

Symbolic and Ideological Representation in National Parliaments

A Cross-National Comparison of the Representation of Women, Ethnic Groups,
and Issue Positions in National Parliaments

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List of Abbreviations

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
AIC	Advanced industrial countries
CSES	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems
GDP	Gross domestic product
HDI	Human Development Index
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
ILO	International Labour Organization
M	District magnitude
Mj	Majoritarian
MMD	Multi-member district
MMM	Mixed-member majoritarian
MMP	Mixed-member proportional
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PR	Proportional representation
Q	Representation score
SMD	Single-member district
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WVS	World Value Survey

Chapter 1

Introduction

One of the great advances in the last century was the radical expansion of citizenship: the view that all humans are essentially equal. This argument of justice is well reflected in the mantra of *one person one vote*, with inclusiveness being a fundamental criterion for democracy (Dahl, 1985). However, despite these advances, ideals of equality are far from accomplished. In some places, women and ethnic minority groups remain systematically marginalized and under-represented in national parliament. This is problematic because the level of representation of women and minority groups in national parliaments is indicative of their status in society.

Representation in national parliaments is also sought for different reasons. It is sometimes argued that women or ethnic minorities have distinctive interests, and on this ground, their inclusion in parliaments is vital to accommodate these interests. Examples include birth control for women, or issues of land resources that may affect certain ethnic minority groups. The argument put forward is that such issues are not representable by anyone not directly affected. Although this contention is in many cases controversial, representation is thought to ensure that these particularized interests can be defended in parliament.

Parliamentary representation is also sought because of legitimacy and accountability. Where certain views or groups are excluded from processes of decision-making, the power held by such institutions is sometimes questioned as illegitimate. Accordingly, an institution consisting only of men, or one

where only left-wing ideas are present, for instance, is seen as deviating from the ideal of inclusiveness to the extent that its legitimacy is questioned. Going back to Rousseau, this view is rooted in the ideals of direct democracy, and representation in parliaments is regarded as entrusting someone else with one's rightful privileges and rights to take part in decision-making processes. What all the outlined views share is the importance given to the representativeness of parliaments. In order to achieve the goal of higher levels of representation in parliament, it is necessary to understand which factors are associated with under-representation.

The starting point of this project is the vastly different levels of representation in national parliaments. Representation is approached in terms of the representation of women, ethnic groups, as well as policy issues. I refer to the representation of women and ethnic groups as *symbolic representation*, and use the term *ideological representation* for the representation of policy positions and issue preferences in different domains. In order to establish the contributing factors for higher levels of representation, it is first necessary to outline different conceptions of representation. On this basis, it is possible to establish the levels of representation in different current legislatures. The first research question that follows is: *How can we explain differences in the levels of representation?* In other words, applied to the specific forms of representation examined in this project: *What factors are associated with levels of gender representation, ethnic group representation, and ideological representation in different domains?*

In this project, institutional, cultural, and other factors are considered as contributors to the different levels of representation observed. Very broadly, institutional factors refer to aspects of the electoral system, whereas cultural variables capture the prevalent attitudes towards women and ethnic minority groups in different societies. Unfortunately in the existing literature cultural factors are often ignored or only included as an after-thought, this despite the recognition that attitudes in the population towards women and minority

groups may be substantial in shaping the level of representation in national parliaments. Part of this thesis is dedicated to exploring the influence and possible interdependence between cultural and institutional factors for representation. The intuition is that the effects of institutional factors may be limited if not accompanied by analogous cultural attitudes. The anticipated role of institutional, cultural, and other variables is further developed in a theoretical framework presented in chapter 2. By considering both institutional and cultural factors, the project is also able to examine whether current approaches to improve levels or representations—principally by means of quotas—are an effective means to this end.

When talking about representation, it is necessary to recognize that political representation is multifaceted and multidimensional. In the following pages, the representation of women and ethnic minority groups is equally examined as that of policy positions. Indeed, the relationships between the different forms of representation are of key interest, and this project examines whether there are factors that are associated with higher levels of representation in all cases, or whether there is a trade-off between different forms of representation. With an eye on electoral engineering, it is particularly interesting to determine whether improving one kind of representation necessarily comes at the cost of another, or whether different forms of representation can be reconciled, or can even be mutually supportive. The guiding research question is: *How are levels of representation in different forms linked?* In other words, applied to the specific forms of representation examined in this project: *What are the relationships between levels of gender representation, ethnic group representation, and ideological representation in different domains?*

The different forms of representation are examined in more detail in chapter 2. The project focuses on symbolic representation—concerned with demographically defined groups, particularly women and ethnic groups—and ideological representation—linked to policy preferences. Symbolic representation is asso-

ciated with group rights, an aspect of citizenship more commonly recognized and emphasized in recent years. In free societies where all citizens are considered equal, everyone has the same right to representation. Consequently, the under-representation of certain groups is an issue concerning the legitimacy of the parliament in question.

At the same time, it is often argued that ideological representation is what voters care about (Darcy *et al.*, 1994). The focus in this case is on the role of parliament in policymaking: either actively in creating policies, or passively as watchdogs of the government. The intuition is that voters care about their interests, and are concerned with how well the representatives in parliament defend their policy preferences. In this sense, however, in some cases ideological representation may not be enough: The presence of like-minded members of parliament does not guarantee their active involvement in processes of policymaking.

For this reason, performative representation is of interest: It would be interesting to know what members of parliament actually do. However, performative aspects of representation are beyond the scope of this project for a number of reasons. The biggest challenge is the lack of adequate data in many countries—the voting patterns of members of parliament are commonly used. However, voting patterns in parliament might not be the best indication of performative representation, since a parliamentarian may have an impact on a particular bill through discussions and arguments put forward in select committees even in places where party discipline encourages him or her to vote differently. What is more, the impact of policies is also shaped by factors outside the parliament, such as large businesses, the media, or government committees. The result is that a proper examination of performative representation is highly complex to capture empirically.

Moreover, focusing on performative representation would imply that parliaments are purely a tool for policymaking. Different conceptions would be dis-

regarded, such as the importance of the representation of women and ethnic minorities in parliament as a sign of justice and the equality of citizens. Following this argument, the presence in parliaments is sometimes regarded as intrinsically valuable, whilst other contributions focus on the symbolic value of inclusion, and women and ethnic minorities as role models for future generations.

The systematic analysis of parliamentary representation in this project does not assume a purely utilitarian view reducing the role of parliament to policymaking. Political representation is rooted in concerns of justice, going back to Rousseau: the equality of citizens is highlighted, with the view that parliament should mirror the citizens as well as possible—creating a microcosm. Consequently, this project includes different conceptualizations of representation: Both symbolic and ideological forms of representation are considered. Following this focus on justice, the project presumes meaningful and competitive elections, with the result that presence in parliament is linked to power. In some places this fundamental assumption of justice is violated, such as in repressive regimes (de Rezende Martins, 2004; Matland, 2006; Baldez, 2006; Khan, 2007). In such countries, the dynamics related to political representation may differ significantly (Yoon, 2004). I circumvent these issues by excluding unfree countries in the empirical analyses. The analyses in this project are based on the 131 countries classified as *free* or *partly free* by *Freedom House* (2006).¹

There are a number of themes in this project. One is the role of different forms of political representation. The role of institutional and cultural factors in explaining different levels of representation is another recurring topic, as is their possible interaction. Even though in the literature institutional factors are the

¹ There is an inherent difficulty in classifying regimes into free and unfree, because many regimes are in fact hybrid cases (Diamond, 2002); a fact reflected by the concept of *partly free* in the *Freedom House* classifications.

most commonly used explanation, in this project cultural variables are included in a systematic manner. Only by so doing can the relative importance of cultural factors be appraised, and with that can the effectiveness of introduced measures be examined, such as that of quotas.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of the different conceptualizations of representation. This builds up to a theoretical framework of parliamentary representation, from which a series of hypotheses are derived. This framework is not intended to provide a unifying theory, but is a tool to bring together the different, separate facets of political representation. It helps to identify the factors associated with different levels of representation, but might also be useful to recognize potential linkages between different forms of representation. With that, both research questions are addressed. The hypotheses that are derived from the framework build the basis for the empirical chapters: Gender representation is examined in chapter 4, ethnic group representation in chapter 5, chapter 6 is concerned with ideological representation, whilst chapter 7 is dedicated to the relationships between different forms of representation. The empirical chapters also deal with subject-specific literature and previous results. Possible contributing factors that could not be included in the empirical analyses are discussed in the concluding part, making sure that a more complete picture of representation is presented. With that, limits to electoral engineering are discussed in the light of institutional and cultural influences on levels of representation.