



# The Silent Sex: Gender, Deliberation, and Institutions

*Christopher F. Karpowitz, Tali Mendelberg*

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Do women participate in and influence meetings equally with men? Does gender shape how a meeting is run and whose voices are heard? *The Silent Sex* shows how the gender composition and rules of a deliberative body dramatically affect who speaks, how the group interacts, the kinds of issues the group takes up, whose voices prevail, and what the group ultimately decides. It argues that efforts to improve the representation of women will fall short unless they address institutional rules that impede women's voices.

Using groundbreaking experimental research supplemented with analysis of school boards, Christopher Karpowitz and Tali Mendelberg demonstrate how the effects of rules depend on women's numbers, so that small numbers are not fatal with a consensus process, but consensus is not always beneficial when there are large numbers of women. Men and women enter deliberative settings facing different expectations about their influence and authority. Karpowitz and Mendelberg reveal how the wrong institutional rules can exacerbate women's deficit of authority while the right rules can close it, and, in the process, establish more cooperative norms of group behavior and more generous policies for the disadvantaged. Rules and numbers have far-reaching implications for the representation of women and their interests.

Bringing clarity and insight to one of today's most contentious debates, *The Silent Sex* provides important new findings on ways to bring women's voices into the conversation on matters of common concern.

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