

**Talking Representation:**

**How Legislators Re-establish Responsiveness in Cases of Representational Deficits**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A close connection between public opinion and policy is considered a vital element of democracy. However, legislators cannot be responsive to all voters at all times with regard to the policies the latter favor. We draw on recent literature showing that legislators use explanations when their policies are incongruent with the attitudes of their constituencies, and adopt a conceptualization of responsiveness as a communicative process. We argue that legislators use the speaking time in parliament to offer compensatory speech acts to their constituents who might oppose how they voted on a policy in order to reestablish themselves as responsive to the public's wishes. Leveraging the case of Brexit, we show that legislators pay more discursive attention to constituents who might be dissatisfied with how they voted. Furthermore, their use of rhetorical responsiveness is contingent on the magnitude of the representational deficit they face vis-à-vis their constituency. Our findings attest to the central role of parliamentary speech in maintaining the legislators' position as responsive to the will of the public. They also demonstrate that communicative responsiveness can substitute for policy responsiveness.

**Keywords:** responsiveness, representation, parliamentary speeches, text analysis, Brexit, rhetoric