The Feminine Touch

The Effects of Descriptive Representation on Men's Confidence in Government

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Beginning with Hannah Pitkin's 1967 research on representation, scholars have sought to understand connections between electoral systems, the composition of legislatures, the output of legislatures and public perceptions of legislators. This study considers the link between the demographics of legislatures—called descriptive representation—and public perceptions of government—symbolic representation. Examining Canadian politics between 1993 and 2008, this research explores the possibility that the proportion of women in the Canadian Federal Parliament affects citizens' confidence in government as well as those citizens' voting habits, particularly males. This aims to fill existing gaps and discrepancies in the literature; my findings reveal that a more diverse government is associated with citizens viewing their government as more legitimate if they have more confidence in the decisions they make.

Introduction

A burgeoning area of study within political science focuses on legislators' representation of their constituents. Defining what is meant by that representation is a broad and complex subject of study in political science. How citizens expect their elected officials to represent them, for example, varies widely from person to person, and these expectations affect constituents' perceptions of their representatives as well as government as a whole. Some theorists, for example, argue that the shared life experiences among certain people (demographics) lead to homogeneity in interests. This presumed homogeneity prompts some people to make decisions to elect those they feel are best equipped to represent their demographic group (see Mansbridge 1999, 655). In this school of thought, having a legislature truly representative of the demographics of the constituency is essential for legislators to "act for" the interests of the citizens they represent (Pitkin 1967, 28). Indeed, studies show that women exhibit higher levels of trust in government when there are more women in legislatures (Lawless 2004, 1114; Ulbig 2007, 1110). However, this line of reasoning fails to consider if people will then have less confidence that the government acts in their interests if they are *not* represented by someone demographically similar to them. This study aims to discover if men feel less represented if high proportions of women represent them in a law-making capacity.

Defining the Terms: Pitkin and the Dimensions of Representation

Hanna Pitkin first developed a complex structure of interrelated layers of representation, relaying that each of these modes of representation can build from but also facilitate others (1967, 209). Understanding what is meant by representation is critical in understanding how a relationship can exist between proportions of representation and

"feeling" represented. Descriptive representation deals with demographic breakdowns of governmental bodies and is primarily concerned with numbers of representatives, and symbolic representation refers to constituent perceptions toward government. These two dimensions of representation are those which are studied in this research. The two other dimensions are substantive—policy responsiveness to a constituency—and formal—the institutionalized ways by which people can be represented. A discussion of each of these modes follows.

Descriptive. Descriptive representation is the sheer demographic comparison between legislators and their constituencies they represent. This form of representation relies on the assumption that similarities in demographic identities between individuals mean similarities in ideologies (Pitkin 1967, 60). Essentially, in any given society, this theory suggests that women think as other women, African Americans as other African Americans, and so on. If the demographic composition of a governmental body is proportionally similar to that of its constituency, then the assumption is that the government will think and act in a way consistent with the thoughts and actions of the overall population. This is not to say that all people with one or more similar demographic characteristics think or behave the same way; other factors clearly play a role as well. However, in a study of women leaders, Tolleson-Rinehart suggests that women who embrace more traditional gender roles still share gender group consciousness with feminists, even though they hold different political ideologies (1994, 68-70). This form of representation is easily measured and thus one of the more often studied. Women constitute just over half the population of most nations, yet no nation has close to 50 percent descriptive representation of women in federal legislators. Canada, for example, ranks second among female descriptive representation of G8 nations, but its

Parliament is but 21.1 percent female (http://www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/map-world-womenpolitics/). Even so, descriptive representation of women in Parliament has swelled substantially in recent years. Between 1920 and 1970, only 18 women were elected to the Canadian House of Commons, and there was only one female member in 1970 (Trimble and Arscott 2003, 18), but there are 69 female members serving in the 40th Parliament (November 2008-present) alone. Table 1.1 maps the increase of women in Parliament in the most recent sessions of Parliament. It is significant to note how the rates of female descriptive representation vary widely across the provinces. Indeed, it currently has nearly 22 percent women but breaking down the Parliament by province, some provinces have close to that 30 percent, while others lag far behind, with women making up less than 10 percent of Parliamentary seats. This variance on across the provinces provides the opportunity to study the effects of different levels of descriptive representation, thus making Canada an ideal choice for this study.

Province	Sessions of Parliament					
	35th (Jan 1994-April 1997)	*36th (Sept 1997-Oct 2000)*	*37th (Jan 2001-May 2004)*	*38th (Oct 2004-Nov 2005)*	*39th (April 2006-Sept 2008=*	*40th (Nov 2008-Present*
Alberta	5 of 26 (19%)	3 of 26 (12%%)	3 of 27 (11%)	3 of 28 (11%)	2 of 28 (7%)	3 of 28 (11%)
British Columbia	6 of 32 (19%)	5 of 36 (14%)	5 of 34 (15%)	5 of 36 (14%)	10 of 37 (27%)	10 of 37 (27%)
Manitoba	1 of 14 (7%)	2 of 14 (14%)	3 of 15 (20%)	4 of 14 (29%)	4 of 14 (29%)	6 of 14 (43%)
New Brunswick	2 of 10 (20%)	3 of 10 (30	2 of 10 (20%)	1 of 10 (10%)	0 of 10 (0%)	1 of 10 (10%)
Newfoundland and Labrador	2 of 9 (22%)	0 of 8 (0%)	0 of 9 (0%)	0 of 8 (0%)	0 of 7 (0%)	2 of 7 (29%)
Northwest Territory	1 of 2 (50%)	2 of 2 (100%)	1 of 1 (100%)	1 of 1 (100%)	0 of 1 (0%)	0 of 1 (0%)
Nova Scotia	3 of 11 (27%)	3 of 12 (25%)	2 of 11 (18%)	1 of 11 (9%)	1 of 11 (9%)	1 of 12 (8%)
Nunavut	***	***	1 of 1 (100%)	1 of 1 (100%)	1 of 1 (100	1 of 1 (100%)
Ontario	21 of 102 (21%)	26 of 105 (25%)	25 of 105 (24%)	27 of 106 (25%)	24 of 109 (22%)	21 of 106 (20%)

Prince Edward Island	0 of 4 (0%)	0 of 4 (0%)	0 of 4 (0%)	0 of 4 (0%)	0 of 4 (0%)	1 of 4 (25%)
Quebec	12 of 80 (15%)	18 of 78 (23%)	19 of 81 (23%)	20 of 75 (27%)	23 of 79 (29%)	21 of 77 (27%)
Saskatchewan	1 of 14 (7%)	0 of 14 (0%)	2 of 14 (14%)	2 of 14 (14%)	2 of 15 (13%)	2 of 14 (14%)
Yukon Territory	1 of 1 (100%)	1 of 1 (100%)	0 of 1 (0%)	0 of 1 (0%)	0 of 1 (0%)	0 of 1 (0%)

Table 1.1. Percentages of Women Representing Provinces and Territories in the House of Commons, 1993-2010.

Symbolic. Symbolic representation refers to the ways that representatives are perceived by constituents. The faith and trust that arise from a constituency towards their government constitutes symbolic representation (Lawless 2004, 82). Rooted in the idea that symbols represent values of a society, this concept means that constituents must *believe* that their government truly represents them and thus trust the government to make decisions on their behalf (Pitkin 1967, 107). Essentially, symbolic representation fulfills an almost emotional response that citizens can get toward their government; it seeks to answer the question, "does this government represent my interests?" Pitkin recognized this concept was difficult to define but necessary to differentiate because no matter what a government does, who is in it, or what institutions are in place to define it, people may still have little trust that the government acts in their best interests (1967, 115). Canadians' trust in government is relatively high (51 percent in 2008), especially in comparison to the United States (38 percent), but this trust varies widely from province to province (Wiseman 2007, 51). The western provinces, for example, tend to have less faith than do the eastern ones (Ibid., 52). Again, such a variance of levels of trust and confidence in Canada give ample data to which we can test potential relationships with descriptive representation. Although these two modes of representation (descriptive and symbolic) frame the theoretical foundations of this study, a brief discussion of the two other modes needs to be considered to understand the effects these dimensions have on one another.

Substantive. Substantive representation is the extent to which policymakers act in a way responsive to the constituencies they represent (Childs and Krook 2009, 127; Tremblay 2006, 503). Often, this responsiveness is viewed as policy output. If a legislative body passes laws that are in the interests of women, then they have a woman-friendly policy agenda, and so women are being represented substantively. Defining what constitutes "women's" interests, however, is a source of contention among scholars, as defining what is in the interests of a particular group is socially relative; indeed, women's policies are not necessarily feminist. Clearly, other variables affect women's identities and thus what issues are important to them (Caizza 2004, 38; Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers 2007, 554). Thus, female legislators may not necessarily pursue an agenda that women would universally view as woman-friendly. It has been found, however, that women legislators will speak more frequently in regard to issues that affect women (positively or negatively) than similarly-situated male lawmakers (Chaney 2006, 705; Celis and Childs 2008, 119; Childs and Krook 2009, 131; Mansbridge 1999, 629; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, 413; and Thomas 1994, 11, for example). Substantive representation may have effects of symbolic representation, but such research remains outside the scope of this study.

Formal. Pitkin defines another dimension, formal representation, as the institutional standards and legal procedures that ensure representation in government (1967, 40). In representative democratic systems, elections are legally-binding exercises that give authority for a person to represent a group of people and make decisions on that group's behalf. Whether the elected officials truly act in the interests of the represented is unimportant under a strictly formal view. Instead, it is the institutionalized mode of authorization that is at the heart of this view. Most studies use elections to illustrate and operationalize this formal

approach to representation (Powell 2000). In studying women in government, it is important to consider the legal framework that can affect their presence and influence: Are women allowed to vote? Can women hold governmental positions? Are there constitutional mandates to sustain a certain proportion of women in office? Essentially, one must see if the law of a certain jurisdiction holds women to a different legal standard than it does men in order to understand political contexts that may facilitate or stymie the promotion of women-friendly policy agendas.

Connecting the Dots: Integrating Models of Representative Dimensions

While Pitkin's 1967 influential work theoretically stresses the importance of the interconnectivity of all dimensions of representation, scholars refute the importance of all of the dimensions and tend to treat them independently of one another (Wahlke 1976, 280; Marsh and Norris 1997, 154). Others aim to understand linkages between some, but not all, of Pitkin's dimensions, and while they are by definition incomplete, according to Pitkin, they can be interwoven to gain a better understanding of the relationships among the various dimensions. Very few studies have sought to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among representative dimensions (but see Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005).

Linkages between formal and descriptive, formal and symbolic, descriptive and symbolic, formal and substantive, and substantive symbolic dimensions have been exposed in previous studies (for a discussion see Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005, 411; Lawless 2004, 93). Among the most studied is the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. Consistent with Pitkin's theory (1967, 211), this linkage means that demographic proportions of a representative government that are more consistent with those of the population at large will have policy agendas that are more salient to specific groups. If

there are higher proportions of female members in a legislative body, for example, then the legislative agenda should have more issues salient to women than agendas in legislative bodies with fewer female members.

Descriptive-Symbolic Linkages. The theory on representative links presented above suggests that more women in legislatures will affect policy outcomes, but it is certainly possible to have more benefits than mere policy output. Symbolic representation involves feelings of trust, efficacy, and legitimacy that constituents have toward their representatives and government (Pitkin 1967, 107). If there are higher rates of women in legislative bodies and they yield some sort of policy response, then it would follow that women would presumably trust the government to act in their best interests, and that could drive them to the polls to participate in the political process. This sequence would occur as a result of women feeling they had a personal stake in the political process, and so they would act upon it. Therefore, studying how the proportion of women in elected government affects feelings toward government overall is important to legitimize the democratic goals of these governments, whether on a local, state, or national level. And yet, to date, research fails to study adequately how *men* feel about women in representative bodies, a somewhat novel approach in the study of women and politics.

Jennifer Lawless's 2004 study focuses on the relationship between descriptive and symbolic dimensions of representation within members of Congress and their constituencies in an attempt to fill this research gap. Her study finds that women were indeed more trustful of government if they were represented by a woman, but those feelings of trust did not affect political attitudes or engagement overall, as measured by propensity to vote (Lawless 2004, 81). These findings are similar to those found in a 2007 study of municipal governments,

which argue that there is a stronger increase in trust if people surveyed believe that there

should be more women in government (Ulbig 2007, 1118).

How, though, would men respond to having more women in a legislature? On one

hand, there is a possibility that because women politicians are viewed as more embracing, less

power hungry, and more approachable, then perhaps men would feel more comfortable and

trusting of the government if there were more women making legislative decisions

(Flammang 1985, 108). While this phenomenon may be explained by some unknown,

confounding variable, there may also be some legitimacy to the argument. Having more

proportional gender representation in legislative bodies to the population at large may give

men and women alike the notion that the actions of that body would be more equal in terms of

representing all voices in a constituency. However, this idea of men being more trusting of

government with more women in it has been refuted by the Ulbig's findings, but Lawless

found that in certain levels of government, men will indeed have more confidence in

government with higher levels of descriptive representation. The reasons for this discrepancy

are unknown, and this research seeks to validate one of the two findings. Because both of

these case studies are within an American framework, looking to a different system of

government and political culture in Canada may provide an answer to the overall question of

how descriptive representation affects symbolic.

Why would men be less trusting of government with more women making legislative

decisions? Perhaps there will be some sort of backlash from male citizens because of the

women-friendly policies that arise as a result of the increase of descriptive female

representation. Men could feel that the female legislators are undermining their own interests

or authority (Ulbig 2007, 1118; Dahlerup 1988, 284, among others). This holds true

particularly if men believe that women are cannot be assertive or aggressive enough to be able to handle public office (Newman and White 2006, 105). Some men may also contend that because women have a disproportionate burden in familial responsibilities, they may not be able to concentrate their efforts on being an effective politician (MacIvor 1996, 237). Furthermore, the female legislators may be viewed as being feminist (self-described or not), which often carries negative connotations (Dahlerup 1985, 198). This negative connotation may be compounded by the scarcity of media coverage of female legislators or leaders in Canada (and indeed in other countries as well), which could lead men to question what those leaders are doing to promote their interests (Newman and White 2006, 114). Thus, as legislatures can be seen as the face of government, men may grow distrustful of the government and may be disillusioned with the political process.

This research thus has two alternative theories of effects of descriptive on symbolic representation, and finding which holds true is important when studying how (or even if) diversity matters in government. If an important principle of republican democracy is to have a government act on behalf of the people it represents, then if the people do not feel confident that the government is doing so, then the legitimacy of republican democracy is called into question. It is with this concern in mind that we can statistically examine if demographic breakdowns of Canadian Parliament is associated with constituent trust in government.

Hypothesis

With the theoretical framework in mind, this study seeks to explore the following research hypothesis:

Canadian citizens who live in provinces with a higher percentage of female Parliamentarians will have greater confidence in the current government than those living in provinces with lower rates of female representation.

Research Design

A question from the post-federal-election surveys from the Canadian National Election Study (CNES) from the years 1993, 1997, 2004, 2006, and 2008 will be used to measure confidence in government, the dependent variable). This question simply asked how confident the respondent was about the federal government, providing a four-point scale ranging from "no confidence at all" to "a great deal of confidence." Data on the number of women in the Canadian House of Commons across those years was gathered to create the independent variable. All control variables also come from CNES data.
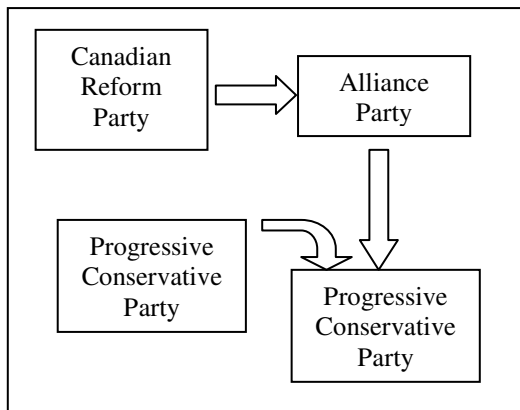
A chi-square test of significance within cross-tabulation analysis will determine if the null hypothesis (that is, no relationship between the variables) can be rejected or not. Because both variables were coded into ordinal-level data and the cross-tabs are considered "non-square," the most appropriate measure of association is Kendall's tau-c.

Controls

Region. Due to the limited survey responses from some of the provinces in the study, some provinces were collapsed into two regions: the Maritimes (Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia) and the Prairies (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta). The three largest and most populous provinces were measured individually because there was sufficient data to do so: Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia. These groupings are based on similar characteristics in the cultures within these geographic areas (for discussion, see Wiseman 2007, 126).

Gender. Given the theories of differing attitudes between men and women toward female elected officials, controlling for gender is the first step in tackling the heart of the research question. It is expected that female constituents will have greater trust in government with higher percentages of women representing them than will male constituents.

Political Party. With the strength of political party in Canada, controlling for party is also an obvious step. Methodologically, however, this can be problematic because of the emergence and dying out of parties within the past few decades in Canada. Therefore, data on party affiliation between 1993 and 2008 has been collapsed into the five most prevalent parties today. This was done based on the general ideologies former parties had as well as the trajectories those parties took. For example, the Canadian Reform Party became the Alliance Party, and then Alliance merged with the Progressive Conservative Party to form the Conservative Party. I put all three of these responses together as Conservatives, although I acknowledge some of the ideological differences among its predecessors. Other parties include Liberal, the National Democratic Party (NDP), Reform, Bloc Quebecois, as well as other/no party.

Age. Age will also be analyzed, as people of different generations may possess different levels of confidence in government, particularly with the ebb and flow of divisive political issues, such as the question of Quebec's secession. These issues—which are memories for some but only in history books for others—may affect how citizens view their government.

Marital status. As some research indicates differences in voting choices status across different marital statuses (Weisberg 1987, 387), it is reasonable to theorize that people of different marital statuses may view government differently, so that variable is a necessary control. This variable was conglomerated to have three possible values: never been married, married/partnered, and separated/divorced/widowed.

Race. Canada features a vast array of races and ethnicities, so it is critical to consider these in analyzing the data, particularly when looking at the First Peoples and those of French or Acadian descent, who have historically been treated differently than the other ethnicities within Canada. French Canadians have a sense of culture wholly distinct from the rest of Anglophone Canada, and the First Peoples have gone through years of institutional discrimination, only to have received an official apology by the federal government in the 2000s.

Findings and Analysis

Control Variable	χ^2	Sig.	Kendall's Tau-C	Kramer's V
Proportion alone (no control)	88.282	.000*	.065	
Gender				
Male	68.395	.000*		.034
Female	33.040	.000*		.050
Region				
Ontario	35.504	.000*		.045
Quebec	56.552	.000*		.021
British Columbia	18.834	.004*		.003
Maritimes	18.903	.026*		.053
Prairies	18.950	.004*		.026
Age				
18-34	51.724	.000*		.002
35-49	43.056	.000*		.000
50-65	11.944	.216		.027
66+	12.926	.006*		.011
Marital Status				
Never Been Marr	19.316	.023*		.013
Married/Partner	69.888	.000*		.006
Sep/Div/Widow	11.821	.224		.024
Party				
Liberal	19.274	.023*		.000
PC	39.623	.000*		.076
NDP	9.041	.434		.003
Reform	9.380	.403		.000
Bloc Quebecois	48.043	.000*		.003
Other	4.017	.910		.000
Race				
European	54.046	.000*		.000
Latin/South Am	4.906	.556		.111
Asian	7.496	.586		.048
African	11.912	.331		.013
Native	5.619	.467		.000
French/Quebec	7.565	.579		.037
Middle Eastern	4.353	.887		.056
Year				
1993	5.278	.509		.018
1997	24.496	.004*		.002
2000	50.586	.002*		.036
2004	13.228	.040*		.000
2006	10.595	.102		.028
2008	8.697	.191		.001

Table 1.2: Chi-Square Test of Significance between Proportion and Confidence, with controls

Using cross-tab analysis, a chi-square test of significance revealed that the proportion of women representing the respondent in the House of Commons did have a positive relationship with that respondent's level of confidence in the federal government, although the relationship was weak with a lambda value of .065, meaning only 6.5 percent of the values of the dependent variable (confidence rating) could be explained by the independent variable (proportion of female representatives. Still, as the control variables indicated in lambda tests, the values of independent variable alone explained more data than any other variable.

Gender

The data show a statistically significant relationship between proportion and confidence, even when gender was held constant. Contrary to the research question, however, there exists a *positive* relationship between the independent and dependent variables for both genders. These findings are opposite what Ulbig found in her research. The lambda value indicated that the association between the variables, when controlling for gender, was weaker than when testing the dependent variable against the independent variable alone.

Region

Interestingly, controlling for all regions still revealed a statistically significant relationship between proportion and confidence in government. Again, controlling for region showed a weaker association between those variables, which means that region does not sufficiently explain confidence in government than does the proportion of women representing those regions. These findings are somewhat surprising in that it was expected that regions with a history of rifts with federal government (Quebec and the Maritimes, for example) would have low trust in government overall, but incidentally, the number of women is a better explanatory variable.

Age

Except for the 50-65 age group, controlling for age cohort still showed association between the variables, although they were considerably weaker than when proportion alone was tested as the independent variable. It is curious why the 50-65 age group made the association between the independent and dependent variables insignificant. Speculatively, this appellation may be a result of the political environment of the 1960s and 1970s, when these citizens would have been in their teens and twenties. Perhaps the political unrest affected their views on government, and the rest of the generations were either not alive to experience it or too old to feel affected by it. However, further tests on this phenomenon could better explain why this difference occurred.

Marital Status

The only control value for which the association between proportion of women in government and confidence in government was made insignificant was with people who were separated, divorced, or widowed. It explains a measly 2.4 percent of the data, but it is worthy of explanation nonetheless. There may be complicated steps involved with divorce process, and that may espouse frustration with government. However, the independent variable explains at least three times better the dependent variable alone than when controlling by marital status, so proportion is a more important explanatory variable.

Party

Presumably, if people are members of parties not in power in the federal government, then they would have less confidence in government. To an extent, this may be true; only half of the parties controlled for kept the relationship between proportion and trust significant. The Progressive – Conservative (PC) Party actually held a stronger explanatory nature of feelings

of confidence than with the proportion of women alone, but this statistic is questionable because there was an immensely low *n* of people in the PC party, so the lambda value might not be a reliable measure in this case. For all other values of the party variable, the independent variable alone was a better explanatory variable.

Race

Interestingly, those of a European descent were the only group in which the association between proportion of women in government and people's trust in government. Yet, the other values explained significantly less than the proportion alone, so their lack of significance was of less importance. The Latin American/South American value explained nearly 11 percent of the data, but with the *n* value of that group was too low to be a statistically viable test.

Year

Controlling for year was a way to be able to control for political environment. For example, a the government in 2007, for example, may have been unpopular and would affect the way people view government. Half of the values made the association between the test variables insignificant, so there is an indication that political environment has something to do with confidence in government, but the proportion of women in Parliament explained confidence better than the years.

Conclusion

It is indeed significant that men and women both had increases in trust in government once with higher numbers of women in office. At least for Canada, the answer to the research question—do men feel less represented with more women holding office?—is a decisive no, and, in fact, the opposite appears to be true. This finding shows

This kind of research is quite significant in studying democratic governments. If having gender diversity in the legislature makes Canadians more confident in government, and, if subscribing to the belief that the perception of government affects "true" representation, then diversity in government legitimizes their representative democracy. It would then be of interest for the government of Canada (and other democracies) to strive to promote diversity in government, whether it be gender, racial, age or other demographic diversity. This research seems to give credence to the rationale for countries to adopt constitutional quotas for their legislative bodies: it better represents the people. If people do not have confidence in those who represents them in government, then what is the point of having a representative democracy at all?

An important caveat to this conclusion, however, must be made. Gender (or racial) diversity alone is not the only factor influencing people's levels of confidence in government. Future research must examine how governmental policies, for example, play into this relationship, and, in that same vein, looking to see who the representatives *are*. Simply having the diversity does not ensure trust. For example, if women in these positions are merely pawns for other politicians or political parties, then their role as a representative is undermined. Further, people may feel less represented if their MPs are ideologically polar to them; in the United States, it would seem unreasonable to think that the same people who support Hillary Clinton would support Sarah Palin. These differences in policy preferences and actual political power need to be addressed in future research.

Nonetheless, this study seeks to delve into a previously understudied topic of men's and women's perceptions of government when more women are present within it. It will hopefully be just one of many future studies on symbolic representation in relation to

descriptive representation, a field of study that still remains rather sparse and contradictory. Filling in research gaps can help us gain a better understanding of people's perceptions of government and how having a more equally representative government can facilitate better feelings and responses toward governments. A suggestion of further research would be to look more qualitatively at men's views of women in government, and this could be accomplished by conducting interviews of men across Canada and studying their individual responses further. This research is also just the beginning the growing research on representation, and so the other dimensions must be considered in future studies before we can truly understand the nature of representation.

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