

PRIORITIES OF FEMALE LEGISLATORS ARE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS: Evidence from France

Female legislators in France have different priorities than their male counterparts, according to research by **Quentin Lippmann**, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association in Manchester in August 2019.

They are more interested in issues around women, childhood and health, while men are more active on electoral, French overseas and military issues. These findings are partly due to gender differences in legislators' individual interests.

The author examined all the amendments discussed in the French Parliament during the period 2001-2017. The analysis disentangles the effect of constituents' preferences, political party strategy and legislators' individual interests.

From a public policy perspective, the findings suggest that a greater presence of women in politics could lead to a shift in policy-making and increase the prevalence of women's issues.

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For a long time, women were largely absent from the political sphere. To reduce this inequality, over 100 countries have introduced gender quotas. Worldwide, the proportion of seats held by women in parliaments increased from about 11% in 1997 to 24% in 2019. But while women are found in increasing numbers in politics, do female Members of Parliament (MPs) focus on the same issues as their male colleagues?

In theory, there are two opposing views on the role of politicians' gender in the work they do. On one hand, MPs should represent the interests of all of the electors in their constituency in Parliament. Their gender should not therefore have an influence on their legislative work.

But another set of arguments maintains that politicians' gender could play a decisive part, arguing that MPs listen more attentively to or share the priorities of the electors of the same gender.

These two theories have different implications in terms of public policy. If instead of representing solely the interests of the electors in their constituencies, MPs also represent the interests specific to their gender, then putting in place parity obligations in politics would ensure that the interests of women are equally represented in Parliament.

To investigate this question, the study focuses on the French Parliament where gender quotas were introduced in the early 2000s. To measure whether there is a gendered difference in areas of interest among French MPs, the analysis focuses on the production of amendments and use text analysis to identify amendments' topics.

Analysis of the amendments initiated in the French Parliament reveals a clear gendered division of focus in the parliamentary work. Female legislators are respectively about 100%, 50% and 25% more likely to initiate at least one amendment related to women's, child and health issues.

At the other end of the spectrum, women are respectively almost 40%, 25% and 10% less likely to initiate at least one amendment related to military, electoral and French overseas issues.

An analysis of the underlying mechanisms reveals that this division appears to be due, to a large extent, to differences in personal objectives between female and male parliamentarians.

These results would suggest that the presence of women in politics has enabled a change to be made in the contents of the public policies passed by Parliament. Therefore, gender quotas may lead to policies that better encompass the interests of women in the population.

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