

Social Class and Representation: The Effects of Socialization on MPs' Responsiveness to the Working Class

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Abstract

It is an increasingly obvious conclusion that government is more responsive to higher class voters. Such findings are deeply problematic for conceptions of equal democratic representation, but we still have limited understanding of the various mechanisms driving unequal responsiveness. In this article, I argue that representatives' educational socialization affects how they respond to the working class. I apply this argument in the context of the United Kingdom's House of Commons by focusing on representatives' communication from 2017–2021. Using an original dataset that combines 151 repeated public opinion surveys, as well as representatives' communication online and in parliament, I show that MPs educated at one of the two Oxbridge Universities – Oxford and Cambridge – are more responsive to the middle class while simultaneously less responsive to the working class in relation to MPs with other educational backgrounds. The results of the article contribute to literature on descriptive (mis-)representation as a driver of unequal responsiveness to working class voters.

Keywords— Inequality, class, responsiveness, socialization, elite education

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