Who wants descriptive representation, and why?

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In the face of mounting evidence for the substantive under-representation of marginalized groups and for the lack of responsiveness to their concerns in democratic legislation, calls for measures to improve descriptive representation have become louder. While better descriptive representation may be in the interest of a majority of citizens, the implementation of respective measures is eventually down to political elites. We therefore ask what legislators in the United States and Germany think about the importance of descriptive representation. Leveraging data from new surveys in both countries, we analyze respondents' views on descriptive representation concerning gender, age, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. We hypothesize, first, that process preferences for better descriptive representation are correlated with substantive preferences for progressive policies and that parties on the left will deem descriptive representation more important. Secondly, we expect intersectionality to affect the formation of process preferences, and members of disadvantaged groups to be more supportive of better descriptive representation of all groups. Our findings show clear differences between parties, confirming that left-leaning parties tend to be more supportive of descriptive representation. Moreover, women are more supportive of descriptive representation in most parties, with female legislators supporting not only women's representation but also better descriptive representation for other groups. The group least supportive of descriptive representation are men in right-wing parties.

1. Introduction

During election campaigns, politicians often refer to who they are in order to appeal to voters.[1]

For example, they may claim to come from a working-class family, to be a devout churchgoer, or

to come from a rural area. These kinds of claims are intended to lend credibility to a candidate's

political stance. Most politicians would probably agree that who they are is important to how they

act as representatives of the citizens. However, this does not mean that politicians readily accept

the need for descriptive representation. In fact, the longest-serving member of the German

Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble, explicitly argued that to demand group representation is to

confuse representation with statistical representativeness.[2]

However, many empirical studies have shown that who the members of parliament are not only

influences what issues are put on the agenda and which policies legislators favor but also how

they behave in parliament. While this research initially focused on women and ethnic minorities,

it has been extended beyond these groups in recent years. While such empirical findings do not

imply that it is normatively desirable for legislative assemblies to accurately reflect the

composition of society at large, it seems clear that certain disadvantaged groups would benefit

from a greater presence in parliament, even if members of the groups in question are highly

diverse. Obviously, the likelihood that group-specific needs and demands will be addressed

increases with better presence in legislatures.

Although many societal groups and even a majority of citizens could substantially benefit from

better descriptive representation, whether respective measures will be implemented depends on

[2] See: https://www.bundestag.de/parlament/praesidium/reden/2021/20211026-866254.

professional politicians. However, few empirical studies have so far asked legislators themselves what they think about descriptive representation and which groups they think need better representation. Understanding what legislators think about descriptive representation is particularly important because they are in a position to implement mandatory or voluntary quotas, often select future candidates, and shape policies that make it easier or harder for social groups to gain representation.

In this paper, we attempt to broaden the perspective. In the next section, we start out by stating the arguments in favor of better descriptive representation and summarize the existing literature, diagnosing a shortage of studies on legislators' views. Against this background, we develop theoretical arguments to explain legislators' (lack of) support for descriptive representation. Asking who supports descriptive representation and why, we present two arguments. First, we argue that there exists an association between policy and process preferences that makes progressive legislators more likely to stress the importance of descriptive representation. Secondly, we argue that perceptions of intersectionality make members of marginalized groups more likely to support better descriptive representation not only for their own group, but also for other underrepresented groups. To test our hypotheses, we leverage data from an own new survey of legislators from Germany and the United States, analyzing their views on descriptive representation for five groups: Women, ethnic minorities, age groups, LQBTQ+, and social class (section 3). In our results, three patterns stand out: First, there is a clear left-right partisan divide in support for descriptive representation, and second, female legislators are much more supportive than male legislators. In fact, female legislators are not only more supportive of women's representation, but also more supportive of group representation in general. Third, the more right-wing a party is, the smaller the gender differences are (section 4). In the conclusion,

we discuss normative and empirical implications of our findings and point out desiderata for future research.

2. Representation of social groups – substantive effects and process preferences

Research interest in descriptive representation has intensified in recent years. In due course, it has moved from a normative debate about the circumstances in which group representation is justified, or perhaps even necessary, to an examination of the consequences of persistent underrepresentation of particular social groups. Over time, the focus has broadened to include not only women or ethnic minorities, but also disabled people, gays and lesbians or members of the working class. Many of the original advocates of group representation were reluctant to include too many groups as eligible for descriptive representation. Advocates of a "politics of presence" (Phillips 1995) argued in favor of group representation of women and ethnic minorities in legislative bodies, but were more guarded about the need to increase the numerical representation of other social groups, such as workers (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995: 174-177; Williams 1998: 201).[3]

The normative argument for group representation, however, is a general one, which can apply to different social groups at different times and places (see Elsässer and Schäfer 2022). It is based on the observation that certain groups need a special form of representation because they are disadvantaged by structural discrimination resulting from a history of political exclusion or oppression (Williams 1998). At the heart of this claim is the idea that formal political equality may not be sufficient to ensure that different interests are given equal consideration in parliament.

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[3] This does not hold for Young (1990), though, who defined a broad concept of "oppression" and based on it, advocated for descriptive representation for all of the oppressed groups.

Where structural barriers prevent certain groups from making full use of their formal political rights, a guaranteed presence of these groups can improve their symbolic and/or substantive representation. As circumstances change, the need for descriptive representation may disappear or become more acute.

Empirical studies have largely, though not always, confirmed a positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. The impact of women's representation on agenda setting and policies has been most extensively studied. Policies that promote gender equality benefit from a greater presence of women legislators (see, among many, Wängnerud 2000; Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Taylor-Robinson and Heath 2003; Bolzendahl and Brooks 2007; Campbell *et al.* 2010; Ennser-Jedenastik 2017; Dingler *et al.* 2019). Another set of studies focuses on the behavior and impact of ethnic minority legislators and, again, confirms that presence translates into substantive representation (Preuhs 2006; Saalfeld and Bischof 2013; Wüst 2014; Sobolewska *et al.* 2018). More recently, the politics of presence of LGBTQ+ legislators has also been analyzed, showing that politicians who are part of this group support a wide range of anti-discrimination policies (Haider-Markel 2007; Reynolds 2013; Hansen and Treul 2015; Bönisch 2022). In addition, Reher (2022) examines whether the opinions of MPs with disabilities are more congruent with those of disabled citizens, which is true for health care and public spending, but not beyond these issues. Finally, the descriptive representation of workers has received increasing attention over the last few years. Recent studies have shown that working-class legislators behave differently in office and bring different policy priorities and perspectives into the legislative process. Within parties, legislators from working-class background lean more strongly towards the left, favor higher social spending and care more strongly about inequality (e.g. Carnes 2012, 2013, 2015; Grumbach 2015; Hayo and Neumeier 2012; Lupu 2015; O'Grady 2019; Barnes and Saxton 2019; Barnes *et al.* 2021; Nicholas Carnes

and Noam Lupu 2023). Taken as a whole, it seems fair to say that these studies show that who the legislators are is important to whom they are representing.

However, these findings do not suggest that personal characteristics are more important than partisanship. The most important factor shaping the views and actions of legislators remains ideology, as expressed through party membership. Particularly for issues on which parties have strong and well-defined opinions, one might expect attitudinal differences to be small. For example, attitudes towards gender equality are shaped more strongly be party membership than sex (Lovenduski and Norris 2003: 94; Campbell 2010: 190). Espírito-Santo *et al.* (2020) show that legislators' sex matters more strongly when parties have not yet defined their stance on a topic. Actually, when interests are "uncrystallized," descriptive representation may be most important (Mansbridge 1999: 643).

Given that there is thus strong evidence that for the composition of the legislature affecting decision-making processes in parliament and resulting legislation, what opinions on the importance of descriptive representation can we expect among legislators? Opinions on descriptive representation are a type of "process preferences" (Hibbing 2001), concerning not the content of policy decisions, but the way in which they are being made. Process preferences can be intrinsically or instrumentally motivated (Landwehr and Harms 2020). If a process preference is intrinsically motivated, specific institutions and procedures, or properties of these, are endorsed because they are viewed as realizing values like equality or democratic legitimacy. By contrast, if a process preference is instrumentally motivated, institutions and procedures are supported as a means to achieve own substantive goals. I might, for example, support a referendum on an issue simply because I know that it will result in a majority for my preferred policy, but reject referenda on other issues because I expect them to result in majorities against by preferred

policies. While intrinsic and instrumental motives for process preferences must be analytically distinguished, it can be difficult to disentangle them empirically. In particular, and as we will argue in a next step, preferences for societal equality and pluralism are likely to be associated with preferences for egalitarian and pluralist modes of decision-making.

How can we expect intrinsic and instrumental motives to affect legislators' opinions on descriptive representation? Thinking about intrinsic motives first, observational evidence indicates a correlation between partisanship and preferences for descriptive representation. Across different countries, it is progressive parties on the political left that have fought for the better political representation of women and minority groups and that have in many cases implemented internal quota rules to promote it. It seems plausible to assume that the values or ideological inclinations that lead individuals to support progressive policies – egalitarianism and pluralism – also play out in the process space. Accordingly, progressives should support institutions and procedures that ensure that the plurality of different perspectives that exist in contemporary societies is adequately considered and that all voices count equally in political decision-making. Descriptive representation promotes egalitarian and pluralist logics of decision-making and may thus be expected to appeal to progressive and left-wing legislators more than to conservative and right-wing ones. While positive opinions on descriptive representation among progressives may thus be seen as rooted in substantive values, the implementation of respective measures would also institutionally entrench these values and result in instrumental motives for their support.

Turning to these instrumental motives, any procedural reform that increases the probability of one's own policy preferences being translated into binding legislation must be expected to appeal to legislators. Instrumental motives may be even more salient in procedural decisions than in

substantive ones, given that by changing the rules of the game, they have long-term effects on the direction of policy-making. When it comes to descriptive representation, we may expect members of all presently underrepresented groups (women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, younger and working class citizens) to be instrumentally supportive of better political representation of their own group. But do members of underrepresented groups also assign importance to the adequate representation of groups other than their own one? Theories of intersectionality (see, for example, Collins and Bilge 2020) would lead us to assume that they do. "Intersectionality" describes the way in which individuals belonging to or ascribed to different social groups experience accumulating disadvantages or privileges. Cooper views intersectionality as an account of power relationships rather than individual identity (Cooper 2015). Thus understood, intersectionality can become an appeal to marginalized groups to build coalitions. Viewing members of other marginalized groups not as competitors for power, but as allies in struggles to overcome domination can foster cooperative interaction orientations that enable these coalitions to overcome problems of collective action (see Scharpf 2018: 89pp.) and gain political influence. With regard to descriptive representation, we might accordingly expect intersectional, cooperative interaction orientations to motivate members of marginalized groups to be more broadly supportive of egalitarian representation beyond their narrow group interests.

As we argued above, legislators' opinions on descriptive representation are of particular interest in light of the fact that they are the ones who can decide on and implement measures to improve it. How much do we know about legislators' process preferences and their understanding of representation? Surprisingly, literature on the topic is relatively scarce. Only a small number of studies have directly asked what legislators think about descriptive representation. Asking legislators from three European countries about the focus of representation, Brack *et al.* (2012) find that legislators typically do not name a specific group they represent. Instead, they often

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emphasize that they try to represent the entire population as well as their own district (Méndez-Lago and Martínez 2002; von Schoultz and Wass 2016; Coffé and Reiser 2018) – especially if the district is considered more peripheral (Hlynsdóttir and Önnudóttir 2018). In their self-conception, MPs tend to think of themselves as trustees who strive to realize the common good (Severs *et al.* 2015). If it exists at all, the motivation to represent one's own group is linked both to intrinsic reasons and to more instrumental, electoral considerations (Broockman 2013; Sobolewska 2018).

A handful of studies ask more specifically about descriptive representation. Childs (2001) shows that newly elected female Labour MPs in the UK strive to act for women. However, Celis and Erzeel (2015) identify "critical actors" who claim to represent women's interests in 10 countries and find that although women and MPs from left-wing parties are more likely to fall into this category, there are a significant number of male and non-leftwing legislators who also belong to this group. With regard to the representation of ethnic minorities, Ceyhan (2018) finds that German MPs generally think that they are well-suited to represent this group. Coffé and Reiser (2018) analyzed German legislators' opinions on descriptive representation, finding support for the instrumental motives outlined above. In their study, churchgoers were more likely to emphasize the importance of descriptive representation for religious groups and East German MPs to speak out in favor of group representation for East Germans. However, and in accordance with our expectations regarding intersectionality, female legislators were found to be more supportive not only of better descriptive representation for women, but also for immigrants, although there was no gender effect for opinions on the representation of religious people and East Germans (see Coffé and Reiser 2018: 283). In addition, some studies have found that newly elected legislators are more likely to see themselves as spokespersons for particular social groups than are long-serving legislators, which might indicate that both intrinsic and instrumental

motives for changing the rules of the game "wear off" with time spent in office (Coffé and Reiser 2018: 285; Bailer *et al.* 2021).

On the basis of the above theoretical considerations as well as corresponding findings in the existing literature, we formulate the following hypotheses to guide our analyses:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Members of progressive / left-wing parties are more supportive of descriptive representation than members of conservative / right-wing parties.

> *Hypothesis 2a*: Members of presently underrepresented groups are more supportive of better descriptive representation for *their own* group.

> *Hypothesis 2b*: Members of presently underrepresented groups are more supportive of better descriptive representation for *all* underrepresented groups.

> *Hypothesis 3*: Long-serving MPs are less supportive of descriptive representation than newly elected ones.

We thus expect right-wing, long-serving, older males to be the least supportive of descriptive representation. In a nutshell, they are the ones who have the least to gain from other groups achieving better representation and will therefore be dismissive of the importance of descriptive representation as well as of means to improve it.

Although we expect similar effects of partisanship and intersectionality on legislator preferences across liberal democracies, the size of these effects is likely to affected by context factors. Patterns of disadvantage and discrimination differ across countries, leading to differences in demand for better political representation of different groups. In countries like Sweden that come relatively close to achieving gender parity in parliament, the importance of descriptive representation of women may both become common sense across groups and lose salience for activists. Moreover, the institutional design of the legislature and the electoral system have

effects on the degree to which descriptive representation is achieved. To assess the generalizability of our findings, we test our hypotheses in two countries – Germany and the United States – that differ both in their histories of discrimination and in their institutional set-up.

3. Data: Legislator survey in the U.S. and Germany

To explore legislators' opinions on descriptive representation and test our hypotheses, we draw on an original survey of legislators in the United States and Germany. In the German case, 2,612 members of the state parliaments and the federal *Bundestag* were invited to participate in an online survey conducted between May and September 2022. In total, 532 of the 2,612 MPs contacted took part in the survey, giving us a response rate of 20.4%. 40 respondents dropped out during the introductory questions, resulting in a sample of 492 MPs with sufficient responses. In the United States, 7,362 state legislators were contacted by email or via their websites, 411 (5.6 percent) of whom started and 361 of whom completed the survey. Among the respondents, there are 190 Democrats and 168 Republicans.

The research for this paper is part of a larger project on "Conceptions of Democracy among Political Elites and Citizens".[4] The legislator survey includes various questions about how the participants understand democracy. As part of this inquiry, they were asked about their views on descriptive representation: "*How important is it that legislatures reflect the characteristics of the population they represent in each of the following ways: Gender, age, social class, sexual identity and ethnicity?*". Respondents answered this question separately for each group on a seven-point scale from "not important at all" (1) to "very important" (7). In addition, the survey

includes information on age, sex, party membership and legislative tenure of the respondents.

Table 1and Table 2 contain descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Germany

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Above 55	0.37	0.48	0.00	1.00
Male	0.68	0.47	0.00	1.00
Female	0.32	0.47	0.00	1.00
Left	0.09	0.28	0.00	1.00
Greens	0.19	0.39	0.00	1.00
SPD	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
FDP	0.09	0.28	0.00	1.00
CDU/CSU	0.25	0.43	0.00	1.00
AfD	0.12	0.33	0.00	1.00
Recent entry	0.60	0.49	0.00	1.00
Rep. gender	4.96	2.16	1.00	7.00
Rep. age	4.49	1.83	1.00	7.00
Rep. class	4.54	1.91	1.00	7.00
Rep. ethnicity	4.31	2.03	1.00	7.00
Rep. LGBTQ+	3.47	2.15	1.00	7.00
Rep. index	4.34	1.75	1.00	7.00

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for U.S.

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Above 55	0.63	0.48	0.00	1.00
Male	0.60	0.49	0.00	1.00
Female	0.40	0.49	0.00	1.00
Democrats	0.53	0.50	0.00	1.00
Republicans	0.47	0.50	0.00	1.00
Recent entry	0.66	0.47	0.00	1.00
Rep. gender	3.74	2.05	1.00	7.00
Rep. age	3.61	1.78	1.00	7.00
Rep. class	3.81	2.05	1.00	7.00
Rep. ethnicity	3.87	2.05	1.00	7.00
Rep. LGBTQ+	3.33	2.05	1.00	7.00
Rep. index	3.66	1.77	1.00	7.00

In the survey, legislators were also asked to place themselves on two dimensions of political conflict. The horizontal axis refers to economic preferences. Lower scores indicate preferences for more redistribution, while higher scores indicate a preference for free markets. The second dimension covers cultural attitudes, with lower scores indicating cultural liberalism and higher scores indicating cultural conservatism. We can use these self-placements to see how legislators differ in their policy preferences across and within parties. The upper part of Figure 1 shows the results for German MPs. Their political positions are well in line with what one would expect. Legislators of the three center-left parties (Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Party) occupy the southeast, progressive quadrant of the figure, with most legislators in favor of market intervention and cultural liberalism. By contrast, Christian Democrats and MPs from the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany tend to place themselves in the northeastern quadrant, signaling pro-market attitudes and cultural conservatism. The Christian Democrats, however, hold more centrist views than the AfD. Legislators from the Free Democratic Party (FDP) combine a preference for free markets with a culturally liberal stance. The northwest quadrant is for the most part empty.

U.S. legislators also align neatly on these two dimensions. Except for individual respondents who may have confused the poles of the axes, almost all Democrats fall in the southwest quadrant of economic and cultural liberalism, while Republicans hold the opposite set of preferences. The square in Figure 1 captures the mean position for each party, which offer clearly distinct platforms.

In view of our *Hypothesis 1*, we accordingly expect legislators of from the Greens, Social Democrats and Left Party in Germany and Democrats in the US to be more supportive of

descriptive representation and legislators from the Christian Democrats and AfD in Germany and

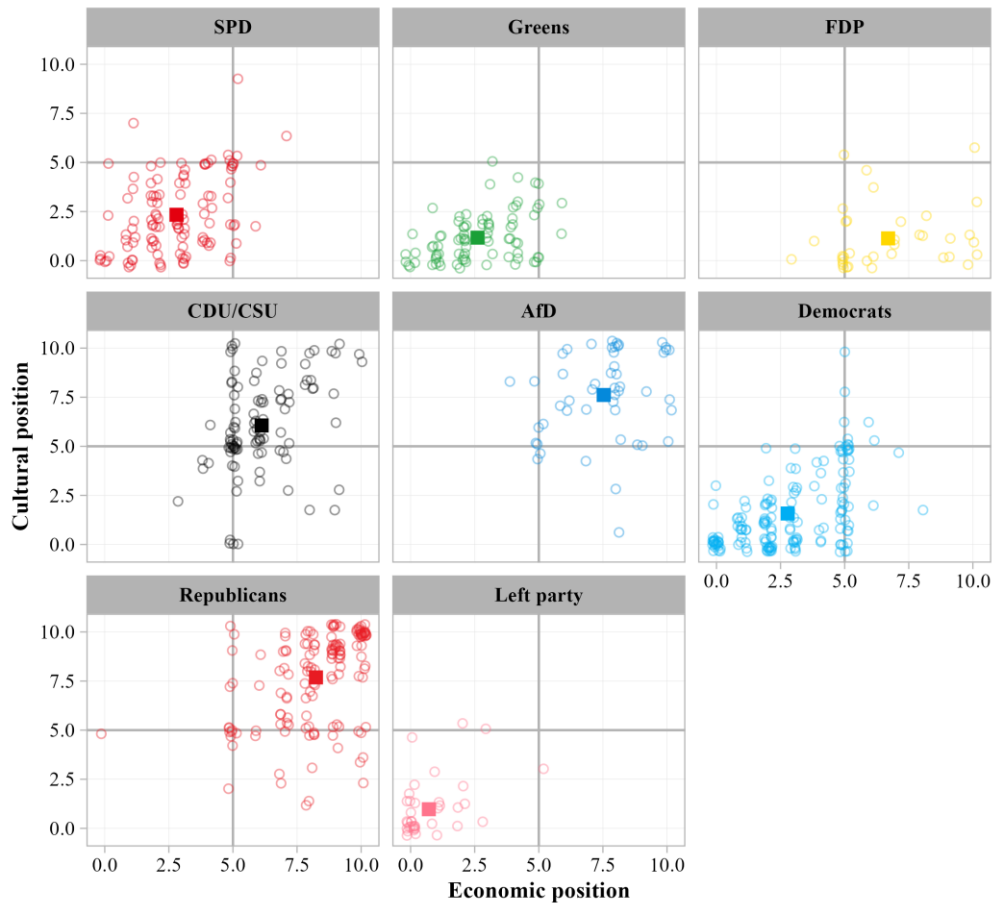Republicans to be less supportive of descriptive representation.

Figure 1: Self-placement of legislators in a two-dimensional space.

To fully test *Hypotheses 2a* and *2b* on group interests and intersectionality, we would ideally

have information not only on MPs' party membership, gender, and age, but also on their social

class, sexual identity, and ethnic/racial minority status. However, some of these questions are

considered sensitive and tend lead to item non-response or even survey drop-outs. We therefore

did not ask for all of these characteristics in the survey and accordingly have to limit the analysis

to those characteristics that we know about.

4. Results

To get a first impression of how legislators view descriptive representation for different groups, we show two figures that illustrate where the respondents placed themselves on a seven-point scale ranging from strong opposition (on the left) to strong support (on the right). In Figure 2 there are clear differences between the parties. Not surprisingly in accordance with our *Hypothesis 1* on partisan effects, progressive parties on the left are highly supportive of descriptive representation based on gender. The SPD, the Greens and the Left Party have all introduced voluntary gender quotas, and the latter two parties have more female than male MPs in the Bundestag. Both the liberal party FDP and the Christian Democrats are undecided on the issue, with almost as many respondents strongly opposed as fairly strongly in favor of group representation based on gender. In fact, there is an ongoing debate in these two parties as to whether gender quotas are necessary or not. In contrast, MPs from the right-wing populist AfD consistently oppose the idea.

Descriptive representation based on sexual identities receives much less support overall (see the right part of Figure 2). Not only the AfD, but also the Christian Democrats do not support it. The FDP is also against it, and the Social Democrats are ambivalent at best. Only the Greens and the Left Party tend to support group representation for the LGBTQ+ group.
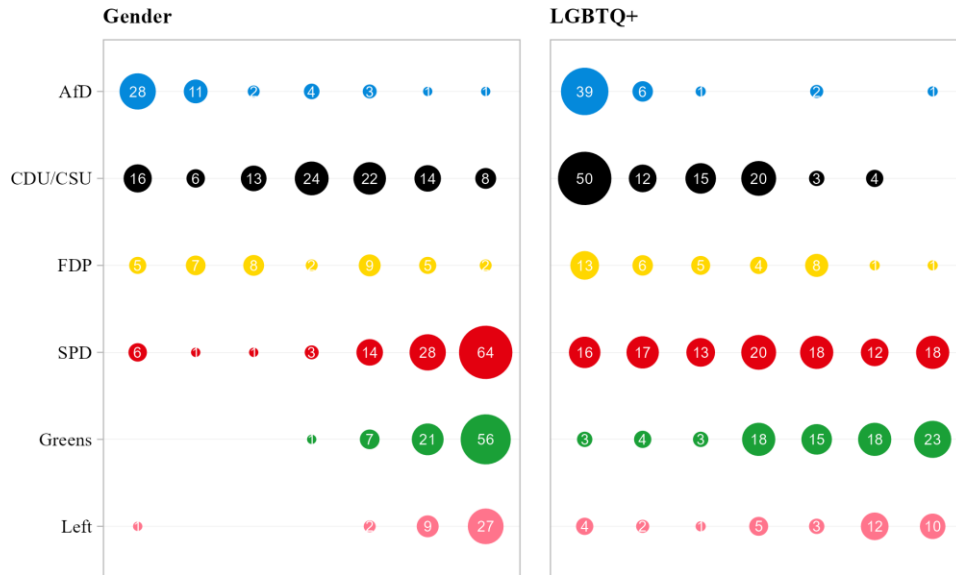
Figure 2: Support for descripitive representation among German legislators.

In the United States, Republican legislators are generally skeptical of gender-based representation and strongly oppose representation based on sexual identity. Nearly 80 percent of Republican respondents chose the lowest or second-lowest category on the seven-point scale. Democrats are more favorable in both cases, although the modal response in each case is the middle of the scale. Still, more legislators support descriptive representation than oppose it in each case.
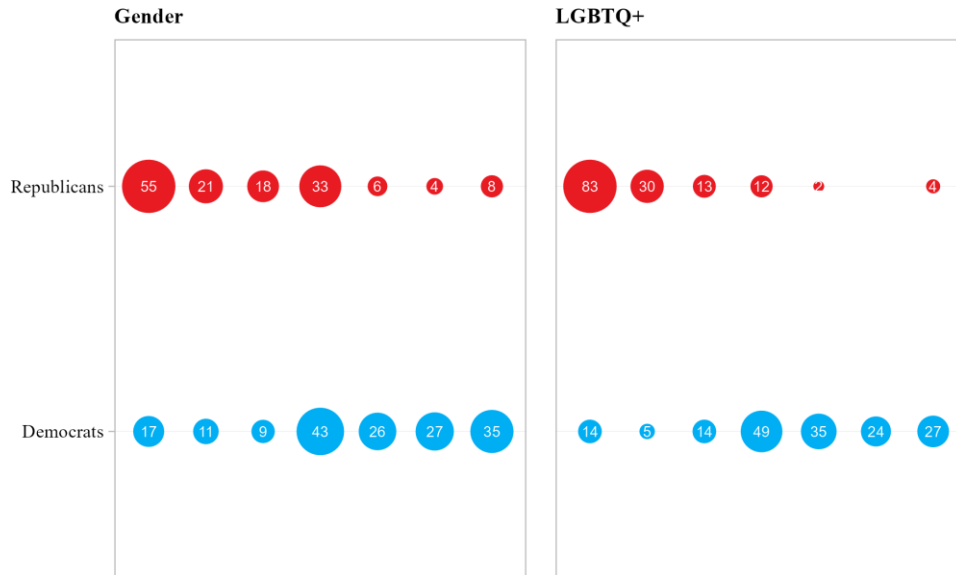
Figure 3: Support for descripitive representation among U.S. legislators.

The basic pattern shown in the last two figures is repeated when we look at the other three groups (see Figure 6 and Figure 7 in the appendix). From right to left, support for descriptive representation increases. In Germany, the three left-of-center parties support group representation based on age (which would mean having more younger people in parliament), social class (which would require having a greater number of legislators who are employees in the production and service sectors), and ethnicity (which would mean having more diversity in parliament in terms of family background). Members of the FDP are always ambivalent, the Christian Democrats are rather skeptical of group representation, while AfD legislators are always against it. In the United States, Republican legislators do not support group representation – almost regardless of which group we look at. Democrats, on the other hand, are more supportive, though far from enthusiastic about descriptive representation.

In the next step, we add gender to the party position on descriptive representation. As stated above, we expect members of discriminated groups, and in this case, female respondents to be

more strongly in favor of group representation for their own (*Hypothesis 2a*) as well as for other groups (*Hypothesis 2b*).

Figure 4 shows that within parties there are significant differences between male and female respondents in their support for descriptive representation of women. In most parties, women are significantly more supportive than men. In the Left Party, the Greens and the Social Democrats, support among women MPs is almost unanimous, and although it is also high among men, it is still 0.3 to 0.86 points lower. Remarkably, gender differences on this question are even greater in the two center-right parties. Female members of the FDP rate this question 1.08 points higher than men on a seven-point scale, and the average for Christian Democratic women is even 1.56 points higher than for men within the same party. Women, who are highly underrepresented among legislators of these parties, are much more likely to endorse descriptive representation. This does not hold, though, for the Alternative for Germany. Among AfD legislators, women are even more opposed to descriptive representation of women than men – but this may be due to the small sample size (only 5 of 49 AfD respondents are female). In the United States, there are virtually no differences within the Republican Party (men 2.7, women 2.73), whereas female Democrats are more supportive (4.9) than male legislators (4.29).

Although the differences in support for women's representation between female and male legislators are anything but trivial, they are small compared to the differences between the parties. For example, Green Party members have an average score of 6.55, while AfD members have an average score of only 2, and Democrats have an average of 4.6, while Republicans have an average of only 2.7. Thus, these comparisons are consistent with *Hypothesis 1* stating that progressive/left-wing legislators are more supportive of descriptive representation than conservative/right-wing legislators.
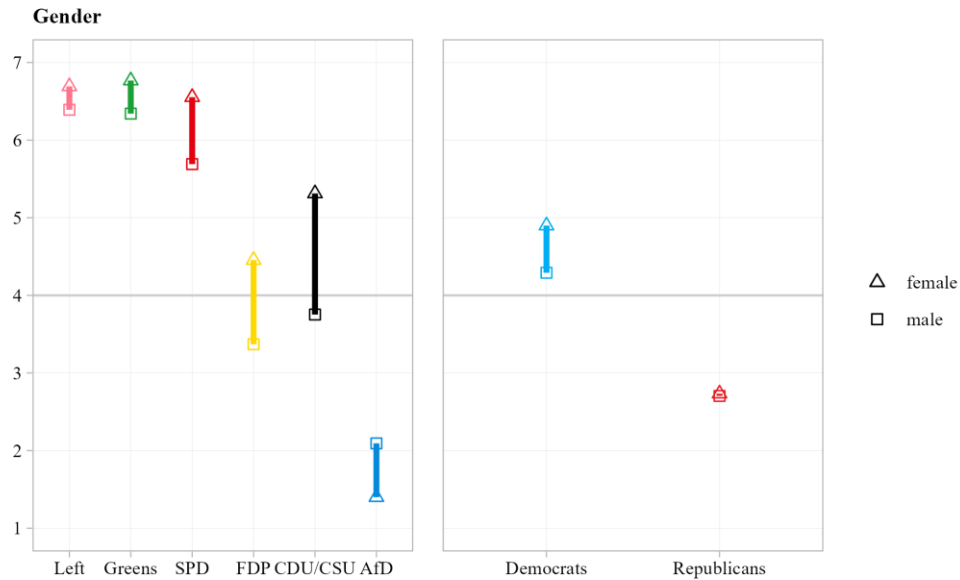
Figure 4: Support for descripitive representation of women across parties.

Figure 8 and Figure 9 in the appendix show the same kind of plot for all groups that were asked about in the survey. The patterns across groups are very similar to the ones just shown. Support for descriptive representation declines as we move from left-leaning to right-leaning parties, and within parties, women tend to be more supportive of it than men (with the exception of the AfD and the Republicans). In fact, if we consider only female respondents, there would be a majority in favor of group representation based on gender, age, class and ethnicity. In the United States, the differences between female and male respondents tend to be smaller than in Germany. Nevertheless, women within the Democratic Party are the most supportive of descriptive representation among state legislators, and male Republicans are the most opposed.

The results so far lend support not only to *Hypothesis 1,* but also to both *Hypothesis 2a* and *Hypothesis 2b*: Women are the strongest supporters of descriptive representation of women – but they also support it for other underrepresented groups. Female legislators do not seem to share

the view that improving descriptive representation overall will be detrimental to improving

female representation.

Table 3: Coefficients of linear regression for five groups in Germany.

	Women	Age	Class	Ethnicity	LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+
Age	-0.01	-0.02**	-0.01+	-0.01	-0.02*	-0.02*
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Male	-0.67***	-0.91***	-0.65***	-0.99***	-0.91***	-0.63***
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.19)	(0.18)
New MP	0.25	0.28	0.18	0.16	0.38*	0.26
	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.17)
Reference: AfD						
CDU/CSU	1.89***	0.70*	0.46	1.59***	0.90**	0.14
	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.30)
FDP	1.44***	0.72*	0.23	1.77***	1.24***	0.66+
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.31)	(0.37)	(0.35)
Greens	4.17***	1.97***	2.15***	3.76***	3.34***	1.66***
	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.32)	(0.37)
SPD	3.77***	1.58***	1.92***	3.21***	2.25***	0.74*
	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.35)
Left	4.28***	1.96***	2.87***	3.87***	3.37***	1.66***
	(0.33)	(0.35)	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.39)	(0.43)
pro female rep.						0.41***
						(0.05)
Constant	2.90***	4.82***	4.19***	2.80***	2.95***	1.78**
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.51)	(0.47)	(0.55)	(0.54)
Num.Obs.	395	393	394	395	388	388
R2	0.556	0.302	0.362	0.543	0.436	0.508

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

We now move from bivariate to multivariate analysis. For each group, we run a linear regression

model that includes the respondent's age, gender and party membership. In addition, we include a

dummy variable that captures whether a legislator entered parliament after 2016. Across the five

groups, the results in Table 3 are very consistent. Although not always statistically significant,

age has a negative effect on support for descriptive representation. The coefficient is negative and

highly significant for descriptive representation of age groups (which would imply better

representation of younger citizens) and LGBTQ+. Male legislators are less supportive of descriptive representation than women for all five groups. Their support is between 9.5 and 14 percent lower than that of female MPs. Having entered the legislature more recently does not have a significant effect, except for support for group representation based on sexual identity. Even after controlling for age and party, there is a significant positive effect of recent entry in this case.

As expected, we find highly significant effects of party affiliation. Members of the right-wing conservative AfD are the most opposed to descriptive representation for all groups, and as we move across the ideological spectrum to more progressive left-wing parties, support increases. For example, respondents from the Green Party are more than four points more supportive of female representation than those from the AfD. The differences are almost as large with regard to ethnicity or sexual identity but small for age and class. In the final model in Table 3, we test whether support for female representation increases support for representation of the LGBTQ+ group. Even after controlling for other relevant factors, higher support for representation of one group significantly increases support for representation of another group, thus lending strong support to *Hypothesis 2b* and our theoretical considerations regarding intersectionality and cooperative interaction orientations.

Table 4: Coefficients of linear regression for five groups in the United States

	Women	Age	Class	Ethnicity	LGBTQ+	LGBTQ+
Age above 55	-0.23	-0.16	-0.49*	-0.27	-0.19	-0.07
	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.15)
Male	-0.40+	-0.31	-0.58**	-0.53**	-0.54**	-0.33*
	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.14)
New MP	-0.02	0.08	0.00	0.12	0.17	0.18
	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.15)
Reference: Democrats						
Republicans	-1.76***	-1.12***	-1.74***	-2.32***	-2.52***	-1.57***
	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.15)
pro female rep.						0.54***
						(0.04)
Constant	4.94***	4.37***	5.29***	5.34***	4.83***	2.15***
	(0.30)	(0.28)	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.26)
Num.Obs.	311	310	308	311	310	310
R2	0.224	0.128	0.260	0.393	0.456	0.688

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

For the United States, the results are similar (see Table 4). The coefficient of being over 55 is negative but not statistically significant. Males generally tend to be less supportive of descriptive representation, and the effect is strong and significant for class, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+. Recent entry into the legislature does not affect attitudes towards descriptive representation. As in the German case, there is a strong party effect. Republican legislators are consistently less supportive of descriptive representation than Democrats. On a seven-point scale, their score is between 1.1 and 2.5 points lower. Finally, support for female representation increases support for LGBTQ+ representation. Those who view descriptive representation favorably tend to do so across groups.

For the final step of the analysis, we construct an index of "support for descriptive representation," which is the average across the five groups. Model 1 and Model 3 in Table 5 in the appendix show the results for Germany and the United States, respectively. They are consistent with the previous results and therefore do not need to be repeated. In Model 2 and

Model 4, we run a difference-in-difference model, which interacts party and gender to see how the effect of gender differs across parties. In the German case, being male has a significantly stronger negative effect in each party than being male in the AfD – that is, the differences between women and men are larger in these other parties. In the U.S., the difference between female and male legislators does not differ significantly across parties, although it is larger within the Democrats. To fully understand the effect of gender across parties, we plot the difference in the predictions for women and men in each party with confidence intervals. If the confidence interval does not cross the zero line, the difference is statistically significant.
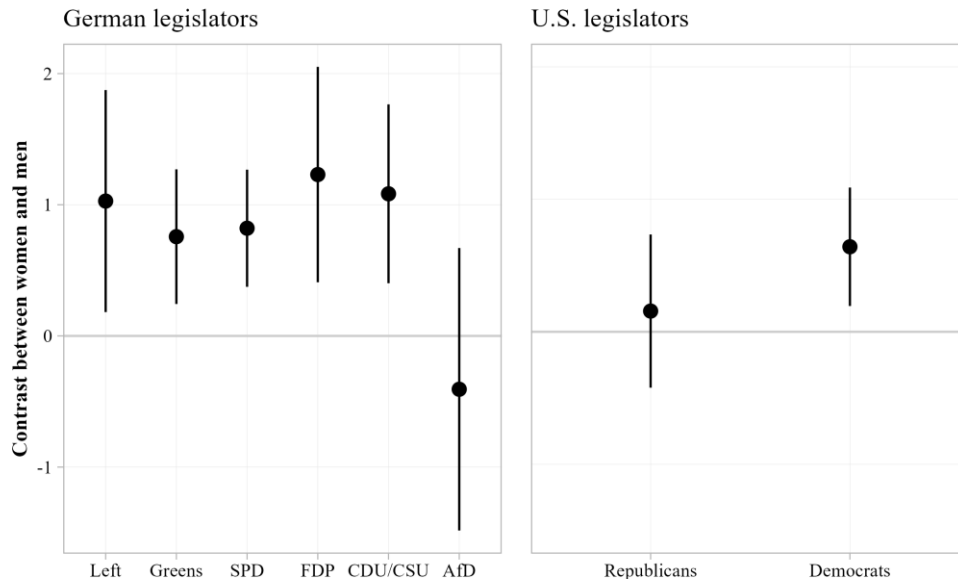

Figure 5: Difference between women and men in support of descripitive representation based on table 5 in the appendix.

Only in two parties – the German AfD and the U.S. Republicans –, there is no significant difference between female and male legislators. In the other six parties women are more supportive of descriptive representation. The differences is the largest in the liberal party FDP and smallest for the Democrats.

If we revisit the hypotheses formulated in Section 2, we can draw a number of conclusions. First, partisanship has the strongest effect on legislators' position on descriptive representation. Members of progressive center-left parties tend to be in favor, while members of conservative center-right and right-wing populist parties tend to be against. Second, not only for women, but for all groups, women are the most ardent supporters of descriptive representation. Thus, we can confirm *Hypothesis 2a* and *Hypothesis 2b* – at least with respect to women. Female legislators do not seem to believe that better numerical representation of younger citizens or ethnic minorities will be detrimental to women's representation. In fact, support for descriptive representation of women strengthens support for representation of other groups. The effect of incumbency is less clear. For most groups, it does not affect the results. One exception is support for descriptive representation of LGBTQ+ groups, which is higher among German MPs who entered parliament more recently. But overall, we have to reject *Hypothesis 3*.

5. Conclusion

Pitkin famously argued that to represent is to make present something that is not present. She was not convinced that sameness was a prerequisite for this. For her, "acting for" the represented depended more on the ideological composition of the parliament and the continued responsiveness of representatives through accountability. However, empirical evidence suggests that "making present" depends at least in part on "being present". In particular, disadvantaged groups seem to benefit from greater presence in parliament, even if we do not assume that all members of these groups think alike. Apparently, the likelihood that group-specific issues and policy proposals will be put on the agenda, that absent voices will be heard, and that supportive policies will be adopted increases with descriptive representation.

To this day, women, ethnic minorities, and working-class citizens are greatly underrepresented in parliaments. And while there has been some progress in the representation of women or minorities, the underrepresentation of other groups has actually increased. For example, those women who are legislators are – like men – overwhelmingly university graduates. There are plenty of lawyers, business owners, and higher-level employees in parliament, but very few legislators come from production or service jobs, and the increase in women in parliament has done little to remedy this underrepresentation. As the number of studies showing that the composition of parliament matters grows, so does the need to understand who is for or against group representation.

Against this background of mounting evidence for the effect of descriptive on substantive representation, we have theorized that support for descriptive representation can be based on either intrinsic or instrumental motives. Regarding intrinsic motives, we have argued that there exists an ideological association between substantive and process preferences that makes left-wing progressives more likely to support descriptive representation. Regarding instrumental motives, we argued that members of underrepresented groups have an obvious interest in better descriptive representation of their own group. On the basis of reflections on the potential of intersectionality and resulting cooperative interaction orientations, however, we further hypothesized that members of marginalized groups are likely to support better descriptive representation beyond their own group for all relevant groups. Finally, we assumed support for descriptive representation to wear off with time spent in office.

Given that it is political elites and legislators who are in a position to implement measures to improve descriptive representation, this paper focused on German and American legislators' opinions on it. We analyzed data from an original legislator survey in both countries that asked

participants how important they thought it was for legislatures to reflect the characteristics of the population in terms of gender, age, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Few studies have captured the views of legislators across such a diverse range of groups. In keeping with our hypothesis on the association between substantive and process preferences, we find that party ideology has the strongest effect. From left to right, support for descriptive representation declines. In keeping with our hypothesis on instrumental preferences for group representation, we find that within parties, women and men often differ significantly. In general, women are more sanguine about descriptive representation than their male counterparts, although this difference disappears in right-wing parties. Interestingly, and in line with our hypothesis on intersectional coalitions, the support is not limited to women as a group, but is also visible for all other groups.

Future research on support for descriptive representation should compare political elites' and citizen attitudes and further explore both the association between substantive and process preferences and the potential of intersectional coalitions. The latter will also be relevant from a practical-political perspective. Given that women remain underrepresented, their support for descriptive representation may not be sufficient to challenge the overrepresentation of older white men. In consequence, patterns of underrepresentation may be slow to change. Achieving gender parity in parliaments would probably require conservative, right-wing parties to introduce quotas, which seems highly unlikely given their stance on descriptive representation. However, we also see that at least in Germany, female legislators in the liberal party (FDP) and Christian Democratic parties (CDU/CSU) are much more supportive of descriptive representation than their male colleagues. In the face declining support for these parties among female voters, the pressure to improve women's representation in their parliamentary groups will rise, making the adoption of quota rules seem more likely. If our findings regarding women's intersectional orientation and higher support for descriptive representation across different groups are

confirmed, gender quota may well be instrumental to achieving more egalitarian representation for other presently underrepresented groups.

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Appendix

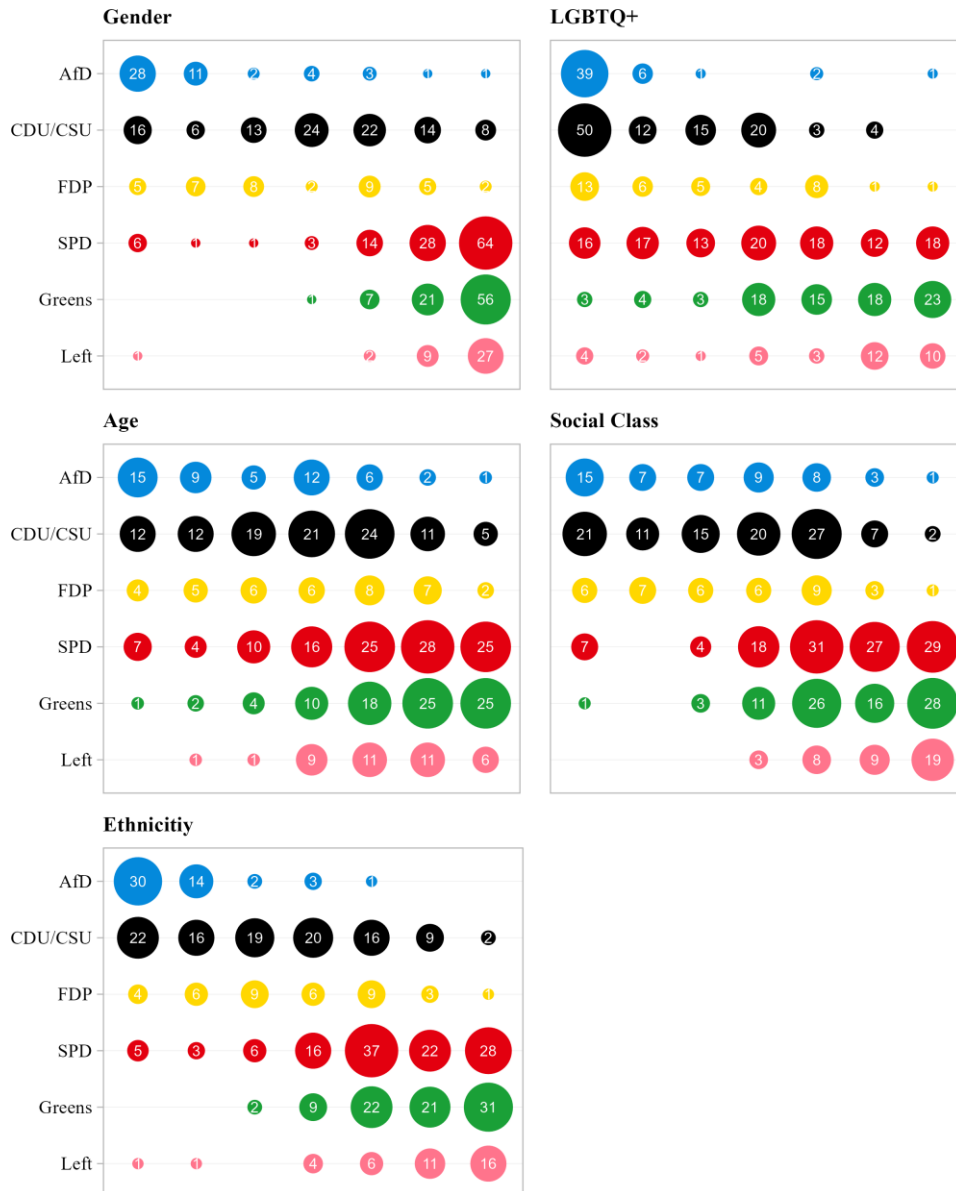The position of German legislators on group representation for five different groups.

Figure 6: Support of German legislators for descripitve representation from low (left) to high (right).

The position of U.S. legislators on group representation for five different groups.

Figure 7: Support of U.S. legislators for descripitve representation from low (left) to high (right).

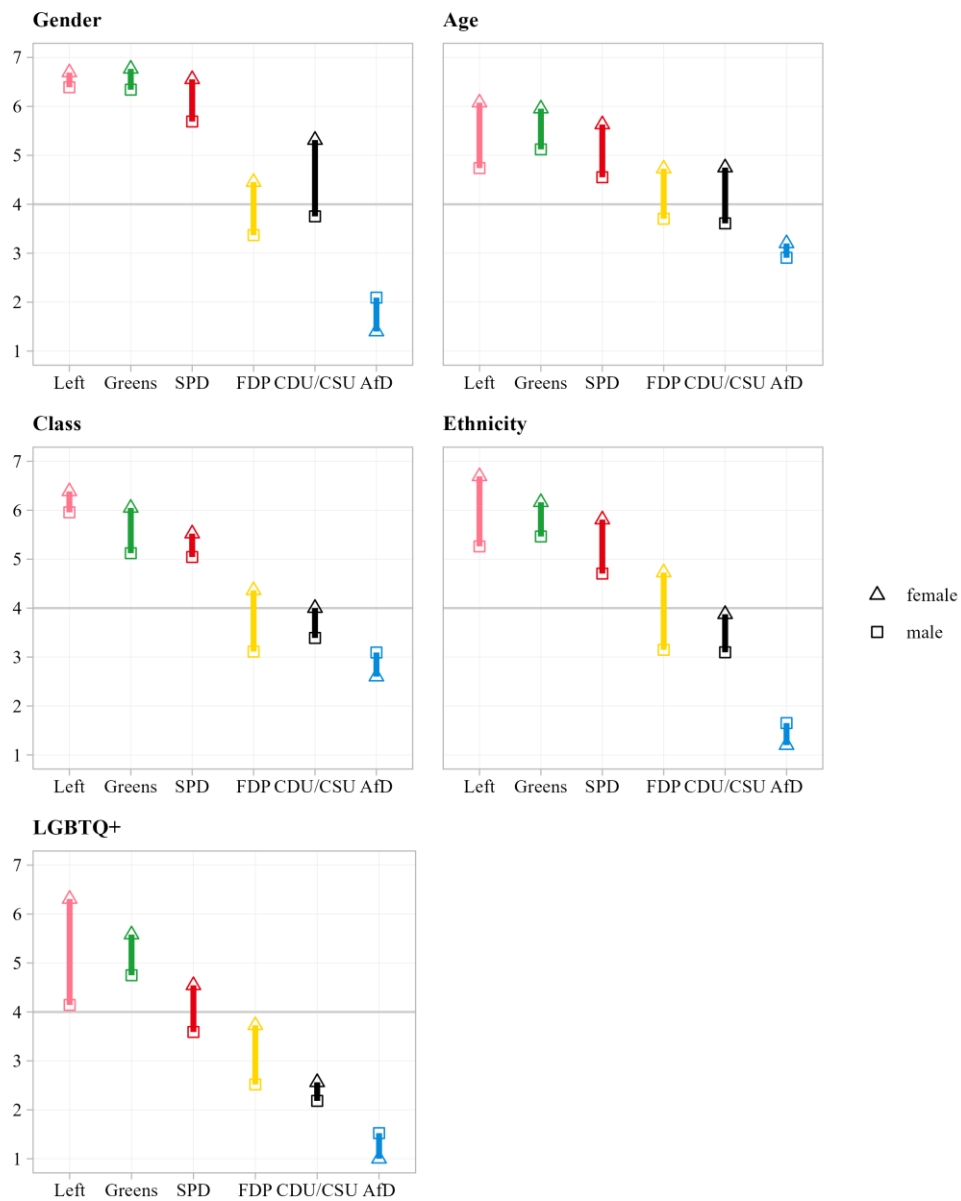The position of German female and male legislators on group representation for five different groups.

Figure 8: Support of German legislators for descripitve representation for five different groups.

The position of U.S. female and male legislators on group representation for five different groups.
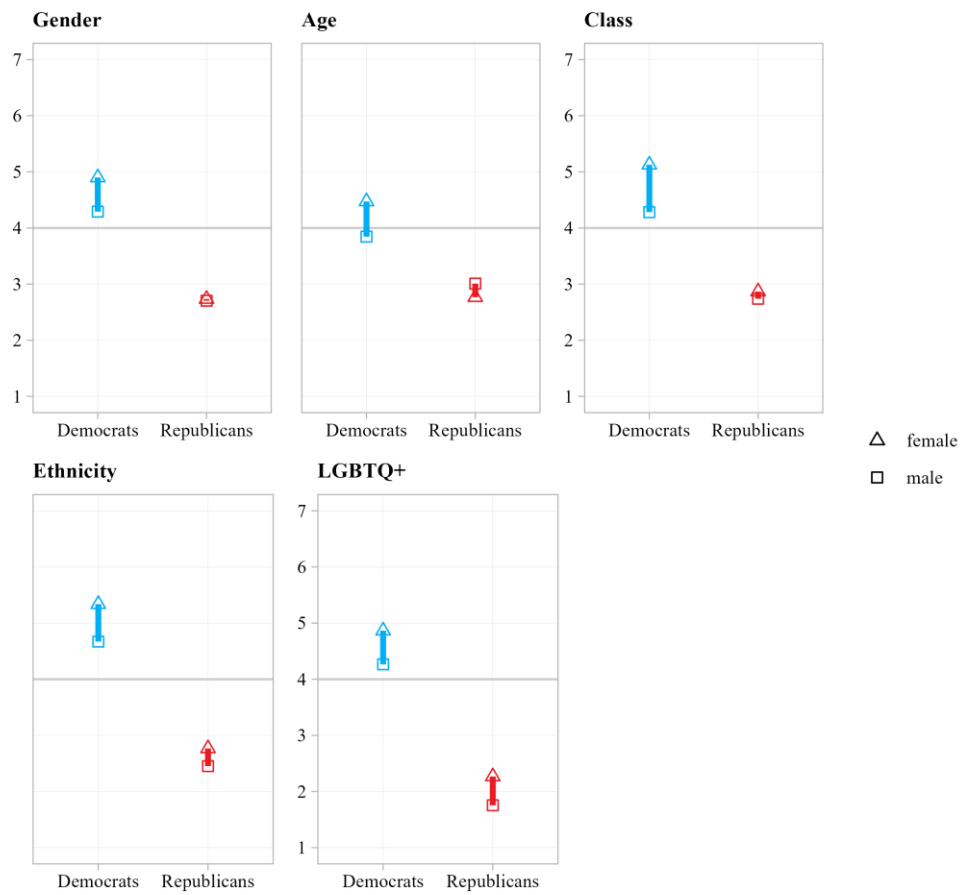

Figure 9: Support of U.S. legislators for descripitve representation for five different groups.

Table 5: Coefficients of linear regression for descriptive representation index

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age above 55	-0.30*	-0.32*	-0.27	-0.29
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Male	-0.83***	0.41	-0.46*	-0.16
	(0.13)	(0.55)	(0.18)	(0.29)
New MP	0.29*	0.26*	0.06	0.03
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.19)
CDU/CSU	1.13***	2.44***		
	(0.22)	(0.61)		
FDP	1.11***	2.48***		
	(0.26)	(0.62)		
Greens	3.13***	4.18***		
	(0.23)	(0.55)		
SPD	2.55***	3.63***		
	(0.22)	(0.55)		
Left	3.29***	4.50***		
	(0.28)	(0.62)		
Male * CDU/CSU		-1.49*		
		(0.65)		
Male * FDP		-1.64*		
		(0.69)		
Male * SPD		-1.23*		
		(0.59)		
Male * Greens		-1.16+		
		(0.61)		
Male * Left		-1.43*		
		(0.70)		
Democrats			1.88***	2.21***
			(0.18)	(0.30)
Male * Democrats				-0.49
				(0.37)
Constant	2.92***	1.85***	3.06***	2.85***
	(0.25)	(0.53)	(0.28)	(0.33)
Num.Obs.	385	385	306	306
R2	0.559	0.566	0.353	0.357

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001