

Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 3: Representation and Responsiveness

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Overview

1. Logistics

2. Week 3 Readings

Pitkin, "The Concept of Representation"

Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes"

Gilens, "Affluence and Influence"

Logistics

Logistics

1. Recitation scheduling finalized
2. Short response papers
 - Please respond directly to the readings; at least one citation (and preferably more)

Week 3 Readings

Week 3 Readings

Pitkin, “The Concept of Representation”

Political Theory

A few words on division of labor in political science:

- Subfields: American politics, comparative politics, international relations, methodology, and political theory
- One role of theory: clarifying concepts

"We may think of the concept [of representation] as a rather complicated, convoluted, three-dimensional structure in the middle of a dark enclosure. Political theorists give us, as it were, flash-bulb photographs of the structure taken from different angles. But each proceeds to treat his partial view as the complete structure. It is no wonder, then, that various photographs do not coincide, that the theorists' extrapolations from these pictures are in conflict. Yet there is something there, in the middle in the dark, which all of them are photographing; and the different photographs together can be used to reconstruct it in complete detail" (Pitkin 1967).

Representation: Clarifying Concepts

Noting that the word “representation” has many (sometimes contradictory) uses, Pitkin sets out to clarify its meaning:

1. Definition

- “**re-presentation**, a making present again”
- “the making present *in some sense* of something which is nevertheless *not* present literally or in fact”
- Definition is inadequate: making present in *what* sense? according to *whom*?

“What we need is not just an accurate definition, but a way of doing justice to the various more detailed applications of representation in various contexts—how the absent thing is made present, and who considers it so.”

2. Applications

Pitkin's Applications of Representation

1. **“Formalistic” views:** defined by legitimacy of the process of choosing representatives
 - Hobbesian social contract: authorization to act, defined by preceding arrangement
2. **“Standing for”:** defined by who representative is
 - Descriptive representation
3. **“Acting for”:** defined by what representative does
 - Substantive representation

Formalistic Representation

- Considers the **process** by which representative was chosen
- Pitkin on Hobbes: “*Representation is a kind of ‘black box’ shaped by the initial giving of authority, within which the representative can do whatever he pleases.*”
- Focused on **free and fair elections**
- Unresolved problems:
 - How often should elections take place? What constitutes fair elections?

Descriptive Representation

- Considers the **identity** of a representative: a representative body “reflecting without distortion” its various constituencies
- “A representative body is an arena in which each opinion in the nation can produce itself in full light”
- Unresolved problems:
 - Which features matter? Is it all about appearance?
 - What about negative features? Should “*morons represent morons*”?
 - (Return to this with Mansbridge.)

Substantive Representation

- Considers the **content** of a representative's behavior
- To represent is to “act for” or “act on behalf of” others
- Questions raised by this view:
 1. The **delegate** or the **trustee** model?
 2. How does the concept of “acting for” aggregate to a constituency?

Substantive Representation

From Edmund Burke:

- The **delegate** model:
 - the representative is a mere mouthpiece for the people's views
- The **trustee** model:
 - *"his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living... Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."*

Substantive Representation

Further complications arise when it comes to representing groups:

- “while it may be difficult to determine the interests or wishes of a single individual, it is infinitely more difficult to do so for a constituency of thousands”
- “on many issues a constituency may not have any interest, or its members may have several conflicting interests”
- “ignorance, apathy, irrationality”
- “further, [the representative] seldom has access to accurate information about what views and interests they do have”

Substantive Representation

"Must we then abandon the idea of political representation in its most common sense of 'acting for'?"

What does Pitkin conclude about whether substantive representation is a meaningful concept? What do you conclude?

From individual actions to systems:

- *"The mere fact that he is functioning within a representative system is, of course, no guarantee that he is truly representing; but it allows for more complex and long-range ways of representing than are possible for an isolated individual agent."*
- *"Representative government is not defined by particular actions at a particular moment, but by long-term systematic arrangements—by institutions and the way in which they function."*
- *"It seems to me that we show a government to be representative not by demonstrating its control over its subjects but just the reverse, by demonstrating that its subjects have control over what it does. "*

Week 3 Readings

Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent
Blacks and Women Represent Women? A
Contingent Yes"

What Is Descriptive Representation?

"Representatives are in their own persons and lives in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent."

- “Black legislators represent Black constituents, women legislators represent women constituents, and so on”
- “Can denote not only visible characteristics, such as color of skin or gender, but also shared **experiences**” — e.g., farmers represent farmers

Some Immediate Objections

“No one would argue that morons should be represented by morons.”

What is Mansbridge's answer?

There are actually two forms of descriptive representation:

- **Microcosmic:** a representative sample of the population
- **Selective:** compensating for the effects of some other process that interferes with the expected proportionality, e.g. discrimination

Mansbridge argues that “morons represented by morons” is microcosmic, but we should also consider selective.

Further Questions

Setting aside these preliminary objections, we can tackle some further questions:

1. Which characteristics ought to be represented?
 - Left-handed people? Redheads? Lithuanians? “*Mirror views provide few guidelines for selecting which social characteristics merit representation.*”
2. What about views that are harmful to the polity?
 - Who decides?
3. How much representation is “enough”?
 - Is one voice enough? Is proportionality necessary?

Which characteristics should be represented?

It depends on the democratic function you have in mind. Specifically, there are (at least) two functions of democracy:

1. **Aggregative**: counting votes
2. **Deliberative**: sharing information, learning, convincing...

*"The perspectives and interests of [left-handers] should be represented in **deliberation** when their perspectives are relevant to a decision and in **aggregation** when their interests conflict with those of others."*

- Does **aggregation** require descriptive representation?
 - Electoral incentives could do the trick: power needs to be exercised proportionally, but not by any particular mechanism
- Does **deliberation** require descriptive representation?
 - Yes. Why might electoral incentives not be enough?

How much representation is “enough”?

One voice may be enough to bring a group's concerns to light in democratic deliberation. Why might it not be enough?

- Deliberation is synergistic
- Minorities may need critical mass
- Representation of heterogeneous interests within minority groups

What are the costs of descriptive representation?

Essentialism: “the assumption that members of certain groups have an essential identity that all members of that group share and of which no others can partake.”

Why is this bad?

“The problem of simple categorization becomes much worse when, as is often the case in human affairs, one group is socially dominant and becomes the norm, setting expectations and structuring institutions so that those who do not conform to that norm are perceived as deviant or lesser beings, perceive themselves as deviant, and cannot function as well in the structures designed for the members of the dominant group.”

- Even political groups that challenge the hegemony of the dominant group cannot escape this dynamic

Additional considerations: erosion of unity, possible reduction of accountability

When do the benefits outweigh the costs?

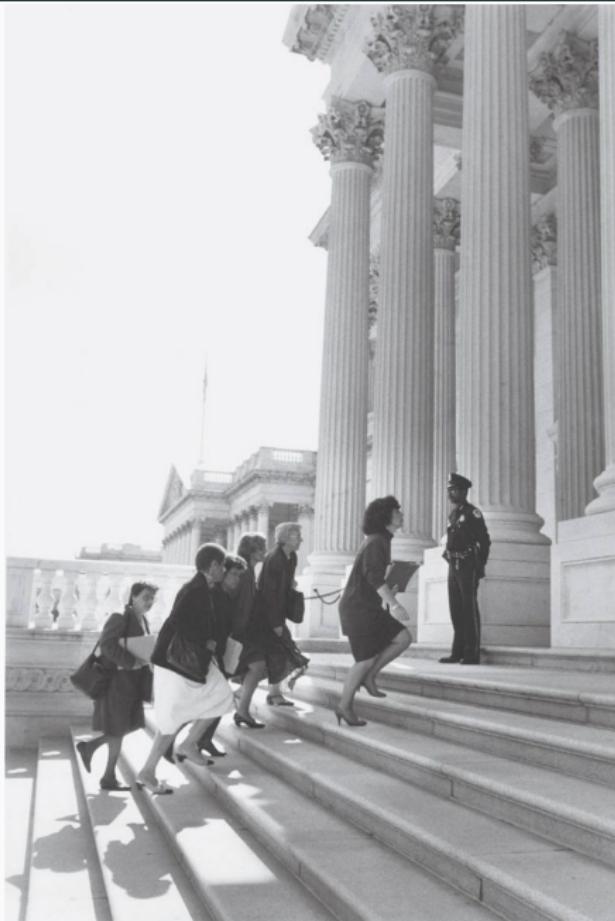
Descriptive representation serves **substantive representation** under conditions of:

- Poor communication and distrust
- Uncrystallized interests

Aside from this, descriptive representation has two direct benefits:

- The construction of social meaning
- De facto legitimacy

Uncrystallized Interests: The Anita Hill Hearings



Uncrystallized Interests: Carol Moseley-Braun



<https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5000887/user-clip-moseley-braun>

Week 3 Readings

Gilens, “Affluence and Influence”

Are Citizens Worthy of Representation?

"The radical idea at the core of democracy—that the power to shape public policies should be widely and more or less equally shared among citizens—presupposes that citizens are widely (and more or less equally) competent to exercise that power."

Purpose of the reading:

1. Ask what is demanded of citizens under different views of democracy
2. Ask if citizens are up to the task

Back to Two Models of Democratic Politics

1. Deliberative

- Citizens' views are *endogenous* to (i.e., shaped by) political process
 - E.g. New England town hall, Athenian democracy

2. Aggregative

- Citizens' views are *exogenous* to political process, which serves only as a mechanism for incorporating these views into governance

A Minimalist View: Citizens Fail on Both Counts

“The typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests” (Schumpeter).

Under this view, the best we can do is **retrospective voting**: citizens select incumbent or challenger and leave them to govern.

- *“In order to ascertain whether the incumbents have performed poorly or well, citizens need only calculate the changes in their own welfare” (Fiorina).*

Even Retrospective Voting Raises Concerns

- **Consensus issues:** Economic performance, crime
 - Attribution
 - Personal vs. national welfare
- **Contentious issues:** Abortion, gun rights, environment, foreign military interventions...
 - Now you need both a **policy preference** and the **knowledge** of whether the incumbent candidate has helped advance the desired outcome

Shark Attacks!

Monkey Cage

Do shark attacks swing elections?



Why is attribution important for democratic accountability?

Three Ways Out of the Grim View

1. Cue taking
2. Issue publics
3. Aggregation