved to the left much more consistently than their already left-leaning counterparts.[36] Viewed together, the summary statistics presented in Table 1 and the time-series data in Figure 1

[34] Inglehart and Norris 2003.
[35] Inglehart and Norris 2003, 83.
[36] A more comprehensive analysis of the variance in country-level trends and differences between left-leaning and right-leaning women and men can be found in Appendix Figures A2–A4.

suggest that women do significantly differ from men in their political ideologies and that there are considerable changes in those ideologies over time.

Measures and Model Specification

Do political parties' manifestos represent the different preferences of women and men equally well? And is the responsiveness to women's preferences conditioned by women's seat share in the respective national parliament? In order to test my hypotheses, I follow previous research and model party movements over time.[37] More specifically, the outcome variable *Party Shift (t)* captures party shifts along the Left–Right dimension between two elections. In other words, it indicates the difference in a given party's Left–Right position between the current election (t) and the previous election ($t - 1$). Similarly, *[Party Shift ($t - 1$)]* is the change in the same party's Left–Right position between the previous election ($t - 1$) and the preceding one ($t - 2$).

To derive party policy positions and shifts over time, I rely on data provided by the Manifesto Project.[38] This project conducts content analysis of electoral manifestos to determine a party's position on the Left–Right scale. Based on the ideas of saliency theory, the project has specifically trained scholars coding each quasi-sentence of a given manifesto into a predefined fifty-six-category coding scheme.[39] To measure a party's placement on the Left–Right scale, the Rile score is calculated, which subtracts the added percentages of a party's scores in thirteen left categories from the added percentages of scores in thirteen right categories.[40] The result is a score theoretically ranging from −100 (extreme left) to 100 (extreme right). The project is unparalleled in its coverage of party positions across both time and space. Spanning the whole post-war period, the latest version of the dataset provides data for over 3,600 manifestos from 900 parties competing in over 600 elections in fifty-five different countries. This means that the dataset lends itself exceptionally well to time-series cross-section analyses such as that undertaken here.[41]

The main explanatory variable of interest is *Voter Shift (t)*, which measures the difference in average Left–Right self-placements of voters in a given country between the year of the current election and the year of the previous election for either women, men or all voters. Data on these shifts come from the Eurobarometer surveys discussed above. Note that since party position data are only available for years with elections in a specific country, *[Voter Shift (t)]* also refers to election years only.

The analysis also includes another key explanatory variable – *Female Seat Share (t)* – which reports the seat share of female parliamentarians in a given country for a specific election year.[42] Information on the number of elected female parliamentarians in democracies around the world is provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).[43] For the years until 2010, these data were compiled by Armingeon et al. in the Comparative Political Data Set.[44] For the time after 2010,

[37] Adams et al. 2004; Adams et al. 2006; Adams and Ezrow 2009; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Ezrow et al. 2011.

[38] Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2012.

[39] A quasi-sentence is defined as 'a set of words containing one and only one political argument', which means that one sentence can contain multiple quasi-sentences (Werner, Lacewell, and Volkens 2011).

[40] Laver and Budge 1992.

[41] In the robustness section and the Appendix, I present results that use the adjusted Manifesto scores by Lowe et al. (2011) in order to address concerns regarding the scores' reliability and missing estimates of uncertainty. These additional results confirm the substantive findings presented in the main analysis.

[42] It could be argued that female politicians might only be able to influence a party's agenda once they are in parliament. To control for this possibility, Appendix Table A6 replicates the main analysis below using a lagged measure of female seat share. The results are virtually identical.

[43] IPU 2016.

[44] Armingeon et al. 2012.

TABLE 2 *Descriptive Statistics: Dependent and Independent Variables*

	Mean value	Mean absolute value	Min	Max
Party shift	−0.04 (0.76)	0.54 (0.54)	−2.39	3.25
Voter shift (All)	−0.01 (0.21)	0.17 (0.13)	−0.57	0.54
Voter shift (Women)	−0.03 (0.24)	0.19 (0.15)	−0.63	0.63
Voter shift (Men)	0.02 (0.21)	0.17 (0.13)	−0.51	0.59
Female seat share	25.26 (11.84)		3.50	47.30

Note: N = 351. All manifesto-based measures have been rescaled to the 1–10 scale used in the Eurobarometer surveys. The numbers in parentheses are the standard deviations of the reported values.

I collected the additional seat shares directly from the IPU website. [45] Finally, some models will include an interaction term *[Voter Shift (t) × Female Seat Share (t)]*, which makes it possible to interpret the effect of different levels of descriptive representation of women in parliament on their substantive representation. Table 2 reports descriptive statistics of the main variables included in the analysis.

In the most basic specification, this allows for the estimation of the two following models to test Hypotheses 1–4:

$$\textit{Basic model} - \text{Party shift (t)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * [\text{Voter shift (t)}] + \beta_2 * [\text{Party shift (t}-1)] + \text{e}$$

$$\textit{Interaction model} - \text{Party shift (t)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * [\text{Voter shift (t)}] + \beta_2 * [\text{Female seat share (t)}] + \beta_3 * [\text{Voter shift (t)} \times \text{Female seat share (t)}] + \beta_4 * [\text{Party shift (t}-1)] + \text{e}$$

Hypotheses 1 and 2: $\beta_{1\text{Men}} > \beta_{1\text{Women}} > 0$

Hypothesis 3: $\beta_3 > 0$; H4: $\beta_3 = 0$

In other words, according to Hypotheses 1 and 2, the party responsiveness coefficients $\beta_{1\text{Men}}$ and $\beta_{1\text{Women}}$ should be positive, with $\beta_{1\text{Men}} > \beta_{1\text{Women}}$ indicating a higher degree of responsiveness to preference shifts among men. If Hypothesis 3 is correct and parties are more responsive to women's preferences as the female seat share increases, the interaction coefficient estimate β_3 should be positive, while Hypothesis 4 would suggest no such conditioning effect.

The analysis focuses on the policy responsiveness of mainstream political parties only. Mainstream and niche parties are defined based on the party family classification in the

[45] Ideally, female seat share would be measured at the party level. However, data availability is significantly more limited at the party level. Greene and O'Brien (2016) have recently collected data for a number of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, and Appendix Table A7 replicates my analysis using their party-level data where available. The results confirm the findings reported below. Moreover, the total number of female parliamentarians should arguably influence all parties' responsiveness. As a parliament's general female seat share increases, even parties with very few female MPs should become more sensitive to women's concerns. In fact, parties might even try to utilize the substantive representation of women to make up for a lack of descriptive representation.

TABLE 3 *Parties' Responsiveness to Different Electorates, 1973–2012*

	Overall Mean Voter (1)	MV – Women (2)	MV – Men (3)	Men and Women (4)
Voter shift (All)	**0.42 (0.18)**			
Voter shift (Women)		**0.29 (0.16)**		**–0.26 (0.27)**
Voter shift (Men)			**0.49 (0.18)**	**0.73 (0.31)**
Party shift (t –1)	–0.33 (0.06)	–0.33 (0.06)	–0.33 (0.06)	–0.33 (0.06)
Constant	–0.04 (0.04)	–0.03 (0.04)	–0.05 (0.04)	–0.06 (0.04)
N	351	351	351	351
R^2	0.13	0.12	0.13	0.13

Notes: The table reports estimated coefficients from an OLS regression and robust standard errors in parentheses. The outcome variable is the change in a party's Left-Right position between the current election and the previous election. The definitions of the explanatory variables are given in the text.

Manifesto Project data. If a party is a member of the Communist, Green or Nationalist party family, it is regarded as a niche party; otherwise it is classified as a mainstream party. This is in line with previous research on party responsiveness, which has shown that mainstream parties react to shifts in the mean voter position, whereas niche parties are found to be more responsive to their specific party supporters.[46]

Additionally, three EU-15 countries are excluded from the analysis: Belgium, Germany and Ireland. This is to meet the concerns raised by Huber, who shows citizens' self-placements along the Left–Right scale to be a valid tool for cross-country comparison across Europe with the exception of those three countries.[47]

RESULTS

Table 3 reports the results from the *basic model* specification based on an analysis of 351 party shift observations by sixty-eight different parties competing in a total of eighty-two national elections across twelve countries in Western Europe. Column 1 presents the coefficient estimates for overall mean voter shifts, Column 2 refers to shifts in the average Left–Right self-placement of women, Column 3 reports the findings regarding parties' responsiveness to changes in the preferences of men, and Column 4 reports the results when including the preference shifts of both women and men.[48] The *Party Shift (t – 1)* term is added for two

[46] Adams et al. 2006; Ezrow 2008; Ezrow et al. 2011. An alternative model including mainstream as well as niche parties is discussed in the robustness section and the Appendix.

[47] Huber 1989. When including Belgium in the analyses, all results reported below hold up. When including Germany (or Germany and Belgium), the results also hold up but are slightly less reliable. When including Ireland or a combination of Ireland and either one or both of Germany and Belgium, I still arrive at the same substantive findings, but most parameter estimates lose statistical significance. This is very much in line with the findings of Huber (1989), Inglehart and Klingemann (1976), and Knutsen (1997), who show the Left–Right scale to structure party competition less meaningfully in Ireland, Belgium and (to a lesser extent) Germany.

[48] This modelling strategy follows recent research in its attempt to disentangle the competing effects of different groups' preferences on policy outcomes (Gilens and Page 2014).

reasons. First, it controls for the possibility of autocorrelation, and secondly, it reflects earlier studies by Budge and Adams, who find that parties have electoral incentives to shift their Left–Right position in the opposite direction of the shift between the last two elections.[49]

As expected, the parameter estimate on *Voter Shift* is positive and significant for the first three specifications. This means that, by and large, parties are responsive to preference changes among women, men and the overall electorate, which is what Hypothesis 1 predicted. Substantively, the estimate in Column 2 means that if the average Left–Right self-placement of women in a given country shifts by one unit (either to the left or the right) between two elections, then parties do, on average, shift by 0.29 units in the same direction. Moreover, the estimates also show that parties are more responsive to preference changes among men than to those among women. For a one-unit change in the average Left–Right position of men, parties tend to shift half a unit in the same direction – the effect is almost twice as strong as that for women. Furthermore, when analyzing the responsiveness to both preference shifts in the same model (Column 4), the coefficient for women's preferences loses statistical significance, whereas the effect becomes even stronger for men's preferences.[50] This in turn supports Hypothesis 2, which states that parties are more responsive to Left-Right shifts among men than to those among women.[51] Finally, the coefficient for *Party Shift (t − 1)* is negative and highly significant in all four columns, supporting the findings from Budge and Adams, who show that parties tend to alternate the direction of their policy shifts between elections.[52]

Table 4 reports results from the *interaction model* specification. Columns 1 and 3 present parameter estimates for a simple version of the interaction model, whereas Columns 2 and 4 present a slightly more sophisticated version. The latter specification includes additional control variables for past election results. More specifically, *Vote Change (t − 1)* reflects a party's vote share wins or losses at the last election. The interaction term *Party Shift (t − 1) × Vote Change (t − 1)* reflects the findings of earlier studies that parties tend to shift their policy position in the same direction as they did at the last election if they managed to gain votes. If they lost votes at the last election, they are expected to shift in the opposite direction.[53]

Starting with Columns 1 and 3, two coefficient estimates are of particular importance. First, the *Voter Shift x Female Seat Share* interaction effect is very close to zero and statistically insignificant in both models, suggesting that the female seat share in parliament has no significant effect on party responsiveness to Left–Right shifts among women or men.[54] When moving to the more complex model in Columns 2 and 4, the same finding persists: the estimated coefficients for the interaction effect are statistically insignificant and virtually zero. Moreover, the additional variables are insignificant in these model specifications and have no considerable influence on either the vote shift parameter or the interaction effect. This provides support for Hypothesis 4, which states that descriptive representation of women in parliament does not directly enhance their substantive representation.

[49] Adams 2001; Budge 1994.

[50] The z-score for a test of differences between the two coefficients is 2.41 ($p = 0.01$).

[51] Given the high collinearity between the two preference terms, the coefficient estimates in Column 4 should be interpreted with caution. However, to provide additional support for Hypothesis 2, I also ran Cox–Pesaran–Deaton, *J*, and Clarke tests for non-nested models to compare the fit of the two models including only the preferences for women or men. All three tests suggest a significantly better fit for the model including men's preferences, lending further support to the hypothesis that parties are more responsive to men than to women.

[52] Adams 2001; Budge 1994.

[53] See Adams et al. 2004; Adams and Ezrow 2009; Budge 1994.

[54] The coefficient estimate for the interaction effect is statistically insignificant and of trivial magnitude. This suggests that the marginal effect of *Voter Shift* varies only trivially with *Female Seat Share*, which allows me to reject the theory of an underlying interaction (Berry, Golder, and Milton 2012).

TABLE 4 *Party Responsiveness at Different Levels of Female Seat Share, 1973–2012*

	Women		Men	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Voter shift	0.74	0.79	0.71	0.77
	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.33)
Female seat share	–0.01	–0.01	–0.01	–0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Voter shift ×	**–0.02**	**–0.02**	**–0.01**	**–0.01**
Female seat share	**(0.01)**	**(0.01)**	**(0.01)**	**(0.01)**
Party shift	–0.36	–0.35	–0.35	–0.35
(t – 1)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Vote change		0.01		0.01
(t – 1)		(0.01)		(0.01)
Party shift (t – 1) ×		–0.01		–0.01
Vote change (t – 1)		(0.02)		(0.02)
Constant	0.20	0.20	0.15	0.15
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
N	351	351	351	351
R^2	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.15

Note: The table reports estimated coefficients from an OLS regression and robust standard errors in parentheses. The outcome variable is the change in a party's Left-Right position between the current election and the previous election. The definitions of the explanatory variables are given in the text.

Secondly, the estimates for *Voter Shift* are again positive and significant for both women and men. While the effect size was much stronger for men in Table 3, the parameter estimates are now relatively similar for preference changes among both women and men. For a one-unit change in the average position of women along the Left–Right scale, parties are expected to move 0.74 units in the same direction. If men move by one unit, parties, on average, move 0.71 units in the same direction. However, due to the inclusion of an interaction term those interpretations are only correct when considering cases where the female seat share in parliament equals zero. Since all cases included in the study do feature at least one woman in parliament, those numbers become almost meaningless when viewed on their own. Instead, it is important to consider the effect of *Voter Shift* conditional on *Female Seat Share*.[55]

This is where the interaction effect becomes important again. It is negative in all model specifications in Table 4, which suggests that as the female seat share in parliament increases, party responsiveness to women and men decreases, on average.[56] The estimates also suggest that it does so at a faster rate for women (the absolute size of the estimated interaction coefficient for women in Column 2 (–0.0217) is almost twice as large as that for men in Column 4 (–0.0132)), indicating that responsiveness towards women decreases twice as fast as that towards men as more women

[55] This is also necessary when examining the estimates for *Female Seat Share*. More specifically, when *Voter Shift* equals zero the significant and negative coefficient estimates indicate that as *Female Seat Share* increases, parties on average tend to shift more strongly to the left.

[56] One reason for this could be that women care more about, and consequently introduce, more issues that do not necessarily fit well onto the Left–Right scale (Greene and O'Brien 2016). Therefore, an increase in female seat share in parliament could lead to less salience of classical Left–Right issues.

are elected to parliament.[57] Therefore, across the different values of female seat share, parties in general appear to be more responsive to preference shifts among men. In fact, the average marginal effect of preference shifts across all 351 observations is 0.439 for men, and only 0.239 for women. This provides additional support for Hypotheses 1 and 2: parties are responsive to preference shifts among both women and men in their electoral programs, but they are more responsive to men.

ROBUSTNESS

In addition to the model specifications and results presented above, I also ran a set of robustness checks (reported in the Appendix) that confirm the substantive findings of the main analysis. Most importantly, I address concerns regarding the Manifesto Project's Left–Right measure of party positions. The main analysis relies on Manifesto data, because it provides an unparalleled scope of coverage both across countries and over time. However, these data are not free from criticism; chief among them is a long-standing debate surrounding measurement and scaling issues.[58] To account for this debate, a first set of robustness checks duplicates the previous analyses relying on the rescaled Manifesto Left–Right scores proposed by Lowe et al., which are based on the logarithm of odds ratios.[59] Results for those model specifications are reported in Tables A4–A5 and confirm the findings of the main analysis.

Moreover, the main analysis operationalizes female descriptive representation as the seat share of female parliamentarians in a given country for a specific election year. This aggregation to the legislative level could potentially mask significant interparty variation, which might bias the analysis towards the reported null result. Unfortunately, little party-level data exist. Table A7 replicates the main analysis using the most comprehensive available dataset of female seat shares at the party level (which has recently been collected by Greene and O'Brien).[60] The sample size decreases considerably, but the results confirm the findings discussed above.

One possible explanation of the main findings could be the idea of differential party response. More specifically, it could be argued that leftist parties might be more responsive to women and rightist parties more responsive to men. This seems especially likely given recent studies on conservative women, which show that the preferences of female supporters of right-wing parties are further to the left than those of male right-wing supporters and party elites.[61] To control for this possibility, I ran a separate set of analyses that split the sample into rightist and leftist parties, respectively. The results, presented in Tables A8–A11, suggest that neither rightist nor leftist parties are significantly more responsive to women's preferences. As an additional check of the link between female descriptive and substantive representation, I ran a set of models that did not include an interaction term, but instead stratified the sample by female seat share in parliament. More specifically, I split the sample into two halves, where one includes all observations with a female seat share of less than the sample median (26.3 per cent), and the other includes all observations with a female seat share of at least 26.3 per cent. The results, presented in Tables A12–A13, support the substantive findings of the analysis including an interaction term.

[57] Marginal effects plots can be found in Appendix Figures A5–A7. All three figures are based on Table 4 in the main text and compare the results from Columns 2 and 4. Figure A5 is a conventional marginal effects plot with 95 per cent confidence intervals, whereas Figures A6 and A7 employ the binning and kernel methods proposed by Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2016).

[58] Benoit and Laver 2007; Volkens et al. 2013.

[59] Lowe et al. 2011.

[60] Greene and O'Brien 2016.

[61] Beckwith 2014; Campbell and Childs 2015.

The main models are also robust to controlling for different levels of socio-economic status. Tables A14–A15 present analyses for which I computed preference shifts separately for women and men who have an above-median income (education) and for those who do not. The results confirm the main findings: parties are more responsive to men and women with higher incomes (education) than their lower-income (lower-education) counterparts. However, even at high income (education) levels, they tend to be more responsive to men than to women. This in turn suggests that parties do not only condition their responsiveness on voters' socio-economic status; they also exhibit an additional gender bias to the disadvantage of women. Moreover, Tables A16–A18 test whether parties have become more responsive to preference shifts among women over time. This could be due to a number of different factors such as the closing gender gap in education or the idea that parties might have become more aware of the demands of female voters. However, these models do not support the argument that parties have been more responsive to preference shifts among women in more recent years. Instead, parties seem to be more responsive to men throughout the period under study.

Finally, while those additional sets of analyses make changes to the models' outcome and explanatory variables to address concerns about their measurement and validity, Tables A19–A20 report results from a number of robustness checks that make sensible alternations to the main model discussed above. These changes take into account alternative and commonly used explanations of party movements along the Left–Right dimension over time such as the possibility of systematic party policy moderation over time or niche party-specific effects, while also including party- and country-specific fixed effects. The results in both tables provide additional support for the main findings.

In short, the findings discussed in the previous section are robust to a number of alternative model specifications. Even when meeting concerns about the Manifesto Left–Right estimates, when focusing the analysis more strongly at the party level, when accounting for socio-economic differences among respondents, allowing for time effects or when controlling for additional popular explanations of party movements, the findings reported above hold up. Parties are responsive to the mean voter positions of both women and men, they are slightly more responsive to preference shifts among men, and the responsiveness to women's preferences does not seem to depend on the female seat share in parliament. In other words, the analyses do not provide any support for the often-assumed link between the substantive and descriptive representation of women in parliament when focusing on Left–Right positioning as a form of substantive representation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that parties are not equally responsive to preference shifts among women and men. Moreover, while most studies on the representation of women implicitly assume that an increase in the number of women in parliament will also improve the quality of female representation, my results do not support this conclusion. Parties follow the preference shifts of women and men, but they are more responsive to men's preferences. The seat share of women in national parliaments does not condition this finding.

The reason is that in multiparty parliamentary democracies, political parties – not individuals – are the focal point for how citizen preferences are expressed.[62] Parties' general responsiveness to voter preferences might therefore be best understood as being driven by parties as a whole, instead of individual female or male MPs, who in most cases are bound to the party line. Party discipline and party cohesion take precedence over the personal preferences of single parliamentarians. Gate-keeping and socialization also explain why parties in countries with

[62] Dalton 1985; Sartori 1968; Sartori 1976.

more female parliamentarians do not respond to women's preferences any better than those with fewer female parliamentarians. Politicians who are responsible for candidate recruitment influence the number of female candidates who run for office.[63] Women are rarely found in these gate-keeping positions, further hindering their chances of gaining more powerful positions within parties, which therefore has a stronger effect on the political agenda.

This suggests a number of interesting questions for possible future research. First, a stronger focus on party-specific characteristics such as the proportion of women in leadership roles within parties could improve our understanding of the link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women.[64] For example, women who are (shadow) cabinet members, prime ministers or part of a party's manifesto-drafting team can be expected to have a much stronger influence on a party's agenda than other parliamentarians. Therefore, while a higher number of women in parliament per se might not lead to better substantive representation of women, a higher proportion of women in political leadership roles might very well do so. Alternatively, one might also explore the relationship with specific attention to 'free votes', in which parties take no (or only little) interest and where no strict party line is enforced. While the number of such votes is very limited, differences between female and male parliamentarians might be more likely to emerge. Finally, this study's focus on the Left–Right dimension presents only one possible way of analyzing the link between descriptive and substantive representation of women in parliament. Future research could also focus on women's issues specifically and how they are being treated differently by parliaments with different shares of female politicians.

By showing parties to be more responsive to preference shifts among men than women, and by finding no evidence that the seat share of women in parliament conditions this effect, the results presented here warrant further analysis of the quality of substantive representation of women, and call into question the existence of a straightforward link between the descriptive and substantive representation of women.

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[63] Cheng and Tavits 2011; Kittilson 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; O'Brien 2015.
[64] Kittilson 1999; Norris and Lovenduski 1995.

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