

Preferences for Descriptive Representation: Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment

Michael Jankowski
(University of Oldenburg)

Abstract

A large corpus of literature argues that descriptive representation is important and can increase the substantive representation of underrepresented groups. At the same time, it is impossible to create a parliament in which all groups of the society are adequately represented. Therefore, normative theories argue that the descriptive representation of certain groups is more relevant than others. However, we know little about the preferences of voters regarding the descriptive representation of different societal groups in parliament. Existing empirical research largely focuses on analyzing voters' preferences for individual candidate characteristics. Such studies are uninformative for assessing voters preferences for descriptive representation as they measure voters' preferences for 'ideal' candidates, but not for the representation of groups. In this article, I design a novel conjoint experiment in which respondents have to decide between two differently composed parliaments and use this design for testing theories about representation preferences. These findings provide a novel perspective on voters' preferences for descriptive representation.

Keywords: public opinion · descriptive representation · political ideology · survey experiment