

SÉMINAIRE

SciencesPo
CENTRE DE RECHERCHES
INTERNATIONALES



SciencesPo
CENTRE D'ÉTUDES EUROPÉENNES
ET DE POLITIQUE COMPARÉE

Les sciences sociales en question :
grandes controverses épistémologiques et méthodologiques

Compte rendu de la 48^e séance

Measuring support for better political representation of women and minorities

13 May 2019

The session is introduced by Nonna Mayer (CEE)¹.

Are opinion polls reliable? Survey-embedded experiments tell us it depends on how the questions are framed, and how informed the public is about the issue. Hilde Coffé and Marion Reiser use them to explore the support for measures increasing the political representation of women and ethnic minorities in Germany. Testing first what respondents know about the proportion of women and minorities in the Bundestag, then providing some with the correct information, some not, they show that political knowledge matters.

Hilde Coffé's (University of Bath) main research interests include public opinion, political behaviour and political representation. She recently published "Taking the case of Germany. Political candidates' attitudes towards group representation", *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 24(3), 2018, p. 272-297 (with Marion Reiser) and "Representing Diversity in Mixed Electoral Systems: The Case of New Zealand", *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71 (3), 2018, pp. 603–632 (with Fiona Barker). The presentation is inspired by a paper she wrote with Marion Reiser. « Perceptions and knowledge about the descriptive

¹ Report written by Camille Escudé (CERI/Sciences Po) and approved by the speakers.

representation of women and ethnic minorities and its impact on support for measures to increase their representation ».

The discussant is Réjane Sénac (Sciences Po, Cevipof, CNRS) studies equality policies, especially those promoting parity and diversity. She recently published the chapter "France: The Republic Tested by Parity » of the *Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights* (2019) and "Explaining Gender Gaps in Legislative Committees », *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 2018, 39(3), pp.310-335 (with Rainbow Murray).

Hilde Coffé

In her introduction, Hilde Coffé underlines the importance of equal representation for the well-functioning of democracy, and the introduction of different measures, such as quotas, to increase the representation of traditionally underrepresented groups (in particular women). Around the world, various countries have introduced measures such as party quotas, reserved seats, etc. to increase the representation of underrepresented groups – have mainly aimed at increasing the proportion of women MPs (far less for other social groups that have traditionally also been underrepresented such as ethnic minorities)

She is focusing on the effect of perceptions and knowledge – relates to the ongoing debates about citizens' (generally assumed) low levels of political knowledge, citizens being misinformed, uninformed, etc. She also broadens the perspective of most existing studies on only women and includes another politically marginalized group. This also allows us to examine whether explanatory patterns for supporting the introduction of measures to increase women's representation are similar to those aiming at increasing the representation of ethnic minorities.

It is important to understand citizens' attitudes towards quotas as public opinion may influence policy makers or legitimize the existence of quotas.

Her research question is: To what extent do citizens' perceptions and knowledge about the descriptive representation of women and ethnic minorities affect their support for measures to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities?

There are a growing number of countries with gender quotas (party quotas, legislative quotas etc.) aiming at increasing the political representation of women. But there are few countries where quotas for ethnic minorities exist. Overall, support for gender quotas is relatively small. Research does show some patterns when explaining support for gender quotas, with for example women being more likely to support the introduction of gender quotas compared with men.

For example, Katrine Beauregard² has shown that the vast majority of Australian citizens does not believe that any measure should be taken to increase the number of female MPs. The largest group (almost 42%) believes that it will happen naturally. Similarly, a New Zealand study that Hilde Coffé conducted together with colleagues, revealed that 46% believed that it would happen naturally. 15% believes that nothing should be done at all. More than 60% thus believed that there is no need for any measures (it will either happen naturally or nothing should be done at all). Only 4 % of New Zealand citizens supports legally requiring political parties to select more women candidates by means of a 'quota'.

There is a link between perceptions of the representation of women and ethnic minorities on support for measures to increase their representation

Starting from an "exposure-based" explanation³, suggesting that people are influenced by what they see and perceive and by their observation of the situation as being (un)fair, Hilde Coffé presents several hypotheses.

Hypothesis (1): The more women or ethnic minority MPs citizens believe that there are, the less likely they are to support the introduction of initiatives to increase women's or ethnic minorities' representation. This first hypothesis is quite straightforward. If you think that there are a lot of women/ethnic minorities in parliament – you probably don't see the need to increase their representation and will thus be less likely to support the introduction of measures to increase their representation.

A significant number of citizens may not know (have no idea about) the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament. Effect of being uninformed: Citizens who are uninformed are expected to differ from those who are informed (whether it is correct or

² Katrine Beauregard, « Women's representation and gender gaps in political participation: do time and success matter in a cross-national perspective? », *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 6(2), 2018, 237-263

³ Katja Möhring and Celine Teney, « Contextual Determinants of Citizens' Support for Gender Equality in Leadership Positions across Europe », *Arbeitspapiere - Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung*; 169, 2017.

not), in particular in their likelihood to not know whether measures should be taken⁴.

Hypothesis (2): Those who do not know (who have no idea about) the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament will not know whether initiatives to increase their representation should be introduced. A significant number of people may have no idea about the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament (14% in the American study of Kira Sanbonmatsu on women's representation)⁵. These people are uninformed – if you are uninformed you are probably also not able to know whether you believe that measures should be taken to increase the representation of certain groups or not.

Next question: To what extent does receiving the correct information about the representation of women/ethnic minorities matter?

Hypothesis (3a) Those who believe that there are few women/ethnic minorities in parliament (and underestimate their current representation) and receive the correct information about the representation of women/ethnic minorities will be less likely to support measures to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities than those who believe that there are few women/ethnic minorities in parliament but who do not receive the correct information.

Hypothesis (3b) Those who believe that there are a lot of women/ethnic minorities in parliament (and overestimate their current representation) and receive the correct information are more likely to support measures to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities than those who believe that there are a lot of women/ethnic minorities in parliament but who do not receive the correct information.

When discussing the effect of perceptions and knowledge about the representation of women and ethnic minorities on support for measures to increase their representation, an important remaining - and so far unanswered - question is whether receiving the correct information makes a difference. In other words, do people change their mind about the introduction of initiatives to increase the representation of both groups once they know the actual representation of women and ethnic minorities in parliament.

Based on the literature on the effect of political knowledge on attitudes/behaviour, one would expect that receiving the correct information would change citizens' opinions

⁴ Flynn, D.J., Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler, « The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics », *Advances in Political Psychology* 38(1), 2017, 127-150.

⁵ Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2003, 'Gender-Related Political Knowledge and the Descriptive Representation of Women », *Political Behavior*, 25 (4), 2003,367-388.

towards the introduction of quotas. For example, looking at the (mis)perceptions about party composition in the US, Ahler and Sood⁶ show that when provided information about the out-party's actual composition, people do change their minds. This would suggest that when people are provided the correct information about the proportion of ethnic minorities/women in parliament, they are likely to change their opinion about the introduction of measures to increase the representation of both groups.

But misperceptions can continue to affect opinions even after being successfully corrected. What is the impact of receiving the correct information about the representation of women and ethnic minorities?

Hypothesis (4): Receiving the correct information about the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament will not affect the support for measures to increase their representation among those over- or underestimating the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament.

Starting from the expectation that when people think that there are only few women/ethnic minorities in parliament uninformed citizens will be more likely to support measures to increase women's and ethnic minorities' representation, receiving the correct information is expected to positively affect support for measures to increase the representation of women and ethnic minorities.

Hypothesis (5): Those who do not know the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament and receive the correct information are more likely to support measures to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities than those who do not know the proportion of women/ethnic minorities but not receive the correct information. While alternative hypotheses can be formulated for the effect of receiving the correct information among those who are *misinformed* (and thus over- and underestimating the proportion of women and ethnic minorities in parliament), we expect that receiving the correct information will affect the opinion of those who are *uninformed* (rather than *misinformed*) about the representation of women.

Hilde Coffé then presents a study case on the German case. Women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the German Parliament: 37% women; 6% ethnic minorities (at the time of the survey). Most parties have party quotas for women. No quotas or specific (formal) measures to increase the representation of ethnic minorities

⁶ Douglas J. Ahler and Gaurav Sood, The Parties in Our Heads: Misperceptions about Party Composition and Their Consequences, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 80 (3), 1980, 964-981.

in German parties. Her experimental approach is that it is ideal to test the causal effect of receiving the correct information while keeping all other variables under control.

- (1) Respondents were asked the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in parliament.
- (2) Half of the respondents received the correct information about women's or ethnic minorities' representation (the so-called "ask and tell" half) while the other half did not receive the information (the so-called "ask only" half).
- (3) All respondents were also asked their opinion about possible measures to be taken to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities.

Each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (receiving the correct information or not receiving any information). Support for the introduction of measures to increase women's and ethnic minorities' representation in parliament. The question asked was: "When thinking about the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in the Bundestag, should there in your opinion measures be taken to increase the proportion of women/ethnic minorities in the Bundestag. Which of the following statements do you agree with?"

After presenting her data, Hilde Coffé outlines the main conclusions.

- (1) Citizens' perceptions of the representation of women/ethnic minorities matter for their attitudes towards measures to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities: The more women/ethnic minorities citizens believe there are in parliament the less likely they are to support the introduction of measures to increase their representation.
- (2) Citizens who are "uninformed" about the representation of women/ethnic minorities differ significantly from those who are correctly informed or misinformed: They are significantly more likely to not know whether measures should be taken.
- (3) Receiving the correct information does (marginally) change the opinions about the introduction of measures to increase women's representation among uninformed citizens: Uninformed citizens who receive the correct information are significantly more likely to support the introduction of measures to increase women's representation than uninformed citizens who do not receive the correct information.
- (4) Having the "correct knowledge" about the representation of women/ethnic minorities (vs being misinformed) matters little for support for measures to increase the representation of women/ethnic minorities.
- (5) Attitudes vs quotas may be relatively stable: You're in favour or against it.

Réjane Sénac

Réjane Sénac begins by thanking Hilde Coffé with this very stimulating study on the link between perceptions and knowledge about descriptive representation of women and ethnic minorities German citizens and their impact on support for measures to increase their representation. It stands well in relation to the abundant literature on gender and politics, more precisely on the both controversial and trendy subject of electoral quotas for parliamentary elections.

As a preliminary to the discussion, she wants to underline that she is not a specialist of quantitative approach. Indeed, Réjane Sénac is a political theorist, her researches tackle how public policy issues intertwine with theoretical frame and challenge. She works in particular on public justifications of equality policies as the promotion of parity, diversity or same-sex marriage legalization. So, she will not arbitrate the legitimacy and the limits of the experimental design, in particular in terms of composition of the sample and difficulties to make quantitative analysis with a low number of respondents. She will just shed some lights on general challenges raise by this study. She will address two kind of issues: first, the implicit assumptions and pending issues at stake in this study; second, connected debates, or even blind spots.

1. Implicit assumptions and pending issues:

The key assumption of the study is that citizen support for the adoption of positive action is highly relevant for the legitimacy of such measures. Three pending issues on this assumption:

- It would be interesting to make the link between this argument and those analysed as central in the public justifications of gender quotas implementation. For example, Drude Dahlerup identifies four main arguments: the non-discrimination principle, the contribution of minority group's experiences and specific interests, the crucial role of political representation in terms of exemplarity to deconstruct stereotypes, gender stereotypes but not only⁷. Finally, we can quote the argument of increasing the legitimacy of the democratic system, for citizens belonging to minority groups (but not only) seeing women or ethnic minority in political (*voice argument*) is a source of confidence (*trust argument*) in its institutions.

⁷ See Drude Dahlerup (Ed.), *Women, Quotas and Politics*, New York: Routledge, 2006.

- To what extent does Hilde Coffé consider the link between support and legitimacy in a democratic regime?

In a representative democracy, elected representatives do not have an imperative mandate, they represent the general interest and not the sum of special/private interests. In this perspective, popular support is not the primary criterion of legitimacy but rather the application of fundamental rights as equality principle.

- With regard to the link between knowledge and support, how does Hilde Jeremy Coffé position herself in front of the “epistemic democracy” which is defined by Waldrom as the “doctrine of the wisdom of the multitude”?⁸

Christian List and Robert Goodin, for example, maintain that “for epistemic democrats, the aim of democracy is to ‘track the truth.’⁹” In that respect, what is the political? Is there politics of equality behind equality policies, as electoral quotas? In other terms, what is the place of ideas and ideological pluralism in Hilde Coffé’s study?

As pointed out by Drude Dahlerup, gender quotas constitute an important research subject, as it creates controversy around central concepts such as “citizenship, representation, democracy, equality, fairness and the political meaning of sex and gender”. Does Hilde Coffé consider that knowledge/perceptions may be independent from political position, conception of what is fair or unfair?

Hilde Coffé makes a link between citizen firstly concerned by the measure (women or ethnic minority) and the support to these measures. This outcome echoes the debate on the links between descriptive representation and substantive representation, “standing for” and “acting for”. In her seminal work *The Concept of Representation*, Hanna Pitkin defines descriptive representation as “a person or a thing (that) stands for others by being sufficiently like them”¹⁰. She argues that what representative do (substantive) is more important than who they are (descriptive”).

We can also quote Anne Phillips’ book *The Politics of presence* drawing on a distinction between the politics of ideas and the politics of presence. The politics of ideas considers accountability in relation to declared policies and programs, and sees the sex or race of the representative as a matter of relative indifference. In the politics of presence, by

⁸ Jeremy Waldrom, “The wisdom of the multitude”, *Political Theory*, 23 (4), 1995, 563-584.

⁹Christian List and Robert Goodin, “Epistemic democracy: Generalizing the Condorcet jury theorem”, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2001, 9.

¹⁰ Hanna Pitkin, 1 *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1972 [1967], 209.

contrast, the gender or ethnic composition of elected assemblies becomes a legitimate matter of democratic concern. This book addresses the concern that the case for political presence could encourage essentialist understandings of group identity or group interest. It argues against an either/or alternative between the politics of ideas and the politics of presence and for a new combination of these two models of representation. How does Hilde Coffé's study take a stand in this ongoing debate?

Moreover, she specifies that "those who identify with the Green party are significantly more likely to support measures to be taken". "Party identification plays a more significant role for the likelihood of supporting measures to increase ethnic minorities' representation compared with women's representation. In particular, compared with those who identify with SPD, those who identify with CDU/CSU, with one of the smaller parties or with no party are significantly more likely to not supporting the introduction of measures to increase the representation of ethnic minorities than to support the introduction of such measures." How does she interpret this diagnostic in terms of politicization of this issue?

At a time of European elections it is interesting to use the example of Europe: the link between knowledge, perception, support, legitimacy and efficiency is anything but obvious or automatic. Explain how Europe works, its institution but also its objective are not sufficient to generate interest or adherence.

2. Connected debates, even blind spots:

Two connected debates:

- It would be interesting to have information on the specificity or not of the German case. How do global and path dependency issues interact?

In her comparative study of gender composition of French and German parliament at the end of the 20th century, Catherine Achin underlines that paradoxically political elite was more open to women in Germany than in France, even if in terms of social order Germany is more conservative in relation to sexual contract¹¹. Have things changed? In what terms?

Hilde Coffé explains that most German parties have political party quotas. In the beginning of 2019, the state of Brandenburg became the first state to legally require all political parties to nominate an equal number of men and women for state elections,

¹¹ Catherine Achin, *Le mystère de la chambre basse. Comparaison des processus d'entrée des femmes au Parlement, France-Allemagne, 1945-2000*, Paris, Dalloz, Coll. Nouvelle Bibliothèque des thèses, 2005.

starting in late 2020. This introduction, and the suggestion of the Social Democratic Party to push for a similar rule for national elections, evoked a strong debate in the whole of Germany among advocates and opponents of gender quotas.

Does she consider there is a shift between the German legacy *incremental track* based on *equal opportunity* and *competitive equality* frame and a *fast track* frame based on the denunciation of systemic discrimination?

- Is there a specificity or not of the gender issue in terms of political representation and positive action?

A last question is: what about the link between underrepresentation of women and ethnic minority? In her study, Hilde Coffé measures a greater support for gender quotas compared with ethnic minorities quotas. How can we explain this difference? Is it relevant to address the issue of the political place of women stemming from ethnic minorities?

Hilde Coffé

People are more familiar with measures to increase women's representation: there already are quotas. But they are less familiar with minorities' quotas. In New Zealand, there are not quotas but reserved seats for indigenous people (Māori). And people are more supportive toward the idea of such reserved seats for Māori compared with gender quotas. She has maybe an explication: when people are more familiar, they are more supportive. Also, people don't like the word "quotas": it is interesting to look at the concept of quotas, and it is interesting for future research to compare between the difference types of measures.

The issue of intersectionality is very interesting: in parliaments, there are more women from ethnic minorities than men.

How specific is the German case? We don't know but for the support of measures it is relatively comparable with studies in New Zealand and Australia. It would be interesting to see if there is a trend in long term: are people getting used to it?

It is important to see that both the Green Party (*die Grünen*) and SPD have quotas. But people are not very used with measures for ethnic minorities. People seem to support measures which they are the most familiar with. Quotas for ethnic minority are completely

new: there is a much stronger polarization than it is the case for women. We do have data on supporting measure, but we don't know why someone do not support quotas. We could explore some more: why those who are supporting are supporting?

On politics and gender, there is an article to be published on the New-Zealand case.

Questions from the audience

Question: In Germany, there are quite a lot of female ministers, everything seems to be quite equal. But in fact, there is a huge gender gap. Is there a distinction between gender equality on parliament and the head of government?

Question: It is difficult to compare the case from women and ethnic minorities. You were saying that 6% of people in the German parliament are ethnic minorities. How are you counting ethnic minorities?

H.C.: "Ethnic minorities" in the study are people not born in Germany or of whom at least one parent was not born in Germany. Since we only have the data from Germany, we can't make any comparison. But I do think it is relevant to discuss a possible comparison more in the paper, also with Angela Merkel having been chancellor for such a long time! I agree that having a female chancellor can have an effect "oh look how good we are, we have a woman chancellor", and at the same time in the latest elections women representation even decreased. You have this contrasting trend.

Question: In relation to the specificity of the German case: is there an east/west divide? There are differences in the political culture.

H.C.: We did include the east/west divide in the paper (not about identification, but really whether you live in the east or the west). But the former border has no significant effect.

Question: Did you study the case of women who experienced inequality that exists in political engagement in political parties, in unions etc.?

Question: New Zealand is a risky comparison because of the reserved seats for Māori and because it is one of the first countries in the world that gave women the right to vote.

Question: By combining the data from women and minorities: it is invisibilizing women who are minorities? Do they overlap? Are all the black men? At the same time, if this invisibilization continues in the discourse we use it will continue in the practices we have. Are we reducing women to white women?

H.C.: About the representation of ethnic minority and prejudices in society, it makes it useful to distinguish the two parts (gender and ethnic minority), given the differences between both groups. There are very different discourses in the society about women and minorities' representation. About the intersectionality and the overlapping between those two categories, it is very interesting but with the data we have, what we can say about it is very limited.

Question: What is the influence of a federal system? In the case of Germany this is important versus a country like France. What is also the influence of age (e.g. younger women)?

Question: It is difficult to include the AfD, CDU and SPD in the same category. How people see representative across the political spectrum? Why are they in the same category?

Question: By how much are people underestimating the importance of minorities? It would be useful to have more data on that. Who underestimate and does not underestimate? You should look at absolute values in the estimations and use this information in your paper.

Question: Existing ideas and prejudices about quotas are far more important than what people know and don't know. You are shifting from using those perceptions to knowledge. How can you make the difference between perceptions and knowledge of misrepresentations of minorities? If you are assuming that in the "I don't know" category, there are a lot of people who are guessing, you could include the "I don't know" in a random value. Or you could make categories "more than 10%", "less than 20%" etc. to be a little bit more demanding, and then make a category.

H.C.: I see what you mean. We started with the idea of knowledge, but then realized that it is really about perceptions. I think that it is interesting to include the "I don't know" category, and then methodologically how can you include a continuous variable and the "I don't know" variable at the same time. But if we focus on perceptions, it is a continuous variable. We made a category to distinguish the people who overestimate a lot, a little,

and underestimate a lot and a little. You are right, this is something we should think about.

Question: How do you take into account the measure of ethnic minorities by the states you are studying? In France for instance, there are no ethnic statistics. But you can see the name and forename (“prénom”), which shows that he or she is from other origins. It is something contradictory in Western Europe: you have a lot of information about gender equality, comparing with Japan for instance, but few on minorities.

Question (from Nonna Mayer): Working on the misperceptions of the number of immigrants/ refugees/ Muslims, I have the same problem on the dependent variable. It is even more difficult to estimate the number of refugees, so I decided to work just with the median proportions and include the “don’t know” – this is just a suggestion. The problem is that the profile of the “don’t know” in my data is not the same as the profile of those who for instance overestimate the number. Is it so simple for you to mix together the “don’t know” and the misperception category?

Question: What is the part of the ideology? What about those who are feminists, racists? Do you have any data about it?

Question: What is the sense of causality? Are you badly informed because you are prejudiced? Or are you prejudiced because you are badly informed?

Question: You gave them the right numbers. Is there a lasting effect of that information?

Question: There is a problem of definition: when you don’t know, you are, by definition, guessing. The question is whether you are guessing with a bias. A 2% difference is not really not knowing. But if you are giving an estimate that’s 50% above or below, then you are guessing with a bias, you really don’t know. You are taking what you are guessing for reality. The question is, is it a paper about knowledge or about bias? There is a difference between people who don’t really know about reality, but they argue that they do because of their ideology and people who don’t have a problem telling they don’t know. You could still be almost right and be ideological!

one could do a distinction between them and those who are closer to the right answer. Those who are giving a percentage which is very wrong probably are much more politicized. Or they do not want to say they don’t know, because they are embarrassed about not knowing. This is typically gendered because women who don’t know admit it while men take the risk – many experiments show that?

Question Going back to what terminology was used, and the fact that terminology used makes things visible or not visible. How do you define ethnicity? You can be Turkish in Germany and look just as white as someone who is not Turkish. When you say “ethnic minority”, what do you mean? It is not the same as “visible minority” (“musulman d’apparence” in France, a direct import from the US for instance). “Ethnic minority” in Germany has all sort of connotations, not necessarily connected with race. Surely what you are talking about here is race, and the ideology of race, and the representation of racialized people in parliament, rather than ethnic minorities. And appearing white does not mean you are not racialized. What have people thought of when answering the survey? Only racialized people or for instance white people of Russian origins – a very prominent group during the last election? How do you ethnically define a German with Russian origins? Is whiteness the issue? Is it about historical ancestry (for the Russian or Hungarian case)? Germans of Russians origins still are very closed to Russia and were specifically targeted during the last campaign as a group by the AfD. It could be useful to use the specific German word – the wording is important. Words matter!

H.C.: It is really a shame that we don’t have better data on gender equality and presence of ethnic minorities. As shown by the gender literature, yes, women are more reluctant to guess than men are, and we do see this effect. Those who don’t know the numbers are significantly more likely to say that they don’t know if measures should be taken, compared with those who guess but guess it wrongly. So we have to check if this is ok to put those two categories together. But we could explore further, taking the perception or knowledge as a dependent variable and then see if the profiles are similar or different, rather than looking at the effect, and what explains why people are under- or misinformed. Because we don’t know if people are not knowing or if it is people guessing. Ideally, we could know who guesses and who really doesn’t know. We should interview them to know this distinction.