

# Reputational Benefits for Political Parties from Ethnic and Gender Diversity. Evidence from Survey Experiments in the UK

Maria Sobolewska (University of Manchester)

## Abstract

In European political science the issue social diversity of political parties has been considered solely as an issue of representation of under-represented groups. Here I propose to question the wider impact of diversity on the parties general image with the broader electorate. Two things are achieved in doing so. Firstly, it becomes clear that not all forms of social diversity influence voters perceptions of parties in the same way. Out of the two social diversity indicators analysed here gender diversity has a very small impact on party images, and this effect works along gender lines. However, ethnic diversity behaves more similarly to race in the US: ethnic diversity of political parties influences how the white electorate reacts to the parties, and it divides opinion along partisan lines. To find such an effect in Europe, where the main focus is on attitudes towards immigration and not race and ethnicity, is clearly very surprising. Secondly, this paper suggests that political parties can use this phenomenon strategically: while gender diversity can be used to attract women voters, ethnic diversity can be used in a way that goes beyond attracting ethnic minority voters. I argue that this raises important implications for the study of ethnicity as an electoral cleavage in Europe and also for research on descriptive representation.