

Gender and Political Representation

Session 3: Making a Case for (Women's) Representation

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29 April 2026

Event announcement

Together with the Departments of History and Economics and Political Economy, we organize a speaker series.

- Alexandra Jabbour is our guest this week
- Presentation on “The neighbour signal: Local News Markets and Economic Accountability”
- You are all invited to join us directly after the seminar from 12-13 in Room SCH 100.3

What we did last week...

- discussion of main concepts in the study of gender
- review of three common explanations of gender inequalities in politics

Plan for today

1. Watch and discuss testimonies by female legislators
2. Conceptualize different types of representation
3. Does descriptive representation matter?

Testimonies

Again, remain in your groups to watch the following videos/read the text and discuss which challenges female politicians describe in their day-to-day work in politics. Which types of violence, conceptualized by Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020), can you identify?

Testimonies

Group A



Figure: [Vice: America's powerful female politicians tell us how they broke the glass ceiling](#)

Group B: 0:35-4:28



Figure: [Female leaders in Europe share their personal 'Sofagate' experiences](#)

Testimonies

Group C: 0:50-4:55



Figure: PBS: For Black women in government, highlighting threats and abuse can make it worse

Elements of female experiences in politics

- ongoing effects of violence against women – on the campaign trail and in office
- gendered stereotypes: women stereotyped to be caregivers
- gender as an imposed component of female politicians' identity, leading to
 - emotional pressure
 - identity conflicts
- intersectionality and varieties of experiences
- lack of critical mass and role models

Elements of female experiences in politics

Figure 2
Types of violence against women in politics

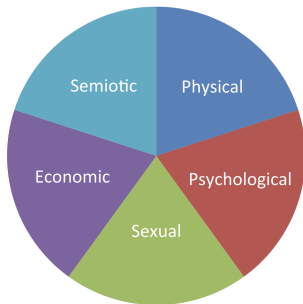


Figure: Types of violence by (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2020, p. 743)

What's representation...?

In the same groups, how can we define representation? What's constituting good representation? Which types of representation exist?

What's representation...?

Representation is about “the congruence of citizens’ views of how representatives should act with representatives’ actual actions” (Wolkenstein and Wratil 2021, p. 868).

It's not (only) about representatives’ responsiveness to citizens (Rehfeld 2009):

- *trustee* model: representative decides what's best for nation
- *delegate* model: representative serves particular constituency

Dimensions of political representation

Initially, Pitkin (1967) distinguishes between four types of representation:

1. **formalistic** representation: legal rights concerning representation
2. **symbolic** representation: representation of an abstract body (like the people)
3. **descriptive** representation: candidates mirror group characteristics of voters
4. **substantive** representation: demand-side preferences shape supply-side behaviour

Which elements does descriptive representation encompass?

One can distinguish between *ascribed* and *achieved* qualities (Linton 1936, p. 115).

- *ascribed* characteristics capture visual aspects, often tied to the outward appearance of individuals (sex, race, etc.)
- *achieved* characteristics deal with qualities that individuals developed through their own behaviour (education, jobs, etc.)

Does descriptive representation matter (for women)?

Should women represent women and blacks represent blacks (cf. Mansbridge 1999)? We are forming two groups.

- **Group A** identifies arguments why descriptive representation is a bad idea.
- **Group B** assesses why descriptive representation might be a good way to improve representation of marginalized groups.

Criticisms of descriptive representation

*Why is descriptive representation a **bad** idea?*

Criticisms of descriptive representation

“When nondescriptive representatives have, for various reasons, greater ability to represent the substantive interests of their constituents, this is a major argument against descriptive representation” (Mansbridge 1999, p. 630)

Criticisms of descriptive representation

Potential problems include...

- essentialism: overemphasis of group identities (polarization?)
- tension with democratic ideals (quotas or re-districting)
- loss of influence in other districts
- reducing emphasis on substantive accountability

Why descriptive representation might matter...

- re-balance historic patterns of exclusion and re-defining stereotypes
- facilitate linkage between constituents and representatives (shared codes and experiences), particularly if interests are uncrystallized
- increase quality of legislative proposals
- addresses concerns of lacking legitimacy

Functions of democracy and representation



Figure: On the abortion debate in the UK (Video by BBC)

Functions of democracy and representation

Mansbridge (1999) distinguishes between two functions of representative democracy.

- Which ones?
- What's their significance for descriptive representation?

Functions of democracy and representation

1. *aggregative function*: decisions by law-makers should comply with the interests of the principals → they need to weigh in the proportion of a group in the electorate
2. *deliberative function*: representation of law-makers informs other law-makers of a group's experiences and preferences

Functions of democracy and representation

According to Mansbridge (1999), descriptive representation notably guarantees the deliberative function. The aggregative function can be achieved by other means...

- politicians want to be re-elected
- if interests of the citizens are not represented, they can prevent politicians' re-election
- anticipating elections, they remain accountable

Does the number of representatives matter?

Mansbridge (1999) argues that there need to be as many representatives of a social background as proportionality allows.

- synergy effects
- critical mass
- dispersion of influence
- intra-group preference heterogeneity

Large scale empirical analyses

TABLE 5 Gender and Women's Representation

	(1)	(2)
Female	0.079 (0.020)	0.083 (0.021)
Commonspace Ideology	-0.196 (0.015)	
District Ideology		-0.256 (0.024)
Congress Fixed Effects	✓	✓
N	2,194	2,194
Adjusted R ²	0.21	0.19

Note: Dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator for intervention on behalf of women in the agencies in Table 1; the unit of analysis is legislator-congress; least squares coefficients with standard errors are clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress intercepts are omitted for readability.

Figure: Results on policy interventions in the US Congress (Lowande et al. 2019)

The role of the political system

The importance of descriptive representation varies depending on the electoral system. *Why?*

The role of the political system

- In single-member districts, the linkage between candidates and voters gains prominence
- In multi-member districts, parties become more relevant; often candidates are voted through party lists, thus being more dependent on them
 - This affects the principal-agent relationship between voters and delegates!

Advancements of the basic representation model

Wolkenstein and Wratil (2021, p. 863) consider, “how citizens want to be represented and whether representatives meet these expectations”

- **Surrogation:** Do candidates care about those voters which did not directly vote for them?
- **Justification:** How do candidates justify their political decisions [pluralist vs. particularistic]?
- **Personalization:** How strong are candidate-party ties?
- **Responsiveness:** How much do policy-makers follow public opinion?

Why might these concept be important?

What we've learned today...

- what the concept of representation is about
- (how to) evaluate the costs and benefits of descriptive representation

To prepare for next week...

- Next week: social norms and their transmission
- Readings:
 - Bicchieri, C. (2017). Diagnosing Norms. In C. Bicchieri (Ed.), *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms* (p. 0). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190622046.003.0001>
 - Giuliano, P. (2020). Gender and culture. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(4), 944–961.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa044>

Thank you for your attention!
Any further questions?

Literature

- Bicchieri, C. (2017). Diagnosing Norms. In C. Bicchieri (Ed.), *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms* (p. 0). Oxford University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190622046.003.0001>
- Giuliano, P. (2020). Gender and culture. *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36(4), 944–961. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxrep/graa044>
- Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanín, J. (2020). The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians. *Perspectives on Politics*, 18(3), 740–755.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001397>
- Linton, R. (1936). *The study of man: An introduction*. Appleton-Century.
- Lowande, K., Ritchie, M., & Lauterbach, E. (2019). Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress: Evidence from 80,000 Congressional Inquiries. *American Journal of Political Science*, 63(3), 644–659.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12443>

Literature

- Mansbridge, J. (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes". *The Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821>
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press.
- Rehfeld, A. (2009). Representation Rethought: On Trustees, Delegates, and Gyroscopes in the Study of Political Representation and Democracy. *American Political Science Review*, 103(2), 214–230. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409090261>
- Wolkenstein, F., & Wrátil, C. (2021). Multidimensional Representation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 65(4), 862–876. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12563>