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Does the Effect of Political Participation Depend on the Status of the Participator?

Elena Leuschner, P.h.D.

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Abstract:

Privileged citizens are more likely to participate in politics and to be better politically represented. Does unequal participation drive unequal representation? Or are politicians biased toward privileged citizens, regardless of their political activity? While politicians' biases toward high-status citizens have been documented, the role of political participation therein remains empirically under-researched. Using nearly 40 years of uniquely comprehensive survey data on Swedish parliamentarians and citizens, we provide the most robust observational evidence to date that politicians' perceptions of public opinion are biased in favor of the opinions of the politically active. Informed by these findings, a novel survey experiment with Swedish politicians will test whether politicians give greater weight to an identical political activity based solely on the status of the participating citizen. Our integration of observational and experimental findings will provide new answers to the important question of whether low-status citizens could increase their political influence by participating more.

*Dr. Elena Leuschner is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Political Science, [University of Münster](#) at Daniel Bischof's chair for Comparative Politics. At the moment, she is working on the relation between protest and public opinion. In 2025, she defended her [PhD](#) on the causes and consequences of government responsiveness to protests at the University of Gothenburg. Her research has been published in highly ranked peer-reviewed journals, such as *Comparative Political Studies* and *Political Behavior*. Besides this ongoing work on protests, she has also published on political biases in evaluations of International Organizations in *Review of International Organization and Public Administration Review*. Throughout her research projects, she employs a variety of quantitative and computational methodologies, such as econometrics, survey experiments, and machine learning.*
