

Gendered Choices?

Tracing Gender Gaps in the Attitudes and Actions of Members of the European Parliament

Abstract

Do male and female representatives differ in their attitudes and actions? Gendered differences are well documented in general publics: across a variety of issues – from the domestic, sociocultural sphere to the realms of international trade and foreign policy – women tend to hold more liberal positions than men. Shifting attention to elite level, however, reveals a yawning void in research. This paper narrows the gap, illuminating the attitudes and actions of Members of the 6th European Parliament (MEPs). A two-step analysis of MEP survey data on the one hand, and roll call voting data on the other, reveals that male and female representatives differ in their legislative behaviour. Within party groups and national delegations, women legislators cast more leftist votes than their male colleagues – both overall and in the areas of gender equality, social welfare, and environmental policy. Findings suggest: ‘politics of presence’ have more than a symbolic function – they make a substantive difference. Women in parliament act for women. These insights in MEPs’ attitudes and actions extend existing studies, providing a novel perspective on voting behaviour in the EP and offering new insights in the outreach and universality of gendered choices.

Keywords: Substantive representation; roll call voting behaviour; European Parliament; gender