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## **Gender bias in legislative oversight: Do parliamentarians control women ministers more tightly than men ministers?**

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## *Abstract:*

Legislative oversight is an important element of the relationship between parliament and government, but how ministers' characteristics incentivize MPs to oversee some more thoroughly than others, has not yet received scholarly attention. This paper contributes to closing this research gap by answering the question as to whether and why the oversight activities of MPs are shaped by the gender of ministers. We argue that MPs control women ministers more tightly than their men colleagues, because stereotypes about women's inability to govern continue to shape MPs' subconscious perception of women ministers and representatives perceive women as less trustworthy than men ministers. To test this proposition, we study the number of oral and written questions submitted to ministries led by men and women ministers in five European democracies since 1990. The analysis focuses on 64 instances of ministerial change between men and women within the same cabinet to uncover how MPs adapt their oversight activities as the sex of the minister changes. We show that MPs oversee women in government more thoroughly than men. We furthermore draw on qualitative interviews with MPs to underpin the causal mechanisms behind this behavioral change. Uncovering the gender bias in legislative oversight has implications for the working of parliamentary democracies as well as the women in high-profile political offices.

**Keywords:** legislative oversight, gender, ministers, women

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