

GENDER GAP AND REPRESENTATION IN POLAND 1997-2011

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Abstract

The article inspects the extent to which the gender differences produce unequal representation. Women are systematically underrepresented in many of the parliaments in the democratic systems and some scholars argue that this affects the representation of their preferences. The underrepresentation of the ideological preferences of women, however, is not empirically clarified. Based on the Polish National Election Studies 1997-2011, this research finds that preferences of women are worse represented than men. The unequal representation of women is not continuous. This study shows that the congruence of women's preferences with MPs increases while at the same time the gap between men-MPs and women-MPs congruence gap is widening.

Keywords: political representation, congruence, gender, Poland, democratization

Introduction

The inequality of political representation is present in many of the works on political representation. Manin (1997) considers it an outcome of the mixed character of political representation. The blend consists of democratic and undemocratic features of governing. One of the undemocratic features is the inequality of political representation derived from its elitist selective character. There are income differences in which regularly the lower income groups are worse represented. Educational differences consist of the influence of the highly educated while citizens with lower educational attainments are not even present in office anymore (Bovens and Wille, 2009). Finally, there are gender and ethnic gaps in representation. These studies show that descriptive representation is necessary to achieve substantive representation (Mansbridge 1999). There is rich empirical evidence of the gender and ethnicity through descriptive representation. However, the empirical evidence

regarding gender differences in terms of substantive representation is omitted and often inferred.

This article addresses this gap by studying the extent to which the preferences of women are substantively and systematically underrepresented compared to the men in Polish politics and whether the rise of women in parliament has a positive effect on the quality of representation of women. The article contributes to an important discussion on the extent to which the preferences of women can indeed be improved by raising the number of women in parliament. Moreover, it also contributes to the evaluation of the quality of democracy Polish representative democracy that is affected when a large segment of its population is not represented.

The Polish political system is well suited for the study of political representation. The electoral system is proportional. The political offer is diverse and high and citizens have knowledge and can express opinions on political issues and ideology. Poland has a communist legacy of enforced gender equality similarly to other Eastern European countries. This suggests that Poland might not be unique and in other countries of the region one might find similar discrepancies.

To examine unequal representation, this article looks at the proximity between the parliament's position and the left-right positions of women and men. This includes the general left right dimension as also specific issues since variations of congruence can be high across specific issues. Instead of using expert surveys and party manifestoes this article relies on the party placements of a sample of representatives drawn from the Polish National Election Study and nationally representative samples of citizens from 1997 to 2011.

The article will proceed with a discussion of the relevant literature on unequal representation and the effect of descriptive representation and substantive representation. After the introduction of data of the PNES 1997-2011, I describe the method of measuring placements of the elite and citizens and the method of measuring congruence. Results are presented and finally the article concludes with a

discussion of the implications of these findings for the interpretation of political representation.

Political representation

In transitional democratic political regimes, the popular view of democracy should be particularly important. That is why any instance in which politicians follow the citizens' will represents an improvement of the quality of the democratic performance. Political representation refers to the degree of similarity in terms of preferences between citizens and political parties and members of parliament. Eulau and Karps (1977) warned those that study political representation not to reduce this concept to issue congruence. Political representation is a more complex concept than simply a comparison between preferences of citizens and the elite. It is a process through which citizens' preferences are transformed into public policies. In this article, I use an outcome oriented definition of political representation that considers whether citizens' preferences get translated into specific policy outcomes.

Other approaches consider that political representation has an important institutional dimension. Features such as the size of parliament, frequency of elections, turnout and the process of translation of votes into seats as well as electoral formulae are scrutinized to assess how political representation functions at the institutional level. Another set of research relies on the reflection in laws of what citizens prefer. These studies focus on what laws are voted who voted for a law and who voted against or for a law. Roll call behavior studies cover this dimension of representation. The behavior of representatives is yet another dimension deemed important in studies of representation. What the representative does in parliament and outside of parliament what the representative or the parliament is standing for and acting for touches upon the social and symbolic dimension of representation. Studies covering the social composition of the parliament and its reflection of the social composition of society look at gender and ethnic representation in politics. Finally, congruence studies compare preferences and values of citizens and representatives and political parties. These studies are

concerned political representation as a mirroring of citizens' preferences by members of parliament.

To be meaningful, the analysis of political preferences by comparison of issue stances must respect the basic assumptions that work for the responsible party government (Adams, 2001). This implies that parties must have distinct positions on issues and these should have stable preferences. Voters, on the other hand, are required to vote based on policies.

These requirements might seem strong especially for the political party systems in Poland. In several Eastern European countries in the early 90ies the political parties rose and fell with amazing speed. By the end of the 90ies, in most countries the political party system stabilized, possibly with the notable exception of Poland. But the circumstances of transition do not seem hostile for a research on policy positions. If political parties are unstable and lack stability in having stable positions perhaps voters and parties would be more inclined to make more rational evaluations or policy oriented evaluations. Thus, the vote would be less relying on party identification or socio-demographic determinants and more on offer and demand in the electoral market.

Gender and political representation

The social composition of society tends to favor women. Currently, turnout rates are higher for women than men, yet on several other political participation forms, women are rated as less active. Yet their voice in politics is less heard. Women are less politically engaged than men and have less interest in politics. One participation deterrent is the under representation of women in electoral contests. Seeing fewer women that would run in elections would make politics look like an inhospitable place and discourages political involvement (Mansbridge, 1999).

Descriptive representation entails that a social group should be represented by a person that shares physical features and similar experiences and background. Citizens often demand for a

representative that has been born or lived in the same town with them. The constitutions of several countries (US, Romania and Poland) demand that the president should be a national of the country implying improved representation if the candidate is owned. Yet it is normative political theorists like Pitkin (1967) that reject this idea. Kymlicka (1993) views it as untenable and other claim that it is the representation of issues that representation should be focused on. This approach trumps competence over degree of physical similarity with voters. Moreover, the introduction of gender quotas facilitated the birth of tokens that reinforce gender gaps (Dahleup and Freidenvall 2010).

On the other hand, there are examples in which improving the representation of women in parliament, through quotas, had long term positive effects (Mateo Diaz, 2005). These studies are concerned with the motivations behind the low number of women representatives. In Western Europe, over several decades, the number of woman representatives has increased. In northern Europe, the growth was linear while in other countries there were periods of accelerated increase, mainly due to political parties, that introduced quotas for candidates. Political parties viewed as the main gate keepers for women representation, voluntarily adopted special rules for enhanced women representation. An ongoing question remains why some political parties have performed better in representing women. The proportional electoral system brings more women to parliament (Lovenduski and Norris 1993), and increases the proportion of women in party leadership (Kittilson 2006, Dahlerup 2006). Cultural heritage (Mateo Diaz, 2005, 63) is another predictor of gender representation especially in Norway.

These studies have as a normative background the ideals of “parity democracy” (Galligan 2007) namely that equal opportunities and gender equality are desirable. It is a separate, less developed stream of studies that addresses this question. What do women bring different in political representation substantively? The first question is whether women should be treated as a group having similar interests (Philips 1995) or that women bring a different interpretation of the world and the issues (Young 2002). The case studies on Western European countries reveal that there is an increase on

substantive representation of women movements policy agendas and debates in parliament (Lovenduski, 2005). The increase of women in Parliament however does not improve substantive representation. Female legislators overstate their position on issues to be identified separately from male representatives. Mateo Diaz claims that since many female representatives are new MPs it is a question whether they should simply resort to mirroring the preferences of citizens or as new legislators they aim more to form opinions and promote reform. This claim is like the Burkean mandate-independence controversy and it is not restricted to women representatives. In elections and electoral campaigns the gender of a candidate does not result in increased political engagement of the female voters (Wolak, 2015)

In the subsequent section I test whether the number of women in the Polish Sejm has increased and whether the increase is associated with better congruence on the left right scale. This is followed by a comparison of congruence scores on issues. I expect large variances across issues. Namely I expect that on social issues congruence will be increased compared to economic issues.

Methods and Data

The Polish National Election Study are surveys that are applied during each parliamentary election in Poland. Unlike other national election studies the national survey is matched by a survey of a sample of representatives from the newly elected Sejm. The context for the data collection suits the study of political representation. During the electoral campaign, it is more likely that citizens would express preferences on issues and at the same time members of parliament are keen to follow the wishes of the electorate. Although there was a 2015 survey implemented the survey on parliamentary elites was not. The PNES study provides cross national surveys from 1997 to 2011. The data from 1997 to 2011 is publicly available.

Congruence or proximity will be used as a proxy for political representation. This method measures the distance between the citizens and the members of parliaments' preferences. Herein it is measured by comparing the policy and left right preferences of

women and men to the policy preferences of the member of the lower chamber of parliament. This is a direct measure of representation thought to bear more validity compared to alternative measures such as the mean policy preferences of parties extracted from party manifestoes or expert surveys. There are six ways to determine the policy positions of political parties and the citizens. The first is to determine the policy positions of citizens through surveys and compare them to the positions of political parties as stated by experts (Huber and Powell 1994). Second, the position of political parties is estimated through party manifestoes and these are compared to the election results that estimate the electorates preferences (Budge 2001). Third, voters can indicate their own preferences as well as the parties' preferences on several policy scales (Golder and Stramski, 2010). Fourth, the party positions can be estimated from expert surveys and be compared to the answers citizens give to the policy scales on the VAA (Garcia, Bright and Trechsel 2015). Fifth, the political parties' preferences can be estimated from surveys on lower echelon party members and compared to the policy preferences of citizens obtained from surveys (Kitschelt et al. 1999). Sixth, the party preferences can be estimated from the surveys on representatives in parliament and surveys of citizens on the same policy scaling (Miller and Stokes 1963, Burean 2015). This last method is used in this article as it enables a direct comparison of citizens and representatives' preferences. Because the respondents can place themselves and the political parties on the same scale this method would avoid problems of interpretation than inevitably occur when experts are compared to parties or when there are different scales.

This choice holds some questionable assumptions about voters and representatives' capacities to place themselves. When people are uncertain about their policy positions they would choose options in the middle of the scale. Golder and Stramski (2010) found a way around this problem by choosing the most educated citizens in the sample. In the PNES surveys the level of non-response on issues is very low. Moreover, the problem of artificially crowding political party positions in the middle by citizens' choice is not a problem since I use the MPs to estimate the position of their party and of themselves on the left rights scale and on a list of ten issues.

The proximity between the parliaments position and the perception of voters is captured by the “many-to-many citizens’ congruence” (Golder and Stramski 2010). This type of congruence compares the cumulative distribution functions of the MPs and citizens’ preferences. I follow Andeweg (2011) recommendation about using non-cumulative distribution functions since like in the case of the study performed by Andeweg in Netherlands the direct measure of the proximity of mass-elite positions does not require the comparison of cumulative distributions. The measure compares the overlap between the citizens’ preferences and all the representatives’ preferences and precisely displays the percentage of overlap between distributions. The general mathematical formula is simple and it is displayed below:

$$CONGRUENCE (MANY - TO - MANY) = \sum_x |F_1(x) - F_2(x)|$$

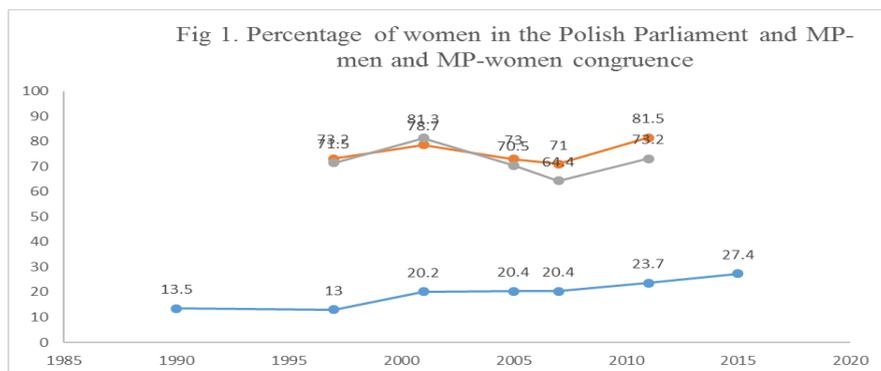
For example, if I choose to compare the overlap between the citizens and MPs preferences on the left-right scale the calculus is done in the following way. If the scale is from one to seven I compare what is the percentage of MPs that answered on answer “1” with the percentage of responses of citizens on answer “1” and I choose the smaller percentage to which I add to the outcome of the comparison of the other answers. This will give me a percentage ranging from 0 to 100 that will show how close is the overlap between the citizens and the MPs preferences.

The congruence on the left-right scale will be used for the study. The left-right scale is present in all the mass-elite surveys under scrutiny. The scale ranges from 0 to 10 in which “0” means a leftist position and “10” means a right-wing position. The scale was recoded into a 1 to 7 scale. This would allow the results to be compared to a similar study conducted in the Netherlands (2011). Reducing the scale artificially augments the overlap yet still it makes the results comparable to the Netherlands.

To test the hypotheses, I compare diachronically the left-right self-placement of the mass and the elite. The analysis is a dynamic one since I compare stages of the Polish democratic regime from 1997 to 2011. Earlier data are not available and the 2015 data is not yet publicly available. I want to see whether with the passage of “democratic time” congruence will improve for females. It is plausible to expect that during the consolidation of democracy there will be some convergence. Further on I compare the congruence on issues of males and females to identify which of the issues are women better represented.

Results

Figure 1 tracks the descriptive of the many to many congruence. It shows that the differences between the congruence on the left right scale of the men and women are largest in 2011. This widening gap started in 2005 with the dismissal of the PiS led government. The highest convergence between men and women occurs in 2001 when PiS came to power. This when women were better represented than men. This figure shows that the gap in representation between men and women is increasing. Notice the blue line that tracks the percentage of women elected in parliament. This has been increasing since 1997. At the same time the congruence scores of women were systematically lower than that of men.



World Bank Data. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (%)

<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2016&locations=PL&start=1990&view=chart>

Polish National Election Study – Institute of Political Studies, Polish Academy of Science

The blue line represents the number of women in parliament, the grey line is the congruence score of women with MPs and the orange line represents the congruence score of men with members of parliament.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the main dependent variable

Congruence scores (%)	1997	2001	2005	2007	2011
men	73.2	78.7	73	71	81.5
women	71.5	81.3	70.5	64.4	73.2

Substantive representation on the left right scale

Figures 2 to 6 track the left right placements of the members of parliament and men and women on five electoral years. For these years, it seems the men and the women are closest to each other on the left right which is not a surprise. While the left right preferences of citizens remain stable it is the preferences of MPs that seem to fluctuate more. This indicates that possibly the shifts of representatives on the left right scale coincide with variation in the congruence score. Additionally, the polarized distribution of political parties in Poland brings more congruence with the citizens than a skewed distribution. Moreover, the skewness to the centre right of Polish political parties in 2007 and in 2005 yield lower congruence scores with females.

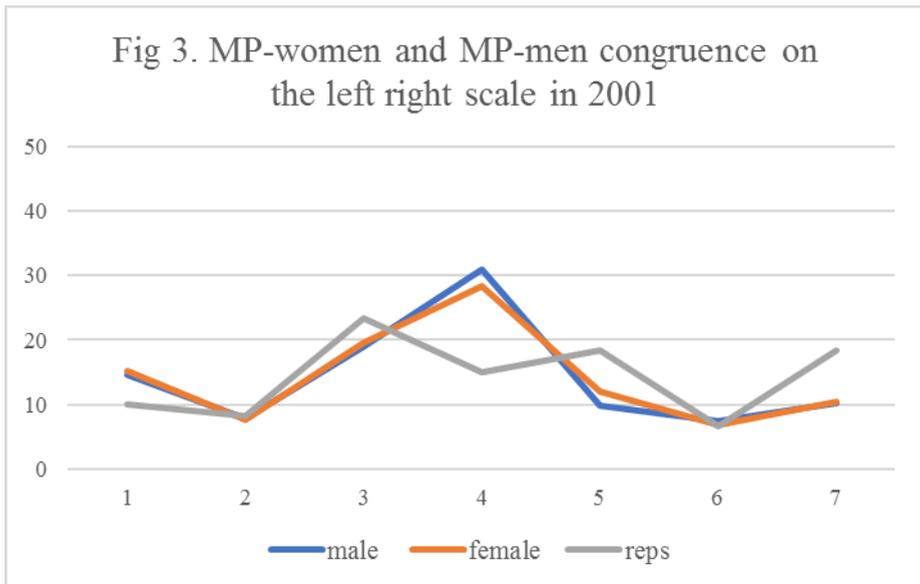
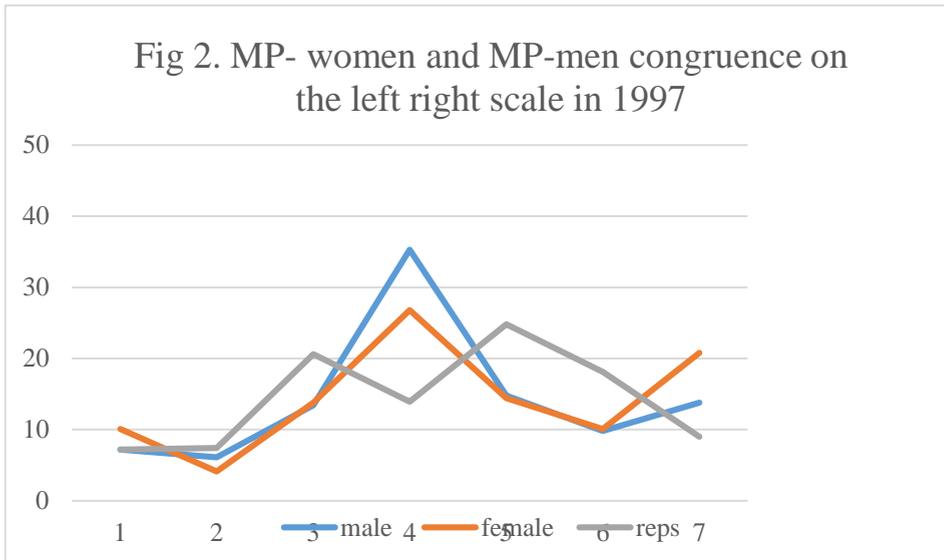


Fig 4. MP-women and MP-men congruence on the left right scale in 2005

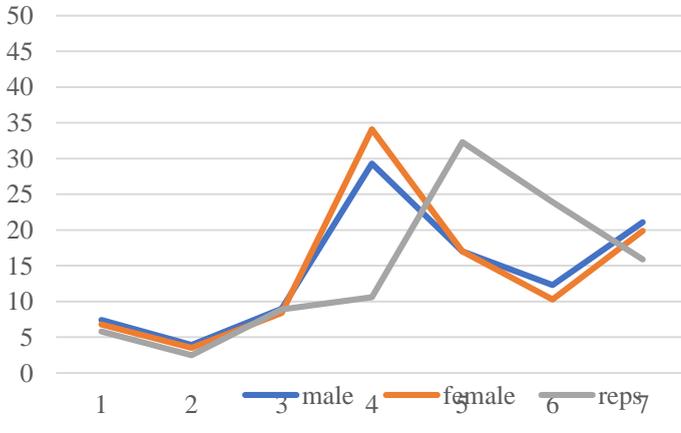
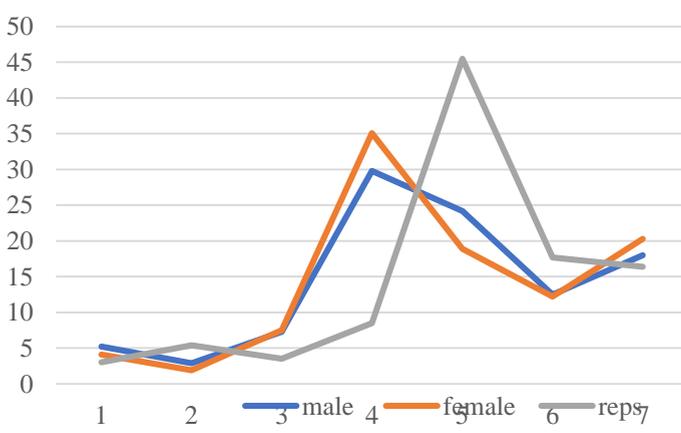
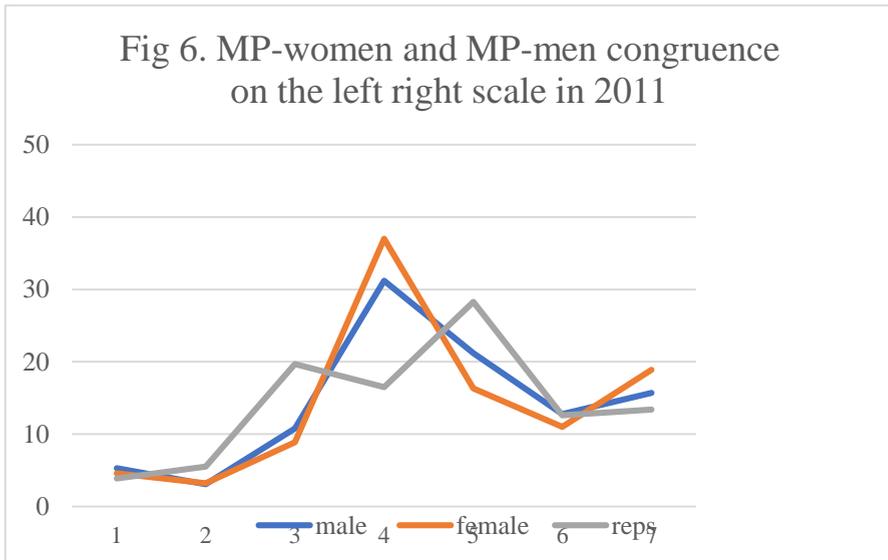


Fig 5. MP-women and MP-men congruence on the left right scale in 2007





Three important observations are due at this point. First the results not only show that females are worse represented in 4 out of the five electoral years but also that the males enjoy an improving representation scores over time. Second, there is only one instance in which the women are better represented. This is in 2001 with the socialists winning 41% of the seats in parliament. In 2001 there was also a 6.8% increase of the number of female representatives, the highest increase of the scrutinized period. Third, the effect of the increased presence of women is not growing in accordance with the passage of democratic time. It seems that, when the former communist political party had its largest share of parliamentary seats, that is when women were substantively better represented on the left right scale.

Conclusion and Discussion

Are the women substantively and continually underrepresented in Polish politics? Studies show that the least affluent groups in politics are the ethnic minorities and women. Dahleup and Freidenvall (2010) argue that quotas often do not work and they just promote tokens that reinforce gender inequality. However, the extent to

which the preferences of women are substantively represented in Polish politics has not been studied. This article fills this gap by showing that the underrepresentation of women is associated with the representation gap, which goes in line with the current debates of a representative deficit in current democracies.

The data from 1997 to 2011 PNES tested the level of congruence between the preferences of men and women and the position on the left right scale of representatives. The article examines the effect of the gender quotas and the passage of “democratic time” on the left-right scale modelling representation in accordance to this proxy for parliamentary behavior. The starting hypothesis were that with the passage of democratic time the congruence between women and MPs will improve but that the increasing number of women that are represented in the parliament does not improve substantive representation.

The results indicate that women are substantively underrepresented by the parliament. The congruence analyses reveal that compared to the men, women, except for 2001, are worse represented by all legislatures until 2011. Thus, substantive representation in Poland works in favor of men thereby providing support for the second hypothesis. However, the support for the underrepresentation is weakened by the passage of time. In time the congruence of women with MPs grows. At the same time the gap between the congruence score of men-MPs and women-MPs has widened.

In democratic systems, it is undesirable to have any group underrepresented. The Polish society experienced decades of equal descriptive representation during communism. This did not transfer to the new democratic regime. Underrepresentation of the preferences of women confirms that the increased descriptive representation might not have the expected effects.

On the other hand, this research showed that the representative substantive democracy seems to work in Poland. The congruence scores of Polish MPs are at the level of Netherlands (see Andeweg 2011) a consolidated representative democracy. It would be fortunate

to explore the underrepresentation of women from a comparative perspective. For example, it would be expected that the underrepresentation of women in the Eastern European parliaments would depend on the size of the parliament and on how parties decide to apply representational quotas. The level of underrepresentation of women is then expected to differ among the Eastern European democracies.

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