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On: 23 April 2013, At: 09:30
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,
UK



West European Politics

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fwep20>

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Irene Bloemraad

Version of record first published: 22 Apr 2013.

To cite this article: Irene Bloemraad (2013): Accessing the Corridors of Power: Puzzles and Pathways to Understanding Minority Representation, West European Politics, 36:3, 652-670

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2013.773733>

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Accessing the Corridors of Power: Puzzles and Pathways to Understanding Minority Representation

IRENE BLOEMRAAD

Three major constraints hinder cross-national comparisons: a lack of data on the immigrant origins of political candidates and elected representatives, incomplete public data on the immigrant origins of national populations or electorates, and cross-national differences in the definition of the minority population. This article addresses these methodological difficulties and the conceptual challenges of studying minority representation. Using public data for a number of West European countries and three 'Anglo-settler' immigration countries, it elaborates an index to evaluate representational equity and to compare women's and minorities' presence in national legislatures. The index reveals the limits of a 'national models' or simple 'electoral rules' framework. Future research should focus on dynamics of group mobilisation, ideological contexts and the recruitment practices of political parties.

Does it matter who, exactly, walks the corridors of power? The political platforms and ideologies of elected representatives have clear consequences. But does it matter if a representative is light-skinned or dark, native-born or not? If a representative articulates and promotes the preferences of electors, this seemingly effaces the relevance of who articulates those preferences.

This symposium is built on an opposing assumption: that the identity and experiences of elected representatives matter. As Anne Phillips (1995) argues, the 'politics of ideas', in which representatives are faceless as long they reflect electors' opinions, are insufficient given a strong sense of political exclusion among those kept out of the corridors of power. An alternative 'politics of presence' demands greater representation of women, ethno-racial minorities and other excluded groups. Some claim that deliberations will be inadequate without sufficient representatives who share minorities' experiences, and who thereby bring new perspectives to democratic decision-making. Others contend that the legitimacy of a democracy is undermined when a society's members fail to see themselves mirrored in decision-making bodies.

Correspondence Address: bloemr@berkeley.edu

This article, like the others in this symposium, presumes the value of studying ‘mirror representation’. It leaves open the question of whether descriptive representation necessarily produces substantive representation for immigrant-origin minorities. In fact, any debate about descriptive versus substantive representation is impossible to adjudicate until we better understand the empirical facts: what is the degree of mirror representation in West European democracies? How do we measure and compare minority representation? The latter question is complicated by the fact that distinctions between ‘insiders’ and minority ‘outsiders’ vary from place to place since they are a product of history, demographics and evolving social perceptions.

Making progress on understanding the dynamics and consequences of minority representation requires better and more systematic data on the origins of political candidates and office holders, as well as better, comparable statistics of the underlying population represented by elected officials. In what follows, I outline some of the data challenges researchers face and make the case for a more standardised representation index to facilitate comparisons across political bodies and minority groups. Importantly, the methodological challenges involve key conceptual decisions, ones which defy the usual standardisation of variables across cases. I consequently argue for a more qualitative, case-by-case determination of ‘minority’ which, once conceptualised, can be converted into a quantitative index for cross-national comparison.

To illustrate the value of this approach, I use the index to compare a small number of West European countries with Australia, Canada and the United States, three traditional countries of immigration. The results produce some surprises. While those of North African origin make up about 5 per cent of the French population, in 2007 not a single member of the National Assembly was of Magrebian origin. In contrast, those of Turkish origins make up a smaller percentage of the German population – about 3 per cent – but in 2009, before the autumn elections, just under 1 per cent of seats in the German Bundestag were held by people of Turkish background. The greater Turkish-origin representation in Germany contradicts a longstanding typology that juxtaposes more inclusive ‘civic’ nationalism and open citizenship in countries like France to the exclusionary ‘ethnic’ nationalism and closed citizenship of countries like Germany (e.g. Brubaker 1992; Favell 1999). Furthermore, while Scandinavian countries share high levels of representation by women in national legislatures – often explained in part by electoral rules and practices – minority representation is much more unequal, suggesting that simple ‘electoral rules’ explanations of representation are also inadequate. In examining the patterns, I offer some suggestions for future theorising and scholarship in the field.

Conceptual and Methodological Issues in Studying Minority Representation

The contributions to this symposium focus on counting representatives deemed to be ‘immigrant-origin’ or of ‘minority’ backgrounds. This strategy – which

can be called ‘statistical’, ‘descriptive’ or ‘mirror’ representation – considers the demographic or biographical characteristics of an elected official as an indicator of representation for the group that shares those characteristics. This practice is increasingly common among social scientists, policymakers and advocates concerned with equity in representation.¹ Yet it immediately raises questions about the overlap between statistical and substantive (or issue) representation. Not all elected officials would agree with their placement into certain groups, and assignment to a particular group is no guarantee that an elected official will take the concerns of that community to heart, assuming that a ‘group interest’ can be identified. Indeed, a few North American studies suggest that, for minority and immigrant-origin populations, progressive white officials can at times engage in greater substantive issue representation than those of minority backgrounds (Browning *et al.* 1984; Siemiatycki 2008).

Despite such concerns, statistical representation provides an important benchmark for the empirical study of minority equity in politics. Others have extensively interrogated the philosophical and theoretical reasons for descriptive representation (e.g. Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Pitkin 1972). With the aim of promoting future empirical work, four arguments for descriptive representation stand out.

First, whatever a representative’s policy platform, the election of people from certain groups carries symbolic weight, for members of the group and those outside the group. The power of such symbolism should not be underestimated, as seen in the reaction to Barack Obama’s victory in 2008, widely celebrated as the first African American president,² and in the subsequent flurry of commentary about whether a ‘European Obama’ of immigrant or minority origins would soon follow.³ The mere presence of someone of Moroccan origin as mayor of Rotterdam sends a powerful symbolic message, regardless of the mayor’s stance on issues.⁴ Even if immigrants’ interests can be represented by non-immigrant politicians, the lack of diversity in Europe’s legislatures conveys a message of exclusion.

Second, the election of a minority-origin politician can be a measure of the acceptance of a particular group by those in the majority, an indicator of the socio-cultural and economic integration of the minority group, or both (Alba and Foner 2009; Schönwälder 2009). In this way, descriptive representation measures not only how immigrants and their descendants are doing, but also serves as an indicator of the receptivity of the places where migrants settle (Bloemraad 2006). Descriptive representation might also produce a self-reinforcing cycle of political integration. In the United States, there is evidence that greater Latino and African American representation in state legislatures increased voting among minorities in subsequent elections (Rocha *et al.* 2010). When a member of an under-represented group is elected, this can set off a virtuous circle of political competition. Co-ethnics might vie for office, inspired by a role model’s election or infuriated by the prior winner’s claim to represent the community (Bloemraad 2006: 228–29).

Third, statistical representation can carry real consequences for a minority group's substantive representation. Those elected can, and often do, work for other members of the group, advocating particular policies, influencing the allocation of public resources such as public contracts or social benefits, and serving as a spokesperson for the group's concerns (e.g. Bird *et al.* 2011; Butler and Broockman 2011; Lovenduski and Norris 2003; Owens 2005; Preuhs 2007). Minority representation can broaden the circle of deliberative decision-making and the articulation of diverse interests (Mansbridge 1999).

Finally, at a pragmatic level, descriptive representation is easier to study, especially across time and place. It is simpler and more straightforward to label and count elected representatives based on demographic characteristics than to conceptualise or measure substantive representation. Descriptive counts also provide greater transparency regarding the reliability, validity and comparability of data. It is a critical first step towards an empirical evaluation of the consequences of political presence. Yet even when measuring descriptive representation, scholars face challenges.

Defining and Measuring Minority Groups – Who Do We Study?

The act of counting representatives raises normative and political questions about the categories into which we place people. Why is categorising a representative as a 'minority' any more (or less) legitimate than examining whether an elected official is right- or left-handed? This question becomes especially delicate, academically and politically, when the category of 'minority' attempts to measure things such as race or ethnicity (Simon 2005). Here, the term minority reflects two considerations: designation as an 'out-group' different from the majority, and the likelihood of unequal power (including economic, political and social power) based on that designation. Scholars of comparative minority representation face a tension between establishing some reliable and valid cross-national measure to distinguish minorities from non-minorities, while at the same time acknowledging that this term is a social construction that is time- and place-specific.

As discussed in the introduction to this symposium, there is a case to be made for the specificity of *immigrant-origin* minorities, as distinct from longstanding ethno-national minorities, such as Catalans in Spain or Québécois in Canada. 'Immigrant-origin' nevertheless leaves open where to draw the line between generations – when is someone no longer an immigrant? Cross-national differences in legal status and colonial history demand flexibility. In some cases, researchers will want to place greater emphasis on the foreign-born origins of individuals, as in Schönwälder's (2013) analysis of German regional legislatures; in other cases, the 'visibility' of minority status – ascriptive differences of ethno-racial background – becomes more salient than proximity to the immigrant generation, as in the United Kingdom (Sobolewska 2013).

A scholar's conceptual definition of a 'minority' carries methodological implications and can be affected by data constraints. Unless a researcher has

sufficient resources to field a large-scale national survey, statistics on the aggregate population – that which representative bodies should mirror – usually depend on national statistical agencies that only collect certain types of information. The extent and categorisation of such data vary widely, making comparative scholarship difficult. A review of official population statistics across 41 European countries reveals that 19 countries collect no information, beyond birthplace, that would allow researchers to identify residents' ethno-racial background (Simon 2012: 1376).

When it comes to elected representatives, identifying and counting minorities raise practical considerations about the type of information we have on politicians. A very well-informed political observer might have sufficient knowledge to categorise representatives in a particular political body at a specific point in time, but this ability quickly disappears as the time frame lengthens or the number of electoral bodies expands.

For those who focus more on immigrant experience and origins, one methodological strategy is to categorise representatives and the general population by their place of birth or their parents' birthplace. Thirty-nine of 41 European countries (95 per cent) collect information on residents' country of birth and citizenship as part of official statistics (Simon 2012: 1376), a practice replicated in traditional immigrant-receiving countries. Legislative directories frequently contain information about elected representatives' place of birth, allowing longitudinal analyses over a century or more (e.g. Bloemraad 2006: 56–63). Parents' birthplace is harder to find, but Schönwälder's (2013) analysis of almost a dozen German regional legislatures, each with roughly 80–100 representatives, adopts such an immigrant-oriented strategy. It is one that makes particular sense for scholars sensitive to how legal status and prior political socialisation might impose barriers to representation.

Birthplace is, however, an imperfect measure, especially for former colonial countries. Someone might be foreign-born, but have parents or ancestors originally from Europe who migrated to overseas colonies. This is the case in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. Thus, Ségolène Royal, the presidential candidate for the French Socialist Party in 2007, is 'foreign-born' since her birthplace is present-day Senegal while it was occupied by the French. Yet her legal status is not akin to a typical immigrant – she was a French citizen at birth – and her physical appearance and life experiences bear little relation to those of African migrants. Some scholars consequently focus on 'visible' minorities, including the second or even third and later generations of earlier migrants.

Attention to visible minority representation makes sense for scholars concerned with minority groups' exclusion from the mainstream, rather than legal status or migratory experience. Concerns over racial discrimination lead many scholars of British politics, including Sobolewska (2013), to focus on 'ethnic minority' MPs, or those who are non-white. Minorities are deemed 'different' from the majority based on their skin colour, their origins, and/or their religion. The article by Tiberj and Michon (2013) provides some empirical evidence that

such differences carry real weight: the political attitudes and partisan orientations of first and second generation European immigrants are much closer to majority French opinion than to those with origins in Asia, Africa or the Caribbean.⁵

For representatives, identification as a member of a 'visible minority' is usually done through a combination of birthplace information, physical cues from published photos, news reports and analysis of last names. Especially when dealing with a very large number of representatives or political candidates, last name analysis becomes an efficient way to identify minority background for some groups of representatives (e.g. Black 2008; Dancygier 2011). The problems of categorisation by last name are substantial, however. This is especially the case when women change names upon marriage, post-colonial minorities have last names similar to those of the majority population, or when individuals alter their last name to render it less foreign. These problems have led some scholars to send surveys to candidates or elected representatives asking about their ethnic and religious background (e.g. Andrews *et al.* 2008), but non-response rates can be substantial.

When it comes to aggregate population statistics, the use of visual cues or last name analysis is virtually impossible, making it unfeasible to match perfectly techniques for identifying political representatives with the methods of measuring population diversity. Here, scholars must rely on government 'race' questions that attempt to tap racial minority status, or they must rely on proxies for visibility linked to country or region of origin, religion, language or other variables correlated with visible minority status. Such proxies become problematic if researchers wish to include the second or even third European-born generations in their analyses, and they are subject to the vagrancies of statistical agencies. For example, in some countries, such as the Netherlands, minorities of concern are labelled 'non-Western', with a rough equivalence to racial minority status, though in the Dutch case this categorisation includes those from Turkey, and excludes those from Japan. More generally, among European countries that collect some official data on ethnic and racial origins, the actual categorisation can vary widely, from information on nationality or ethnicity to data on religion or language (Simon 2012).

The Representation Index – Benefits, and Some Cautions

Countries vary in their statistical and social categorisations of minorities due to historical legacies of migration and colonisation, minority politics, academic precedent and because of how national statistics are collected. Since a rapid convergence in statistical categories is unlikely, we need to employ a measure of representation that standardises the locally accepted definition of immigrant-origin or ethno-racial minority groups so as to facilitate comparisons between countries, across political jurisdictions and over time.

I consequently advocate the use of a representation index. It is created by dividing the percentage of minority representatives in a particular elected body

by the percentage of people from that same minority group among the general population. A figure of 0 indicates an absolute lack of representation while 1 indicates perfect ‘mirror’ representation: there is parity in the minority group’s proportion in the population and their proportion in the elected body. Numbers below 1 indicate under-representation; those above 1 signal more representation in office than we would expect based on demographic data alone.⁶ In the German example that opened this article, Turkish-origin representatives accounted for 0.8 per cent of seats in the Bundestag, and 3.1 per cent of the population in 2009, for an index value of 0.26 – about a quarter of the representation we would expect based on population statistics alone. This index permits simple, straightforward comparisons, it is easy to understand and it is relatively easy to construct, given the substantial differences in how countries count and categorise their populations. Importantly, it permits the researcher to vary the definition of ‘minority’ from country to country, as long as the definition used to count political representatives is the same as that used to calculate population percentages in the denominator for a particular country.

The index is not without drawbacks. Some may object to using a group’s demographic weight in the general population for calculations, preferring the electorate as the point of reference. All European countries have minimum age requirements for voting and in numerous countries non-citizens do not have the right to vote, especially for national government.⁷ Should our reference point not be those who can actually influence elections, the voters? Unfortunately, practical constraints make it difficult to calculate the minority electorate. In some cases, the detailed statistical data needed – of immigrant origins, age and citizenship status – are not publicly available; in a few cases, they are not available at all. In countries lacking appropriate statistics, scholars make increasingly sophisticated estimates of minority populations, some of which are used in this article. Most of these calculations, however, focus on the general population, rather than the adult or citizen population.

There are also substantive reasons to include non-voters in calculations. Those unable to vote can support minority candidates in other ways. They can donate time or money. They can support the institutions in which candidates build their careers before moving into politics, such as by consuming ethnic media, buying a businessperson’s products or services, or being a member of a community-based organisation. Political parties might also feel compelled to run candidates from minority communities due to the absolute size of the group, not just its size in the voting population. It is not self-evident that a narrower focus on the electorate is a more defensible strategy than a broader accounting of the population.

A second drawback with the representation index, as used here, is its inattention to intersectionality, the overlap of multiple social characteristics to create unique situations of marginalisation or privilege. Gender, in particular, stands out as an especially consequential factor that might make the experience of minority women qualitatively different from minority men or from majority women. There is some evidence that minority women must ‘compensate’

for double disadvantage by having higher levels of education and more prestigious occupations than other candidates, though for those with extremely high levels of human capital, their very status as ‘double minorities’ might make them attractive to political parties wishing to diversify their candidate lists (Black 2000). Future research must consider such intersectionality more fully.

Patterns to Puzzle Over: Cross-national Differences

Comparing a number of West European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom) and three traditional countries of immigration (Australia, Canada and the United States), we find striking variation in minority representation. Table 1 presents representation indices for the primary elected national legislative body in each country.⁸ Following the column reporting the representation index, I identify the type of minority group counted, the proportion of the group in the general population, and the proportion of minority representatives holding elected seats.

The Limits of Simple ‘National Models’ or Straightforward ‘Electoral Rules’ Approaches

One general conclusion is that minority representation, across all the countries considered, is poor and inequitable, with the exception of the Netherlands in 2006. Minorities only hold a quarter or less of the seats we might expect based on their demographic weight in Australia, Denmark (in 2001), France, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom (in 2001) and the United States (for Asian Americans).⁹ This shocking degree of under-representation applies equally to countries with ‘civic’ or ‘ethnic’ traditions of nationalism, and it is evident in longstanding ‘Anglo-settler’ as well as European countries of immigration. These dichotomies – of ethnic/civic nationalism or traditional/newer countries of immigration – are widespread in the migration literature that theorises incorporation, but here we see that they provide little purchase on understanding minority political representation.

Among scholars of comparative politics, a standard explanation for representation differences lies in the electoral system of a country (see Ruedin 2009 for a discussion). Quota systems, party lists, multi-member constituencies, first-past-the-post systems and the size of electoral districts have all been identified as important factors in explaining variation in women’s and minorities’ representation (e.g. Forest 2012; Norris 2004; Reynolds 2006).

Yet the indices reported in Table 1 do not provide straightforward support for a ‘rules-of-the-game’ explanation. It is true that the Netherlands, with the highest representation index – about parity for its non-Western minority population in 2006 – employs proportional representation using a list system, with the whole country as the single ‘district’, all features that might well facilitate

TABLE 1
 MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN SELECTED EUROPE AND TRADITIONAL
 COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION

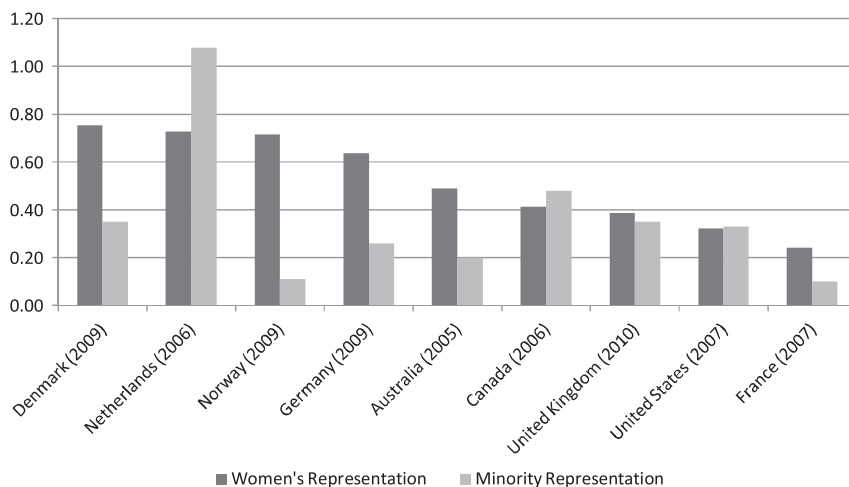
Country	Representation index	Minority population	% in pop.*	% in office**
<i>Traditional Immigration Countries</i>				
Australia (2005, House of Rep)	0.20	Non-European	10.1	2.0
Canada (2006, H of Commons)	0.48	Visible minority	16.2	7.8
United States (2007, H of Rep)	0.36	Latino	14.7	5.3
United States (2007, H of Rep)	0.20	Asian Am./ Pacific Islander	4.5	0.9
<i>European Immigration Countries</i>				
Denmark (2009, Folketinget)	0.35	Non-Western	6.4	2.2
Denmark (2001, Folketinget)	0.22	Non-Western	5.0	1.1
France (Ass. nationale, 2007)	0.00	Maghrébins	5.1	0.0
France (Ass. nationale, 2007)	0.33	Caribbeans	0.6	0.2
France (Ass. nationale, 2007)	<0.10	Visible minority	>5.7	0.5
Germany (2009, Bundestag)	0.26	Turks	3.1	0.8
Netherlands (2006, Tweede Kamer)	1.08	Non-Western	10.5	11.3
Norway (2009, Stortinget)	0.11	Non-Western	5.6	0.6
Norway (2003, Stortinget)	0.15	Non-Western	4.0	0.6
United Kingdom (2010, H of C)	0.35	Non-white	12.1	4.2
United Kingdom (2001, H of C)	0.24	Non-white	7.9	1.9

Sources: *Population proportions calculated from the following sources: Australian 2006 national census of population; Canadian 2006 national census of population; US Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2006–08 three-year estimates; Danish registration data from Statistics Denmark; Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (2009) for Germany; Dutch population data from the Dutch Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek; Norwegian population data from Statistics Norway; and, for the United Kingdom, data from the 2001 national census of population and 2009 National Office of Statistics estimates for England and Wales. For France, where no official data exist, the Maghrébins estimate is from Tribalat (2004: 65), referring to first and subsequent generations from Africa, excluding European colonists who moved to Africa and later re-migrated to France, as well as African Jews. The 'Caribbeans' estimate is from Maxwell (2012), referring to people from current or former French territories in the Caribbean (except Haiti), and the 'visible minority' estimate is from Keslassy (2009), referring to Blacks, Arab-Berbers, Asians, Indo-Pakistanis or those of mixed race.

**Elected minority data from: Anthony (2006), for Australia; Black (2008), for Canada; Amer (2008), for the United States; Margit Warburg (personal communication) and my own calculations for 2009 and Togeby (2008) for 2001, for Denmark; Haut Conseil à l'Intégration (2009), Keslassy (2009), Maxwell (2012) and Michon (2011), for France; my own calculations for Germany; Groenendijk *et al.* (2010), for the Netherlands; Bergh and Bjørklund (2011) and my own calculations, for Norway; and Sobolewska (2013), for the United Kingdom.

minority representation. But the second highest index value, for Canada, occurs in a country with a winner-takes-all, single-member constituency system, one where the drawing of territorial electoral districts tends to under-represent urban minority voters compared to rural regions (Forest 2012). The Canadian system is similar to that of the United Kingdom and the United States, but minority representation in the latter two countries ranges from a fifth to a third of what we might expect, compared to half of parity in the Canadian case. Even more striking, the electoral systems of Denmark and Norway produce

FIGURE 1
MINORITY AND WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION INDEX IN SELECTED EUROPEAN AND
TRADITIONAL COUNTRIES OF IMMIGRATION



Sources: Proportion of women in national legislature from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/english/home.htm>). A common female population denominator of 50.5 per cent was used for all countries. For minority representation, see sources in Table 1.

nowhere near the favourable outcomes identified in the Netherlands, although the countries share some key features of proportional representation. Other recent studies have also suggested that electoral systems provide limited purchase on understanding ethnic minorities' election to office (e.g. Dancygier 2011; Ruedin 2009). Proportional representation can be beneficial if parties put minority candidates on lists; conversely, the residential concentration of immigrant-origin communities can be converted into minority representation in first-past-the-post territorial systems. Pathways to power might differ, but minorities can learn to leverage the rules of the game in diverse settings, and also be excluded, too.

A comparison with gender representation underscores the unique and sometimes surprising patterns for immigrant-origin minority representation. Figure 1 compares the minority index values from Table 1 to a similar index for women's representation.¹⁰ Within countries, the level of under-representation for minorities and for women is similar in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States. In almost all the other countries, however, minority representation is much lower than for women, with the gap between the two varying widely. These variations suggest that scholars of comparative politics need to develop more dynamic models of when and how electoral systems matter, and that while the literature on women's representation offers a starting point to understand minority representation, it is inadequate by itself.

Research Pathways: Group Mobilisation, Ideological Contexts and Political Parties

Because the representation index is a ratio of minority elected representatives to minorities in the general population, it provides a rough control for the size of the minority population. It does not, however, take into account other differences between minority groups, notably individual-level differences in resources, skills and attributes, which scholars of electoral politics have long studied. Generally speaking, those with higher education and more resources tend to participate more, and they are more likely to run for and be elected to office. Some might suggest that Canada's relatively high level of visible minority representation is related to its particular immigration system, one which places a premium on economic migrants with work skills. Conversely, low representation in countries with poorer or less educated migrant communities might be a reflection of socio-economic status rather than minority status, per se. Future research could employ more sophisticated indices that take into account the human capital of immigrant-origin populations or other relevant variables.

It is worth noting, however, that a growing body of evidence suggests that variation in political success among minority groups might not rely on the group's aggregate level of human capital; the relationship could even be the inverse, at the group level. In the United States, immigrants' electoral participation at times accords poorly with standard human capital and resource models that work for the majority population (e.g. Kasinitz *et al.* 2008; Ramakrishnan 2005). As seen in Table 1, Asian Americans are less present in legislative bodies than US Latinos, even though the former enjoy, on average, a much stronger and more secure socio-economic position than the latter group. The political successes of Turkish-origin representatives in Germany (Schönwälder 2013) and in Amsterdam (Michon and Vermeulen 2013), or of Pakistani-origin representatives in Denmark and Norway, offer a similar example.

Indeed, we might need distinct models of political integration and representation for different sorts of immigrant-origin groups (Bloemraad 2011; Hero 1992; Maxwell 2012). Some people might experience individual *assimilation* into politics, where their interest in running for office and their ability to do so is similar to any person of longstanding native origin, or where they feel properly represented by those of the native-born majority and have little interest in being an elected representative. This might be the case for those of European descent living in other European or Anglo-settler countries. In contrast, minority groups experiencing discrimination might need to engage in group-based political *incorporation*, where the group solidarity that arises from unequal treatment is converted into a political resource. Perhaps this explains why Germans of Turkish origin appear better mobilised – and more politically successful – than the ethnic German migrants who constitute a significant proportion of the foreign-born population in some German regions, as documented in Schönwälder's (2013) analysis.

Understanding such dynamics requires more research on the mechanisms that create group solidarity or reinforce ethnically oriented mobilisation, despite differences between individuals within the group. Discrimination can generate feelings of linked fate, such that group identities trump personal circumstances in politics (Dawson 1994). Ethnic organisations, their density and their inter-connections can also facilitate immigrants' political participation and election to office (Fennema and Tillie 1999; Michon and Vermeulen 2009; van Heelsum 2002, 2005). Qualitative evidence indicates that a rich organisational landscape provides more opportunities for would-be politicians to learn leadership skills, to make connections with mainstream elites, to attract political parties' attention, and to provide credentials and experiences to legitimise minorities in the eyes of sceptical voters (Black 2000; Bloemraad 2006; Michon and Vermeulen 2009).

As Michon and Vermeulen (2013) argue, the relative benefits of minority mobilisation might, however, depend on the prevailing attitude toward pluralism among political parties, national institutions and the general public. Tiberj and Michon (2013) remind us that the dominant 'colour-blind' political culture in France makes the articulation of 'ethnic' interests illegitimate. In such an environment, not only would minority organising accomplish little, but it might hinder a group's political representation.

The importance of ideological context could also help explain the standing of the two countries that do best on the representation index, the Netherlands and Canada. The two countries have diametrically opposing electoral systems, but they shared a set of robust policies and politics of multiculturalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Support for diversity – especially the notion that group-based incorporation is legitimate – might have led political gatekeepers to pay more attention to diversity and put in more effort to seek out minorities to run in elections (Michon 2011; Stasiulis and Abu-Laban 1991), and facilitated civic organising by immigrant communities (Bloemraad 2005; Vermeulen and Berger 2008). In comparison, Denmark and Norway, despite promising electoral systems, had weak multicultural policies over this time period.¹¹ Future research must consider the intersection of community organising with features of the political opportunity structure, including the ideological discourses articulated around pluralism or anti-racism efforts (Bloemraad 2006; Koopmans *et al.* 2005; Ruedin 2009; Vermeulen and Berger 2008). Attention to such dynamics might also help explain change over time, especially if the Dutch move away from multiculturalism plays out in lower minority representation.

We also need much more scholarship on party strategies and political parties' recruitment of candidates. France's limited representation of women, despite a law aiming to increase gender parity, demonstrates that formal rules, in themselves, do not automatically produce equitable representation if political parties hinder those efforts. The significant gaps between women's representation, on the one hand, and minority representation, on the other, in the countries of Norway, Denmark and Germany suggest that when parties make efforts to include women on lists and as candidates, gender equity can increase. But

without similar initiatives around diversity, minority representation lags severely.

Minority representation is also linked to the political platforms of parties, and parties' relative success in elections. Across West Europe, parties of the left have usually taken the lead in opening political doors to minority representatives, and minorities tend to support those parties much more (Messina 2007; Tiberj and Michon 2013). When left-wing parties do better in elections, the proportion of minority representatives tends to increase.

The demographic reality of many European electorates – one in which minorities are becoming a larger share, especially in cities – might push parties of the centre-right to open up to minorities. As Sobolewska (2013) shows, the marked increase in ethnic minority members of parliament in the United Kingdom from 2005 to 2010 occurred largely because of a significant increase in Conservative ethnic minority MPs.¹² To date, much of the comparative scholarship on immigration and Europe's political parties has focused on far-right parties and the way anti-immigrant sentiment has fuelled the rise of new parties. But perhaps as immigrant-origin residents become increasingly accepted players in the political game – even if grudgingly – they might change European party politics from within.

Concluding Thoughts

Whether immigrant-origin minorities alter European party systems depends in part on whether ethnic minorities' interests are articulated as cross-cutting or coinciding with partisan divides. Htun (2004) uses the distinction between cross-cutting and coinciding cleavages to explain why policies to redress representation inequalities tend to promote quotas for women and reservations – dedicated legislative seats – for ethnic minorities. The ethnic minorities of interest to Htun are longstanding ethnic, linguistic, tribal and caste groups, not immigrant-origin minorities. The latter instead occupy a peculiar 'in-between' position: like longstanding minorities, immigrant-origin minorities might have distinct interests around linguistic, cultural, religious and race protections distinct from the majority population. At the same time, as the immigrant generation gives birth to native-born children, cultural and linguistic distinctions fade. Even religious and racial differences might become less socially salient. Successful immigrant integration may consequently produce a situation more akin to women's representation: immigrant-origin minorities might have some partisan leanings, but no strong or unified political project that cannot be accommodated within the existing party system.¹³

Fitting into neither traditional ethnic nor traditional gender representation frameworks, the study of immigrant-origin minorities requires new academic models. We might need different models for different types of immigrants: political assimilation for certain immigrants might lead to integration that cuts across existing party divisions; for other immigrants, group-based political

incorporation might generate cleavages coinciding with distinct political projects. This also implies that those wishing to redress representation inequalities cannot mechanically apply institutional responses created for other circumstances to the case of immigrant-origin groups.

This article sought to establish a comparative metric to study minority representation, and it offered some basic statistics across West European and 'Anglo-settler' countries. Future research should focus on understanding how mobilising dynamics, party recruitment, ideological contexts and the intersection of these with a country's electoral rules results in more or less minority representation. Because research in this area is still at a very early stage, I concentrated on national legislative bodies. The dynamics of election to national office might differ, however, from local representation. Studies of Belgian, Dutch and Danish cities suggest that strategic use of the party-list system, especially the ability to write-in or move candidates up the list with personal votes, has been used by minority voters and candidates to great effect (Jacobs *et al.* 2002; Togeby 2008; van Heelsum 2002). These studies also note that immigrant-origin representation is facilitated by non-citizen suffrage, which is provided in municipal elections to residents with at least three to five years of residence in Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands. Thus, in Denmark, minority representation at the local level can diverge significantly from the national level. We need to better understand distinctive processes of local and national representation, as well as possible pathways between the two.¹⁴

We also need to track minority representation over time. If multiculturalism had positive effects on representation in the Netherlands during the 1990s, what will happen in the current period, with the greater emphasis on assimilation? Can gains be erased with political events and circumstance? Recent work on the Netherlands suggests an erosion of minority representation (Michon 2012), but will such a trend hold? It is also possible that minority representation is somewhat 'sticky': once achieved, it becomes part of the political landscape. Black (2008) documents an increase in minority office-holding in the Canadian national parliament from 1993 to 2004, while van Heelsum (2002) does the same in six Dutch cities between 1986 and 2002.¹⁵ If it is hard to claw back immigrant-origin representation once established, this finding carries important implications for initiatives aimed at increasing minority representation. Temporary quotas or other procedures to affirmatively increase the number of minority candidates might be an appropriate strategy for political parties or political systems.

In the European context, the idea of a 'democratic deficit' is often applied to the political structures of the European Union. Closer to home, many European nations experience a democratic deficit vis-à-vis their own immigrant-origin populations. These populations are now, in many cases, settled residents with citizenship and European-born children, many of whom are now in early adulthood. The great gap in minority representation across European legislatures raises important questions of democratic inclusion and legitimacy, questions that call for further academic explorations.

Acknowledgements

I have greatly benefited from the feedback and suggestions of Colin Brown, Rafaela Dancygier, Ben Forest, Dirk Jacobs, Laure Michon, Karen Schönwälder, Constanza Sanhueza, Anja van Heelsum, the editors and reviewers of *WEP*, and participants at the ‘Social and Economic Foundations of Ethnic Minority Political Representation’ conference (University of Manchester, 2010), the workshop on ‘Immigrant Political Incorporation’ (University of Amsterdam 2010), and the ‘Political Incorporation of Immigrants’ conference (University of California, Berkeley, 2011). I thank the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek for financial support and the Institute for Ethnic and Migration Studies, University of Amsterdam, for institutional support during initial research on this paper.

Notes

1. Recent academic books on statistical representation include Andrews *et al.* (2008) and Bird *et al.* (2011). In France, a public think tank and a government commission used this technique to document ethnic and racial inequality in politics (Haut conseil à l’intégration 2009; Keslassy 2009).
2. In the United States, few view Obama as the first mixed-race president, or the first person with an immigrant parent elected to the White House in modern times. The framing as the first ‘black’ president underscores the symbolic importance of representation.
3. On a ‘European Obama’, see, for example, Keslassy (2009), Maxwell (2009) and Schönwälder (2009).
4. In 2007, Ahmed Aboutaleb was appointed mayor of Rotterdam. Aboutaleb, the son of an imam, was born in Morocco and immigrated to the Netherlands as an adolescent. The choice was dramatic since in 2002 residents of Rotterdam had offered significant support for Pim Fortuyn’s party, with its vocal stance against Islam.
5. Given the focus on immigrant-origin minorities, I do not include African Americans in the United States or the Aboriginal population of Australia, Canada and the United States.
6. This type of representation index is also used in Bloemraad (2006) and Andrews *et al.* (2008).
7. In some countries, citizens of certain nations have voting rights in national elections; such is the case for members of Commonwealth countries in the United Kingdom. In other countries, non-citizens are granted local voting rights after meeting certain residency requirements, but such rights are rarely extend to national elections.
8. The representation data rely primarily on research by country experts. In places where more than one source exists, studies were cross-referenced and, in the case of discrepancies, numbers were drawn from studies that most clearly articulated the methods used to count minority representatives. These methods usually relied on web-based or hard copy directories of representatives, and used a combination of birthplace, last name and visual identification, supplemented with knowledge of the country’s political scene. In a few cases, I collected data myself, verifying the data with country experts. Wherever I could, I calculated the population data in the denominator of the index to ensure a precise match between the categorisation used to count representatives and the minority population. When public-use statistical data were not readily available, I relied on studies of the minority population conducted by government agencies or country experts.
9. The US representation index is calculated for Latinos and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders since these groups are most clearly immigrant-origin racial minorities. In 2008, 38 per cent of all self-reported Latinos were foreign-born; the proportion for Asian-origin residents was 67 per cent. In contrast, only 8 per cent of African Americans are foreign-born, a proportion

- equal to the percentage of immigrants in the white population. Compared to Latinos and Asian Americans, African Americans are much closer to reaching representational parity in Congress. Their representation index in the House of Representatives was 0.71 in 2007.
10. The value for the United States combines Latino and Asian American/Pacific Islander representation.
 11. Why such dynamics carried less weight in Australia, also commonly identified as a strong multicultural country, is a topic for future research.
 12. Recent elections in Canada have also led to more visible minorities within the ruling Conservative government; the UK Conservative party is reportedly in contact with the Canadian Conservative party to discuss how it can further increase minority representation.
 13. Immigrant-origin minorities are also 'in-between' when it comes to the benefits and drawbacks of residential concentration in electoral systems. Unlike women, immigrant-origin minorities are usually concentrated in certain residential locations. However, unlike many historic ethnic minorities, they rarely constitute a majority in a region.
 14. In general, minorities enjoy greater representation in local politics than at the national level, probably because the barriers and costs tend to be lower in local elections, immigrant communities are more concentrated in particular places, and success locally can legitimise a 'move up' to national politics. However, comparative representation indices for the Netherlands and Canada suggest that, at least in the early twenty-first century, national representation was more equitable at the national rather than local levels.
 15. This might be because once a few minority pioneers succeed in getting elected, they can serve as inspiration or provoke others to offer an alternate 'ethnic' perspective (Bloemraad 2006). Political parties might also take the success of a pioneer representative as an indicator that a minority community is electorally 'mature' or that voters will not punish parties running minority candidates. If successful, other political parties might also run minority candidates in future elections.

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