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Women's Substantive Representation: Defending Feminist Interests or Women's Electoral Preferences?

ANOUK LLOREN

To what extent does the inclusion of marginalised groups in policymaking institutions influence policy outcomes? This article examines whether and under which conditions female legislators are more likely to represent women's interests compared with male legislators. Building on the literature on women's substantive representation, it is argued that the advocacy of women's interests by female representatives depends on a number of factors, namely party affiliation, contact with women's organisations, electoral district, and seniority. This argument is evaluated using vote-level fixed-effect models based on a unique data set from a direct democratic context that combines representatives' voting behaviour, women's voting preferences, and recommendations from feminist groups. The findings show that female legislators defend feminist interests more than their male colleagues but that they only marginally respond to women's electoral preferences. Moreover, gender has its most visible effect within the populist party.

Keywords: *representation; women's interests; women's electoral preferences; roll call votes; Switzerland.*

Introduction

Over the last decades, the descriptive representation of women and other minority groups in parliaments has steadily improved across established democracies.¹ Yet, it remains unclear whether this progress has resulted in better substantive representation for women and minority groups. Building on the literature on women's substantive representation, this article examines whether and under which conditions female members of parliament (MPs) are more likely to represent women's interests compared with male MPs. It highlights an important distinction between feminist interests and women's electoral preferences and argues that female MPs' advocacy of women's interests depends on a number of factors, namely party affiliation, contact with women's organisations, district characteristics, and seniority. In particular, female MPs are expected to make a difference in policy choices within right-wing parties. This argument is evaluated based on a unique data set from a direct democratic context, namely Switzerland. The Swiss case provides a unique opportunity to address the question of women's substantive representation because Switzerland's political system is characterised by the simultaneous presence of direct democracy and parliamentary democracy.

Furthermore, party discipline is relatively weak in the National Council, which gives us the opportunity to examine competing determinants of voting behaviour towards women's interests. As such, this article compares MPs voting behaviour towards: (1) recommendations from feminist organisations; and (2) women's electoral preferences for exactly the same legislative projects. Thus, it offers an opportunity to measure women's interests in terms of both female voters' preferences and of projects that have been publicly defined as relevant for achieving gender equality by the Swiss feminist movement. This distinction turns out to be essential for the voting behaviour of female MPs: based on vote-level fixed-effect models that control for all observed and unobserved characteristics on the vote level, the findings show that female MPs defend feminist interests more than their male colleagues but only marginally defend women's electoral preferences. The difference in support for feminist interests and women's electoral preferences has important implications for future research on the representation of minority groups more broadly.

The Substantive Representation of Women and Marginalised Groups

Numerous studies have addressed the question of democratic responsiveness. Scholars focusing on the link between public opinion and political decision-making have long shown that congruence between elites and citizens as a whole is, in general, fairly met in established democracies (Wlezien & Soroka, 2009). However, more recent research has suggested that voters have only a limited influence on political elites: they merely elect rather than select policies (Lee, Moretti, & Butler, 2004).

Research has also highlighted that representation can be characterised by inequalities. Thus, established democracies are often less responsive to low-resource groups such as poor, black women or non-voting citizens (Lefkofridi, Giger, & Kissau, 2012). Broadly speaking, these studies indicate that marginalised groups have limited influence on political decision-making. The absence or the under-representation of these low-resource groups in policymaking institutions, such as the parliament, is often blamed for this lack of democratic responsiveness. Along this line, an important strand of the literature investigates whether and to what extent the inclusion of marginalised groups in policymaking institutions influences policy outcomes.

Concerning women's representation, scholars have argued that women's presence in parliaments would transform the way of doing politics and its content, particularly in favour of women (Phillips, 1995). Women are seen as actors changing the political culture: they would progressively transform the competitive way of doing politics and create a more consensual and pragmatic political arena. Furthermore, some argue that the representation of women's interests implies their inclusion in legislative bodies. But women's presence is not a guarantee that women's interests will be addressed, although it should certainly increase its probability. In other words, descriptive representation

(presence) is believed to be a medium for achieving substantive representation (acting for women).

This argument is reinforced by ongoing research on the gender gap, which has shown that women hold different political preferences than men (Funk & Gathmann, 2010; Giger, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Indeed, female citizens are more left wing and more supportive of welfare policies than their male counterparts. This trend is also visible in Switzerland, even though it was one of the last western democracies to grant political rights to women at the federal level (Bütikofer & Engeli, 2010).² Surprisingly, these results also suggest that there is no gender generation gap: left and liberal political attitudes are shared by the different generations of Swiss women, the older generations not being more conservative than the younger ones. Like ordinary female citizens, female elites are thus often expected to manifest more liberal and leftist preferences than their male colleagues.

While descriptive representation has made great progress (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2012), it remains unclear whether the presence of higher numbers of women brings about policy changes, especially if it fosters women-friendly policies. Accordingly, the question remains whether female legislators represent women's interests better than their male counterparts.

Factors Affecting the Substantive Representation of Women

Examining the role of women's presence in parliament for substantive representation, Mansbridge (1999) has argued that descriptive representation makes it possible for social experiences to reach a political dimension, in particular when the group's interests are not explicit and organised. Shared social experiences, especially the experience of gender discrimination, should render female legislators more attentive to women's issues. Along these lines, previous studies indicate that legislators who have daughters rather than sons adopt a more liberal voting behaviour, that is, similar to voting with the democrats, when women's issues are at stake, especially on abortion issues (Washington, 2008). From a more general perspective, other research has shown that descriptive representation increases women's substantive representation in terms of content and frequency (Carroll, 2001; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Swers, 2002).

Dahlerup (1988), however, suggests that a critical mass of women is necessary for women's substantive representation to occur: change in female MPs' behaviour would only become apparent after a certain level of presence has been attained. This threshold fluctuates from 10 to 35 per cent according to the different studies (Studlar & McAllister, 2002). But recently, scholars have shown that numbers are not a guarantee of influence: the position and the weight held in political institutions are often more important. Thus, the substantive representation of women is more a function of critical acts from some key actors (Dahlerup, 2006).

Other research arrives at more ambiguous conclusions. From a theoretical viewpoint, scholars have argued that women's substantive representation is impossible: they deny that shared social experiences are enough to embody a group perspective and that women can be considered as a homogeneous and organised group bearing a common political project (Weldon, 2002). Furthermore, empirical studies have revealed that an increase of female MPs is not automatically followed by an improvement of women's representation. On the contrary, the more women are included in the decision-making process, the less they are able to cooperate (Studlar & McAllister, 2002). The increase of women's diversity (social origins, political affiliations) could explain their incapacity to ally. Additionally, researchers have revealed a potential gap between discourse and behaviour: what female legislators say is not always what they do, because they can be subject to party pressures, but also because of the 'closet feminist syndrome',³ which can bias their perception and discourse (Dodson, 2001, p. 228).

Throughout this discussion, the central hypothesis relates to the representation of women by female legislators and can be formulated as:

H1: Female legislators are more likely to represent women's interests than their male counterparts.

In the following analyses, this hypothesis is re-evaluated for the Swiss case in which parliamentary discipline is relatively weak so that the effect of gender on roll call voting can be examined. In contrast to previous research, direct democratic procedures allow us to combine representatives' voting behaviour, women's voting preferences, and recommendations from feminist groups for exactly the same legislative project. Hence, it affords a unique opportunity to compare MPs' responsiveness to organised interest groups (feminist interests) and to female constituency preferences.

Besides gender, other factors must be taken into account in order to understand women's substantive representation: party affiliation, links between representatives and women's organisations, district characteristics, and seniority. The following sections discuss the importance of these dimensions and how they relate to women's substantive representation as well as to the voting behaviour of female MPs.

Party Affiliation

Party affiliation is generally considered to be the best predictor of legislative voting behaviour, even towards women's interests (Snyder & Groseclose, 2000). In other words, political parties influence the degree to which parliamentarians act or can act for women. Historically, left-wing parties integrated women's interests to their political agenda, and studies have shown that left-wing representatives act more frequently in favour of women (Bratton, 2005; Swers, 2002).

Yet, these results must be qualified. While it is true that left-wing representatives tend to defend women's interests more often, researchers have shown that right-wing female MPs more frequently support women's issues than their male colleagues (Senti, 1999; Swers, 2002). Childs (2004) also noticed that, in some contexts, left-wing women can be more loyal to their party than their male counterparts, even when women's interests are at stake, because parties can make or unmake political careers.

The issue at stake can also influence the extent to which party affiliation matters: party exerts less influence when moral issues are being voted upon. Concerning issues that fall outside the left–right dimension, Snyder and Groseclose (2000) wrote: 'We find almost no evidence of party influence on "moral" issues such as abortion, homosexuality . . . Even in the UK, where parties are otherwise highly disciplined, votes on such matters as abortion, divorce law, homosexuality, and Sunday entertainments are frequently free votes on which no whips are issued' (pp. 193–194). Gender equality issues can be considered as such by parties, which will let their members decide freely on how to vote. However, Cowley and Stuart (1997, p. 127) have shown that the majority of free votes still follow partisan lines in the UK. This finding indicates that members of a party share similar ideological preferences on most moral issues and that party unity can be achieved without external pressure. Furthermore, party matters more when salient issues with regard to the left–right divide are examined. In such cases, gender identity can challenge party affiliation, especially within right-wing parties.

Compared with most parliamentary systems, party discipline is relatively weak in the Swiss National Council, although it is still higher than in a presidential system such as the US. Precisely, left-wing parties (the Social-democratic Party and the Green Party) display the greatest party cohesion for final votes. Representatives belonging to right-wing parties are, on the contrary, less subject to party discipline, especially members of the Swiss Peoples' Party (Sciarini, 2007). Thus, the Swiss case provides a good opportunity to examine women's substantive representation because weak party discipline enables MPs to vote according to their intrinsic preferences.

Recently, women in right-wing parties have aroused scholars' interest. On the one hand, studies have shown that the right is not ideologically homogeneous. With regard to gender issues, right-wing female MPs are often said to be more liberal than their male counterparts. This is especially the case in the US within the Republican ranks (Carroll, 2001; Swers, 2002). On the other hand, gender has less impact within left-wing parties because legislators are, in general, more liberal on cultural issues such as abortion or gender equality issues. Furthermore, left-wing parties also manifest a strong degree of cohesion in the Swiss lower chamber, which leaves – *de facto* – no room for gender difference in voting behaviour.

Furthermore, different right-wing parties can carry specific visions of the place women should occupy in society. In many European countries, the right

is now divided into two poles consisting of a traditional and a populist right, the former being more liberal on cultural issues, such as abortion or women's labour participation, and, consequently, more prone to defend women's interests. But scholars have also pointed out that right-wing women can defend women's interests from a non-feminist perspective (Childs & Webb, 2011; Wiliarty, 2010). This is sometimes the case for female and male members belonging to right-wing populist parties. The question of female MPs' different viewpoints towards women's interests is addressed by paying special attention to their behaviour within right-wing parties.

H2: Female legislators affiliated to right-wing parties are more likely to represent women's interests than their male counterparts. On the other hand, gender does not have an effect on legislators affiliated to left-wing parties.

Moreover, the strength and position of political parties must be taken into account. Grey (2006) underlines that gender equality policies are mostly carried out when the left holds positions of power in parliament and in the executive. Furthermore, opposition parties, especially when they are ideologically to the left, are more prone to propose gender equality policies, although they are not able to carry them out, their role being symbolic and aimed at criticising the majority. In Switzerland, the executive, that is, the Federal Council, is characterised by three principles (Kriesi & Trechsel, 2008): the principle of non-hierarchy grants each of the seven ministers the same power; the principle of non-responsibility makes the Federal Council independent from parliament; and the principle of concordance establishes that all important parties take part in the executive. The four most important parties, namely the Liberal-radicals, the Christian-democrats, the Social-democrats, and the Swiss People's Party, composed the Federal Council from 1959 to 2008. Furthermore, the 'federal administration initiates almost half of the bills, thus taking the lead over the Parliament in the initiation of legislative processes' (Sciarini, 2007, p. 468). Thus, partisan control of the agenda is rather weak in Switzerland. This is why no hypothesis related to partisan control of the agenda is tested in this paper.

Feminist Identification

Studies have discussed whether women's substantive representation is reached through the presence of women in general, who do not always share feminist values, or through the presence of feminists, who could be women or men (Tremblay & Pelletier, 2000). Feminist identification plays an important role in this debate and can be measured by looking at whether a deputy maintains formal relations with feminist organisations. Generally, female MPs have more contacts with feminist organisations than their male counterparts and this could explain why women's issues are more often considered as political priorities for them: 'Women's organizations seem to function as an important linkage mechanism in representation, connecting women officeholders to other women and to a

more collective vision of women's interests, thus providing at least a weak form of accountability' (Carroll, 2006, p. 375). But Childs and Withey (2006) show that formal links to feminist groups are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to explain why gender equality policies are adopted: critical acts by a single deputy and, more importantly, governmental support are key elements for achieving women's substantive representation. Furthermore, Weldon's (2002) findings suggest that women are better represented by women's movements and women's policy agencies than by female MPs. Nevertheless, formal membership of representatives in feminist organisations⁴ is an important factor explaining women's substantive representation. Members of parliament who identify with feminism, whether female or male, are expected to be more likely to defend feminist bills (but not necessarily women's electoral preferences).⁵

H3: Legislators who maintain formal links with at least one women's organisation are more likely to represent feminist interests.

District Characteristics

Female MPs can also have an incentive to defend women's issues because they feel accountable towards women as a group, which they consider as a distinct constituency at the district or national level. Among factors explaining why MPs are responsive to their female constituencies, re-election is probably the strongest. Childs (2004, pp. 108–123) shows that female Labour MPs take it to heart to represent women as a distinct constituency: they are often contacted by women and by women's groups coming from within and outside their electoral district. Simon and Palmer (2010) address this question and focus on the link between representatives and their electoral district. They examine whether the voting record of succeeding MPs elected in the same district changes according to their sex and their parties and conclude that for intra- and inter-party change 'female members of Congress do not necessarily vote the way they do because they are women but because of their constituency' (Simon & Palmer, 2010, p. 227). On the other hand, Swers (2002) suggests that district characteristics are not significant in explaining why representatives support women's issues in the US Congress.

Based on this argument, district characteristics concerning gender equality might play an important role for the representation of women. Councillors elected in modern and urban districts, which usually are the cantons that manifest a strong attachment to gender equality, are expected to represent feminist interests more frequently (but not necessarily women's electoral preferences). To test this assumption, Bühler's (2001) gender equality index is used. It captures the social modernisation degree of a canton concerning gender and is measured through five indicators: the rate of women that graduated from high school; the rate of women in the workforce; the date women were granted the right to vote

in each of the 26 cantons; the approval rate for the federal referendum on women's suffrage in 1971; and the proportion of women elected within cantonal legislative bodies. Overall, French-speaking cantons rank higher on the gender equality index than German-speaking cantons.

H4: Legislators elected in electoral district that rank high on the gender equality index are more likely to represent feminist interests.

Seniority

Another potentially important factor is the extent to which a representative has just started, or has had, a long political career. In general, seniority is a factor that enhances the representatives' independence from their party or from their constituency preferences. This independence can help them to defend gender equality policies, especially for right-wing MPs (Childs, 2004; Swers, 2002). Nevertheless, the opposite hypothesis could also be true: young MPs might be more in favour of women's interests than their older counterparts because gender equality is more widespread in the younger generations of the population.

H5: Legislators with seniority are more likely to represent women's interests.

Overall, these hypotheses lay out important factors that influence the substantive representation of women in parliament and the conditions under which the gender of MPs plays a role. Before describing the data and methods used to evaluate these arguments, the following section provides some background to the Swiss case.

Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women in Switzerland

Women have long been excluded from the political sphere in Switzerland: they were granted the right to vote and to be eligible at the federal level only in 1971. Since then, the proportion of women in parliament has increased almost steadily at each election (Table A1 in the Appendix). In 2007, Switzerland was ranked 25 out of 141 in the World Classification of Women in National Parliaments, with 28.5 per cent of women elected in the National Council (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2012).

Yet, this steady increase in women's representation hides disparities along political lines: female legislators mainly belong to left-wing parties (Table A2 in the Appendix). Moreover, the electoral forces in Switzerland tend to favour centre and right-wing parties, thus disadvantaging women who seek to be office holders. This fact can be explained by strategic and ideological factors, which led left-wing parties in the 1980s to seek electoral support from women, to encourage feminine candidatures and to integrate gender equality issues in their political agendas (Ballmer-Cao, 2005).

Very few studies have examined the question of women's substantive representation in Switzerland. Ballmer-Cao and Schulz (1991) showed that female legislators initiated most parliamentary initiatives on gender equality from 1971 to 1983. Furthermore, female MPs intervened more frequently than their male counterparts during floor debates when gender equality projects were examined. For his part, Senti (1999) studied MPs' voting behaviour for 10 gender equality bills from 1975 to 1993. His results indicated that left-wing parties were more supportive of gender equality policies than right-wing parties. Moreover, he showed that right-wing female MPs sometimes allied with the left and, consequently, voted against their parties. This occurred mainly when partisan polarisation was weak.

Data and Methodology

The central goal of this article is to evaluate whether voting in favour of women's interests is influenced by gender and whether this gender effect varies by party affiliation, feminist identification, district characteristics related to gender equality, and seniority. In order to address this question and evaluate the hypotheses formulated above, this article relies on Swiss roll call votes data from 1996 to 2008: it includes the voting decisions of each representative sitting in the National Council for final votes, that is, the last stage of the legislative process. Direct democracy procedures in Switzerland provide a unique opportunity to merge this information about MPs' roll call votes with peoples' voting choices for exactly the same legislative projects. The data set thus combines MPs' voting behaviour, women's electoral preferences, and recommendations from feminist organisations.

The data set is structured on the vote-MP level so that each observation represents the vote of a particular MP on a certain issue. Based on this data set, the main analyses rely on vote-level fixed-effect logistic regression models, which control for all observed and unobserved characteristics of particular votes. Thinking about individual panel data (the most common application), these models 'control for all time-invariant differences between the individuals, so the estimated coefficients of the fixed-effects models cannot be biased because of omitted time-invariant characteristics ... Fixed-effects models are designed to study the causes of changes within a person [or entity]' (Kohler & Kreuter, 2009, p. 245; see also Legewie, 2012). For the case at hand, fixed-effect models allow us to obtain coefficients that assess the effect of gender within each vote so that the estimates are based on differences in the voting behaviour of MPs for the same vote and conditional on all observed and unobserved characteristics of particular votes. Among these unobserved characteristics are, for example, public opinion, media attention, polarisation, and the legislative session.

Nevertheless, the causal effect of women's representation on policy decisions is difficult to disentangle in so far as confounding factors that are not captured by

the fixed effect term could bias the estimates (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004, p. 1410). The main argument of this article states that a legislator's gender affects vote choice, but as the assignment of gender is not random, other factors could determine the outcome variable. While the fixed-effect term controls for all characteristics on the vote level, district characteristics such as the political preferences of voters or their attitudes towards women and gender equality or MP-level characteristics could confound the estimates. To address this problem, the analyses include further control variables that capture important potential confounders on the district and MP level such as partisan affiliation. Additional sensitivity analyses for a subset of the models presented below was also performed. These sensitivity analyses replace the variable for district characteristics with district fixed-effect terms (dummies for each district) and thereby also control for all observed and unobserved factors on the district levels. The results are essentially the same with similar size point estimates (available from author) and as such further support the results presented here.

The dependent variable measures support for women's interests. Two alternative conceptions of women's interests are examined, namely feminist bills and women's electoral preferences. First, women's interests are considered as collectively constructed by the feminist movement (Bratton, 2005; Carroll, 2006). Feminist interests comprehend all legislative projects that aim at 'overcoming oppression and transcending the societal production/reproduction divisions that locked women into positions of relative inferiority' (Skjeie, 1991, p. 237). In order to select feminist bills, positions taken by the Federal Commission for Women's Issues (FCWI) were examined. The FCWI is 'an extra-parliamentary permanent commission, which ... comprises representatives of major women's organisations, social partners, academia and other professionals' (<http://www.ekf.admin.ch/index.html?lang=en>). This women's policy agency promotes what has been called equality feminism, which 'challenges the private-public dichotomy and the sexual division of labour, demanding equal rights and responsibilities in all aspects of social life' (Bowden & Mummery, 2009, p. 42). In total, 37 feminist bills were voted on in parliament from 1996 to 2008.⁶

Second, women's interests can also be seen as women's electoral preferences (Campbell, 2004; Lloren, 2014). The ideological gender gap is often used to infer preferences that are specific to women as a group: women declare themselves to be more left, more liberal and more attached to welfare and gender equality policies than men (Funk & Gathmann, 2010; Giger, 2009; Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Nai & Lloren, 2009). In Switzerland, direct democracy procedures render it possible to take into account female voters' preferences for exactly the same legislative projects that are voted on by the National Council. Three types of project have to undergo direct democracy procedures: first, any constitutional change requires a referendum; second, optional referendums can be launched against a new law if 50,000 signatures are gathered; and third, citizens can propose a constitutional change by launching a popular initiative if 100,000 signatures are

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Description	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Dependent variables</i>			
Feminist interests	Support = 1; no support = 0	0.720	0.448
Women's preferences	Congruence = 1; no congruence = 0	0.656	0.475
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Gender		0.262	0.438
Year	Continuous (1928–78)	1948.6	9.037
Incumbency	Incumbent = 1; not incumbent = 0	0.658	0.474
Feminist identification	Yes = 1; no = 0	0.046	0.209
Ideological affiliation	Left parties = 1; right parties = 0	0.333	0.471
Equality index in canton	Continuous going from 1 (equality) to 0 (inequality)	0.472	0.169

collected. Women's voting choices are from the Vox database,⁷ which has compiled surveys providing information on turnout and voting choices for each popular vote held since 1977. In total, citizens were called to give their opinion on 91 popular votes⁸ from 1996 to 2008. Women's electoral preferences are defined as in favour of a particular issue when the majority (50 per cent or more) of female voters supports that issue.⁹

To sum up, support for women's interests is defined by positions taken by the FCWI on each legislative project in the first case. In the second case, support for women's interests refers to women's preferences, which reflect their voting choices for popular votes. In both cases, the dependent variable 'support for women's interests' is coded as '1' when a legislator's vote is in favour of women's interests on a particular issue and '0' when it is not.

The main independent variable is the sex of a legislator, which is used as a proxy for gender. In addition, a number of control variables will be added to the model, namely ideological affiliation, age and incumbency as indicators of an MP's seniority, feminist identification, and the degree of gender equality in cantons. Finally, analyses include a number of interaction terms between gender and partisan affiliation in order to investigate the conditions under which gender influences legislators' voting behaviour. Descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables are presented in [Table 1](#).

Results

Feminist Bills

[Table 2](#) presents the results of the logistic fixed-effect regression models that show the support for feminist bills. As expected, ideological affiliation is the most important predictor. Compared with right-wing parties that are the reference category, MPs belonging to left-wing parties are more likely to support feminist laws, that is, to follow the recommendations cast by the FCWI.

Table 2: Gender Effects on Support for Women's Interests

	Feminist Bills		Women's Preferences	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
<i>Sociodemographic factors</i>				
Female	1.069*** (0.135)	1.287*** (0.147)	0.139** (0.050)	0.359*** (0.075)
Year	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.007 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)
<i>Political factors</i>				
Feminist identification	0.627* (0.269)	0.603* (0.263)	-0.007 (0.089)	-0.004 (0.090)
Incumbency	-0.697*** (0.144)	-0.690*** (0.144)	-0.016 (0.057)	-0.009 (0.057)
<i>Ideological factors</i>				
Left	4.528*** (0.190)	5.010*** (0.246)	-1.400*** (0.045)	-1.297*** (0.052)
Left*Female		-1.418*** (0.348)		-0.390*** (0.098)
<i>District characteristics</i>				
Equality index	0.682* (0.308)	0.636* (0.310)	-0.043 (0.123)	-0.071 (0.123)
Constant	13.421 (12.090)	12.150 (12.095)	3.884 (5.163)	2.767 (5.179)
Vote-level fixed-effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Log-likelihood	3115.725	3099.831	15,855.267	15,839.148
N	5787	5787	15,574	15,574

Notes: Unstandardised logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses. Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Concerning the main hypothesis, the results indicate that being a female legislator has a significant and positive influence on support for feminist bills (Table 2, column 1). These findings confirm that female councillors are more disposed than their male colleagues to vote in favour of feminist policies, which might be explained by the fact that women as a group share specific social experiences (Phillips, 1995).

The first column of Table 2 also shows that the hypothesis concerning the impact of an MP's seniority is not confirmed. Coefficients for age and incumbency are negative: in other words, a long political career does not seem to increase the likelihood of voting in favour of feminist policies. To be precise, the coefficient for age is small and negative. Results for incumbency seem to confirm this trend: parliamentarians holding office for the first time are more likely to be congruent with positions taken by the FCWI.

Feminist identification, which is measured through formal affiliations to at least one feminist organisation, appears to be a significant factor affecting votes towards feminist legislation: the coefficient is positive, suggesting that MPs belonging to a feminist group are more likely to support feminist policies. Following Carroll (2006), Swiss women's organisations seem to operate like

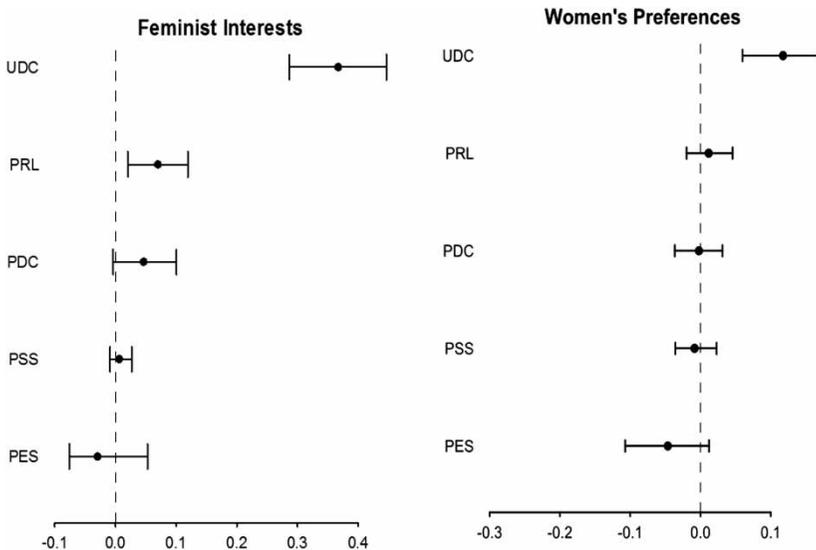
interest groups by aggregating the demands of women and making them known to elected officials.

The model also tests the effect of district characteristics on support for feminist legislation. The results show that the degree of gender equality in a canton does significantly influence MPs' voting choices. The direction of the coefficient indicates that legislators elected where gender equality is high are more likely to vote in favour of feminist bills. This result suggests that parliamentarians behave as delegates of their electoral constituencies when they manifest a commitment to gender equality.

The regression model presented in the second column of Table 2 adds an interaction term between gender and ideological affiliation. Results indicate that right-wing female MPs more often support feminist policies than their male counterparts from the same ideological family.

Figure 1, which is based on Table A3 in the Appendix, details the mean effect of gender within the five biggest parties in Switzerland.¹⁰ The figure shows the average difference in predicted probabilities for support of feminist interests

Figure 1: Mean Effect of Gender within Swiss Political Parties for Feminist Interests and Women's Preferences



Notes: The figure shows the average difference in predictive support for feminist projects and women's preferences for female and male MPs by party with a confidence interval of 95 per cent. For each MP, the predicted probability of supporting feminist projects and women's preferences is based on the model presented in Table A3 in the Appendix. The predicted probability has been calculated for the same MP under the hypothetical scenario that this MP is of the opposite sex. The figure shows the average of the predictive differences between male and female MPs. The confidence intervals are based on simulations of coefficients and the predictive mean difference obtained from each of these simulations. For a list of parties and their abbreviated names, see note 10.

for female and male MPs by party with a confidence interval of 95 per cent. The findings confirm that gender and party interact, and that this effect varies substantially within the three right-wing parties. In brief, the more a party positions itself on the right, the more gender exerts a positive influence on votes towards feminist bills. Thus, being a female legislator affiliated to the Swiss People's Party (UDC) and to the Liberal-radical Party (PRL) significantly increases the likelihood of voting for feminist policies compared with being a male affiliated to the same parties. The effect of gender is also almost significant within the Christian-democratic Party (PDC). In brief, [Figure 1](#) shows that female members of the UDC are almost 40 per cent more likely to vote in favour of feminist bills than their male counterparts. Regarding the Liberals, female deputies are still almost 10 per cent more likely to support feminist policies than their male colleagues. On the contrary, [Figure 1](#) indicates that gender does not have a significant effect within left-wing parties.

Women's Preferences

[Table 2](#) also presents the results concerning support for women's voting preferences. In other words, this section investigates the question of congruence between MPs' and female citizens' voting decisions for 91 legislative projects.

As for feminist bills, [Table 2](#) (column 3) shows that being a female representative has a significant and positive impact on voting in favour of women's preferences when controlling for ideological affiliation. Female legislators are more likely to be congruent with female voters than their male colleagues. Common social experiences, especially experiences of gender discrimination, are a potential factor explaining why female elites and citizens make similar voting decisions. This finding confirms the conclusions of Lindgren, Inkinen, and Widmalm (2009), who have shown that female elected officials are more responsive to citizens' preferences.

But [Table 2](#) also indicates that left-wing parties support women's preferences less frequently than right-wing ones. This finding is not surprising, given the balance of powers in the Swiss political landscape: indeed, the right has always won the majority of seats in parliament.

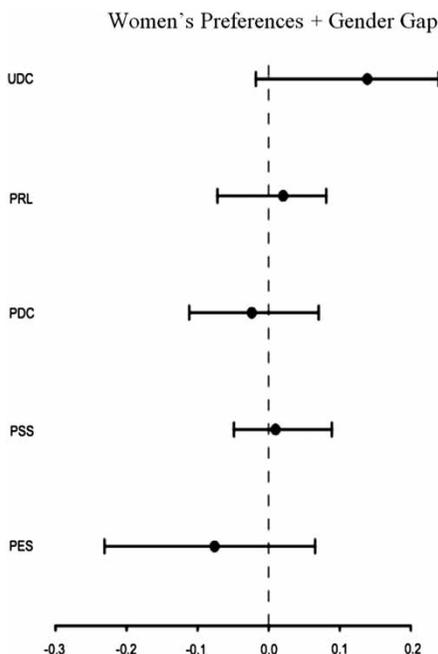
Furthermore, the results show that the other factors tested do not contribute to explaining MPs' behaviour towards women's preferences. Thus, both indicators testing the effect of seniority are not significant, though the direction of the coefficient for age and incumbency is in the same direction: it seems that a long political career hinders congruence with female voters. Although it is not significant, the coefficient measuring the effect of feminist identification is also negative, suggesting that representatives who are formally affiliated to at least one feminist organisation are less likely to take similar voting decisions as female voters. Regarding district characteristics, the results show that the degree of equality in a canton is negatively correlated with congruence between elites and female voters, even though the coefficient is not significant. Again, these findings must be interpreted carefully: recall that women's revealed preferences are

moderately conservative and that right-wing parties represent them better than left-wing ones. In this regard, it is not surprising that legislators affiliated to a feminist group and elected in cantons that rank high with regard to gender equality are less close to women's voting choices.

Results regarding the interaction effects of gender and ideological affiliation are presented in [Table 2](#) (column 4). The findings show that female legislators from the right are more likely to be congruent with women's preferences than their male counterparts. As for feminist bills, [Figure 1](#), which is based on [Table A3](#) in the [Appendix](#), details the mean effect of gender within the biggest parties regarding support towards women's electoral preferences. It shows that gender only has a significant impact within one party, namely the UDC. Indeed, female legislators affiliated to the populist party are almost 10 per cent more likely to be congruent with female voters than their male counterparts. Within the four other parties considered, gender does not significantly influence MPs' voting behaviour when women's preferences are at stake. [Figure 1](#) does, however, suggest that right-wing female MPs are more likely to support women's preferences than their male counterparts (PRL and PDC), while being a left-wing female seems to have the opposite effect (Social-democratic Party [PSS] and the Green Party [PES]).

Additional analyses were performed using the gender gap in policy preferences in order to select a more restrictive set of projects for the category of women's voting preferences. In general, women's and men's voting choices are not very different from one another, but 18 legislative projects (out of the 91) significantly divided female and male voters at the 5 per cent level.¹¹ The analyses show that using 'women's preferences + gender gap' as a dependent variable does not increase the link between a legislator's gender and vote choice. The results are presented in [Figure 2](#), which is based on [Table A3](#) in the [Appendix](#). The findings indicate that a legislator's gender has no significant effect within the five parties considered. Thus, [Figure 2](#) shows that the mean effect of gender is almost significant within the UDC. The results also clearly indicate that gender has no effect in the four other parties when 'women's preferences + gender gap' are examined.

To sum up, the results indicate that women's interests are better represented by female councillors than by their male colleagues. The utilitarian argument, which states that the inclusion of women in parliament brings about a political benefit, especially for women, is thus confirmed. The effect of gender on voting behaviour is more modest for women's voting preferences than for feminist legislation and in both cases the effect of it is larger within the populist party. Accordingly, the results suggest that citizens – and even more so low-resource citizens – have to organise around a common organisational structure in order to have their voices heard and their preferences taken into account by political elites. Finally, additional analyses integrating female voters' ideological identification were performed because women cannot be considered as a homogeneous group. Results investigating the question of intra-partisan congruence

Figure 2: Mean Effect of Gender within Swiss Political Parties for Women's Preferences + Gender Gap

Notes: The figure shows the average difference in predictive support for women's preferences for female and male MPs by party with a confidence interval of 95 per cent. For each MP, the predicted probability of supporting feminist projects and women's preferences is based on the model presented in [Table A3](#) in the [Appendix](#). The predicted probability has been calculated for the same MP under the hypothetical scenario that this MP is of the opposite sex. The figure shows the average of the predictive differences between male and female MPs. The confidence intervals are based on simulations of coefficients and the predictive mean difference obtained from each of these simulations. For a list of parties and their abbreviated names, see note 10.

between legislators and women citizens are presented in the [Appendix](#) ([Table A4](#)). In brief, they show that left-wing female MPs are closer to women voters identifying with the left and with the right.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, the descriptive representation of women and minority groups in parliaments has steadily improved across established democracies. Yet it remains unclear whether this progress has resulted in better substantive representation. This article has examined whether and under which conditions female MPs are more likely to represent women's interests compared with male MPs.

Using a unique data set combining MPs' voting behaviour, women's electoral preferences, and recommendations from feminist organisations, this article has estimated the effect of gender on the substantive representation of women based on vote-level fixed-effect models. The data set allows us to highlight an important distinction between feminist bills (the political agenda of feminist groups) and women's revealed preferences (the voting choices of the female population). This article has thus conducted the first study confronting two alternative conceptions of women's interest.

The results indicate that a legislator's gender has an effect on how he or she votes. Thus, female MPs are more likely to defend feminist bills than their male colleagues. Additionally, the results have shown that feminist interests are better represented by representatives who identify with feminism, and who are elected in cantons that rank high in terms of gender equality. Importantly, the findings also indicate that the effect of gender is much weaker for women's electoral preferences. In both cases though, gender interacts with party affiliation and has its most visible effect within right-wing parties, especially within the populist party.

Considering two alternative definitions of women's interests has thus enabled us to show that female legislators are more likely to support feminist bills than women's electoral preferences during final votes. One explanation of this finding relates to the importance of interest groups on policymaking. Feminist interests stem from organised pressure groups whereas women's preferences are the spontaneous aggregation of women's voting choices. To be precise, women's organisations have publicly taken a stand on these legislative projects. Given that MPs are informed on these recommendations, in particular through the consultation phase of the legislative process where women's organisations are included, it is not surprising that female MPs are more responsive to these issues. On the other hand, women voters are rarely presented as a distinct constituency in Switzerland. This can explain why female MPs are less responsive to women citizens, although in the end it is still female voters, not women's interest groups, who elect and sanction representatives.

This finding is of considerable importance because interests and preferences can sometimes be opposed. This has been highlighted in studies investigating attitudes towards welfare policies: 'Many people have a preference for a level of redistributive policy that clearly is not in their best interest, for instance – they are wealthy themselves but support politics that favour the less advantaged' (Soroka & Wlezien, 2010, p. 7). But other research has shown that during hard times, such as economic crisis, the personal interest of those who do not expect to be welfare beneficiaries will increase, which in turn will diminish all the more public support for social and redistributive policies. Hence, a cleavage between beneficiaries and contributors of welfare policies can arise, and interests and preferences of a segment of the population coincide. Similarly, feminist interests and women's preferences can be opposed. For example, the establishment of maternity leave was a project defended by feminist organisations and was framed as being in the interest of women. On the other hand, this project has for a long

time not been part of Swiss women's preferences because a majority of female voters refused this legislative project several times (1984, 1987 and 1999).

Sidney Verba (1995) argued that political participation is a prerequisite to democratic responsiveness. While turnout does not seem to increase the substantive representation of women, results suggest that organised groups are a powerful instrument to make specific interests visible to political elites. Thus, by articulating and aggregating specific interests, politically organised groups ensure to a certain degree that the voice of marginalised citizens is heard. If the inclusion of low-resource groups in decision-making institutions increases the quality of democracy, active lobbying can also have a sizeable effect on who – and what – is represented.

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Notes

1. Women make up 20 per cent of elected officials in parliaments worldwide and 23 per cent in European countries (Inter-parliamentary Union, 2012).
2. Political rights were granted to women in 1971 at the federal level.
3. 'Those who may hold attitudes consistent with major feminist organizations but be unwilling to associate themselves with feminists' (Carroll, 1984, as cited in Dodson, 2001, p. 228).
4. Only 17 councillors out of 378 (13 women and four men) declared themselves to be members of at least one women's group.
5. These feminist groups are all situated on the left of the political spectrum, as there were not any MPs who were affiliated to right-wing women's organisations.
6. These recommendations can be found on the FCWI's website: <http://www.ekf.admin.ch/?lang=fr>
7. Vox surveys can be found on the FORS website: <http://forsdata.unil.ch>
8. All popular votes are listed on the Confederations' website (<http://www.admin.ch>), which also provides clear information on whether a legislative project has been accepted/refused by the people and by the parliament.
9. Among these 91 popular votes, the FCWI issued recommendations for only 19 projects. These 19 projects are included in the category labelled 'feminist interests', which was discussed earlier.
10. A list of parties and their abbreviated names are as follows: UDC = Union démocratique du centre = Swiss People's Party; PRL = Parti libéral-radical = Liberal-radical Party; PDC = Parti démocrate-chrétien = Christian-democratic Party; PSS = Parti socialiste Suisse = Social-democratic Party; PES = Parti écologiste Suisse = Green Party.

11. Griffin, Newman, and Wolbrecht (2012) used a similar approach to assess women's preferences. They compared constituents' preferences on a specific issue with their representatives' roll call votes on the same issue. Moreover, they selected issues for which there are significant gender differences in mass preferences. The authors conclude that there is no gender gap in dyadic policy representation in the US Congress.

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Appendix: Intra-partisan Congruence

Like most studies on women's representation, analyses revealed that feminist policies are better represented by left-wing parties (Carroll, 2001; Senti, 1999; Swers, 2002). But surprisingly, results indicated that right-wing parties better represent women's voting preferences. This means that right-wing elected officials are more congruent with the majority of female voters. Some might object that our operationalisation of women's preferences is too restrictive, as female voters cannot be considered as a homogeneous group. Thus, scholars have shown that, next to gender, other characteristics must be taken into account in order to understand which specific preferences female voters hold, such as, for example, generation effects or ideological identification (Bütikofer & Engeli, 2010; Campbell, 2004; Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Following the approach used for female elites, additional analyses integrating female voters' ideological identification were performed. In other words, this appendix investigates the question of intra-partisan congruence between legislators and women citizens in order to circumvent the compositional effect, which is due to considering women's mean voting choices only. Two dependent variables measuring congruence between elites and female voters that identify with, first, left-wing parties, and, second, the right-wing parties, were created. Again, these dependent variables take the value of '1' when congruence between elites and citizens within one ideological camp is achieved and '0' when congruence is not attained.

Table A4 presents the results of the analysis concerning intra-partisan congruence between elites and female voters. Column 1, where ideological affiliation is controlled for, shows that female legislators are significantly more likely to represent the preferences of female voters who identify with the left. On the contrary, being a female does not increase the likelihood of representing female voters identifying with right-wing parties (column 3). As expected, results also show that intra-partisan congruence is achieved.

Columns 2 and 4 seek to untangle the interaction effects of gender and ideological affiliation. Regarding female voters identifying with the left, the results indicate that female legislators are more likely to represent left-leaning female voters than their male counterparts ($\beta = 0.139$). More surprisingly, the findings also suggest that right-wing female legislators are more often congruent with women's preferences identifying with the left than their male colleagues ($\beta = 0.498$). The same does not apply for the preferences of female voters identifying with the right. Thus, according to Table 2 (column 4), gender has no significant effect on intra-partisan congruence within the right.

Table A1: Women's Representation in the Swiss Parliament Since 1971(%)

Election	National Council	Council of States
1971	5	2.2
1975	7.5	0
1979	10.5	6.5
1983	11	6.5
1987	14.5	10.9
1991	17.5	8.7
1995	21.5	17.4
1999	23	19.5
2003	25	23.9
2007	28.5	21.7
2011	29	19.6

Source: The Swiss Parliament (<http://www.parlament.ch/e/Pages/default.aspx>).

Table A2: Percentage of Women Elected by Party (1995–2011)

Election	PES	PSS	PDC	PRL	UDC
1995	50	35	15	18	10
1999	62.5	39	23	21	7
2003	54	46	32	19.5	5.5
2007	50	42	39	19.5	13
2011	100	46	32	23	11

Source: The Swiss Parliament (<http://www.parlament.ch/e/Pages/default.aspx>).

Table A3: Gender Effects on Support for Women's Interests

	Feminist Bills (1)	Women's Preferences (2)	Women's Preferences + Gender Gap (3)
<i>Sociodemographic factors</i>			
Female	0.494 (0.291)	-0.015 (0.126)	-0.156 (0.291)
Year	0.004 (0.008)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.007)
<i>Political factors</i>			
Feminist identification	-0.059 (0.316)	0.041 (0.091)	0.185 (0.225)
Incumbency	-0.063 (0.181)	0.106 (0.060)	0.181 0.164
<i>Partisan affiliation (ref: PDC)</i>			
PES	3.967*** (0.641)	-1.572*** (0.147)	-1.938*** (0.380)
PES*Female	-1.131 (0.757)	-0.222 (0.283)	-0.257 (0.519)
PSS	4.260*** (0.304)	-1.557*** (0.078)	-2.195*** (0.193)
PSS*Female	-0.095 (0.503)	-0.023 (0.145)	0.214 (0.338)
PRL	-0.657*** (0.179)	0.048 (0.079)	-0.049 (0.189)
PRL*Female	0.300 (0.389)	0.098 (0.173)	0.264 (0.401)
UDC	-3.443*** (0.214)	-0.563*** (0.078)	-0.590** (0.187)
UDC*Female	2.784*** (0.486)	0.708*** (0.217)	0.982* (0.518)
<i>District characteristics</i>			
Equality index	-0.057 (0.491)	0.007 (0.167)	0.520 (0.440)
Constant	-9.901 (15.425)	-1.606 (5.298)	7.4479 (13.227)
Vote-level fixed-effect	Yes	Yes	Yes
Log-likelihood	2135.102	15,725.483	2528.914
N	5787	15,574	2844

Notes: Unstandardised logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.
Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A4: Gender Effects for Intra-partisan Congruence between Elites and Female Voters

	Women's Preferences			
	Intra-partisan congruence for the left		Intra-partisan congruence for the right	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	0.347*** (0.056)	0.498*** (0.072)	0.023 (0.055)	0.091 (0.078)
Left	1.444*** (0.052)	1.553*** (0.062)	-1.712*** (0.050)	-1.676*** (0.058)
Left*Female		-0.359*** (0.108)		-0.130 (0.105)
Vote-level fixed-effect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Log-likelihood	13,786.89	13,775.72	13,534.789	13,533.270
<i>N</i>	15,574	15,574	15,574	15,574

Notes: Unstandardised logistic regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; control variables are not presented in the table but were integrated in the models.

Significance: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.