

Women Representatives Are More Responsive than Men to Shifts in Public Salience

Zachary P Dickson¹

¹ *University of Glasgow*

zachary.dickson@glasgow.ac.uk

Abstract

There is a long list of normative benefits associated with increasing women’s descriptive representation and past research has shown empirically the substantive benefits women in legislatures provide. Yet, the extent to which women representatives are more responsive to shifts in the priorities of the national public opinion is unexplored and the focus of this article. Using British and American representatives’ dynamic communication on social media, as well as 351 repeated surveys to measure public salience, I demonstrate that women are more responsive than their male counterparts to shifts in issue salience from women specifically and the national public more broadly. These findings challenge the idea that women voters are the sole beneficiaries of an increased female presence in politics and illustrate that responsiveness is not a zero-sum game in that women in parliament outperform men both in responding to the women they represent as well as to the national public.

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