

# The Unequal Representation of Social Groups in Democracies

---

Chitrlekha Basu  
University of Cologne

Helena Heberer  
University of Cologne

Annual Meeting of the European Political Science Association  
June 24, 2023

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office ⇒ favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters ⇒ legislators largely overlooked.

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office ⇒ favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters ⇒ legislators largely overlooked.

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office ⇒ favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters ⇒ legislators largely overlooked.

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office ⇒ favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters ⇒ legislators largely overlooked.

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office  $\Rightarrow$  favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters      legislators largely overlooked.

# Motivation

1. How well are the preferences of different social groups represented by political elites in democracies?
2. Are members of social groups better represented by in-group politicians?

Lots of prior work related to these questions.

- Preferences of less affluent, less educated, female citizens under-represented by politicians overall.

Gilens 2012, Giger et al 2012, Lupu and Warner 2022

- More in-group politicians in office  $\Rightarrow$  favorable outcomes.

Kittilson 2008, Carnes and Lupu 2015, O'Grady 2019, Alexiadou 2022

- However, within-group heterogeneity of voters      legislators largely overlooked.

E.g. not all American women are pro-choice



E.g. not all American women are pro-choice

- Not all women in Congress are pro-choice.

## E.g. not all American women are pro-choice

- Not all women in Congress are pro-choice.
- Views on abortion in the U.S. Congress cut across party lines.

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).



# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# What we do

- Develop new measure of how far social groups' opinions are represented by:
  - Politicians overall?
  - In-group politicians?
- Measure accounts for within-group heterogeneity of both voters and politicians.
  - First cross-national study of descriptive representation accounting for this.
  - Closest: Hakhverdian (2015) but only education, in the Netherlands.
- (So far) we apply this approach to study the unequal representation of citizens:
  - By electoral candidates.
  - Across three cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
  - Across 18 countries, 4 continents, a decade (2007-17).

# Measuring relative opinion presence

Relative opinion presence of an opinion group :

$$= \frac{\text{fraction of politicians with opinion}}{\text{fraction of voters with opinion}}$$

# Measuring relative opinion presence

Relative opinion presence of an opinion group :

$$= \frac{\text{fraction of politicians with opinion}}{\text{fraction of voters with opinion}}$$

Relative opinion presence  $\tilde{n}$  of a social group :

$$\tilde{n} = \frac{\mathbf{X}}{\text{fraction of social group with opinion}}$$
$$= \frac{\text{number of candidates representing a typical group member}}{\text{number of candidates representing a typical voter}}$$

# Measuring relative opinion presence

Relative opinion presence of an opinion group :

$$= \frac{\text{fraction of politicians with opinion}}{\text{fraction of voters with opinion}}$$

Relative opinion presence  $\tilde{n}$  of a social group :

$$\tilde{n} = \frac{\mathbf{X}}{\text{fraction of social group with opinion}}$$
$$= \frac{\text{number of candidates representing a typical group member}}{\text{number of candidates representing a typical voter}}$$

Straightforwardly calculated using survey data on citizen and elite preferences.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on citizen left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on candidate left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- Coverage:
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.



# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- **Coverage:**
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- Coverage:
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- Coverage:
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- Coverage:
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- **Coverage:**
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- **Coverage:**
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- **Coverage:**
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

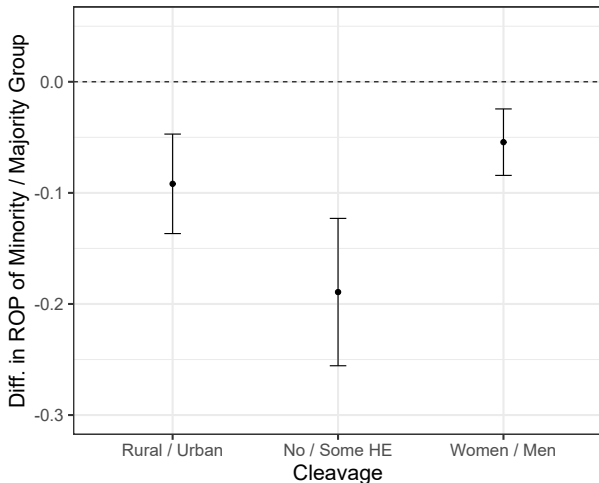
# Empirical strategy

We employ this measure to study how well the left-right preferences of different social groups are represented by politicians.

- Data on **citizen** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)**.
- Data on **candidate** left-right preferences & characteristics: **Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS)**.
  - Non-response bias: post-stratify elite sample to match partisan composition of elected legislature.
    - TBC: gender, other characteristics.
- **Coverage:**
  - 37 country-years, spanning 18 countries, 4 continents, 2007–17 (more to be added).
  - 3 cleavages: gender, education, urban-rural location.
    - TBC: age, occupation, ethnicity and intersectional identities.

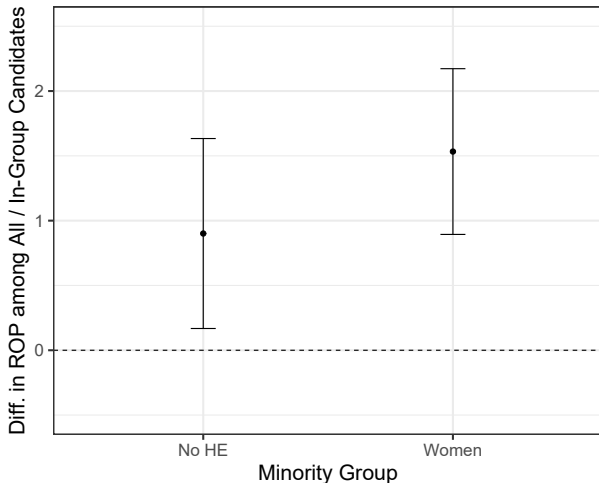


# Are minorities systematically under-represented by candidates?



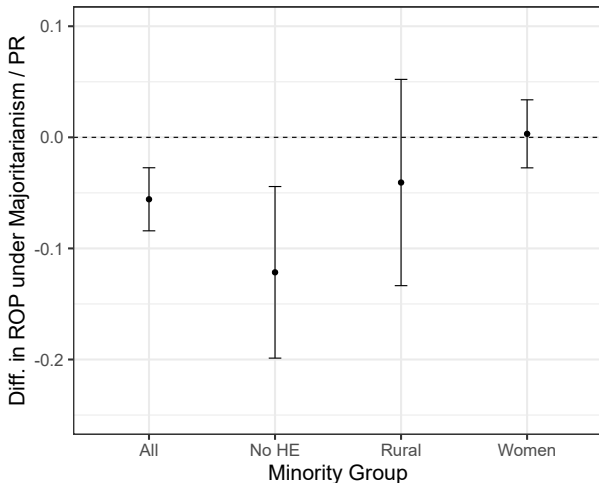
Note: Paired  $t$ -tests of  $H_0 : \text{minority ROP} - \text{majority ROP} = 0$ .

# Are minorities better represented by in-group candidates?



Note: Paired  $t$ -tests of  $\mu_0$ : in-group ROP - overall ROP = 0.

## Revisiting the 'ideological congruence controversy':



Note: Clustered/Welch Two-Sample  $t$ -tests of  $H_0: \text{ROP under Maj} - \text{ROP under PR} = 0$ .

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.



# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# Conclusion

- **Relative opinion presence:** a measure of how well social groups' opinions are represented by politicians.
- Allows us to study group representation by all / in-group politicians without assuming uniform preferences / interests.
- Initial findings:
  - All minorities under-represented by candidates, but esp. low education voters.
  - Minorities substantially better represented by in-group candidates.
  - Minority representation among candidates somewhat better under PR.
- TBC: more countries, cleavages; intersectional identities.

# The Unequal Representation of Social Groups in Democracies

---

Chitrlekha Basu  
University of Cologne

Helena Heberer  
University of Cologne

Annual Meeting of the European Political Science Association  
June 24, 2023