

## **The symbolic impact of women's representation on citizens' political attitudes**

Tània Verge, Universitat Pompeu Fabra  
Nina Wiesehomeier, Swansea University  
Ana Espírito-Santo,

The majority of studies in the field of women's political representation have focused on the descriptive dimension and increasingly on the substantive dimension. Hitherto, the third dimension of political representation, the symbolic dimension, has received little scholarly attention. This dimension captures the effects that women's political representation has on the electorate, particularly regarding feelings of closeness to and satisfaction with political institutions and their levels of political involvement. The very few existing studies face a number of conceptual and methodological challenges leading scholars to reach at best mixed results or to identify modest causal relationships – which may well be spurious. Many of those challenges are related to the inappropriateness of the data used. This paper aims to deal with some of these limitations by building on an online experimental survey, administered to Spanish and Portuguese citizens. This type of survey is increasingly used by studies on political attitudes to isolate more accurately the causal effects and to avoid social desirability problems. The goals of this paper are then twofold. Firstly, it seeks to refine the conceptualization of symbolic representation, distinguishing the potential impacts on citizens' political engagement from the potential effects on their evaluation of the political system. Secondly, the paper will empirically examine how and the extent to which women's political presence affects citizens' political involvement and attitudes as well as whether the observed effects have the same intensity on women and men citizens.