Representative Bureaucracy: Four Questions

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Representative bureaucracy, a major theoretical concept in public administration, concerns the ability of the bureaucracy to represent the general public. Mosher (1968; see also Pitkin 1967) distinguished between passive representation that focuses on origins and demographic characteristics of bureaucrats, that is, the degree to which they mirror the society (also termed symbolic representation), and active representation when bureaucrats advocate for constituents' interests (also termed substantive representation). Originally, representative bureaucracy hinged on the idea that bureaucracies are reflective of the dominant class in society and no group could be trusted if it is not reflective of such (Kingsley 1944; Krislov 1974). A group of US scholars (Levitan 1946; Long 1952; Van Riper 1958) refocused the theory on the ability of bureaucrats to represent the general public not just the dominant class in society.

This chapter will address four key questions in regard to representative bureaucracy. First, what characteristics should a bureaucracy represent? Second, what factors determine how representative a bureaucracy is?

Third, how might passive representation lead to active representation and greater policy responsiveness? Fourth, does representation influence how effective bureaucracies can be?

WHAT SHOULD BE REPRESENTED?

Before addressing what characteristics bureaucracies should represent, one might first address whether or not bureaucracies should be representative institutions at all. Many argue that representation is best provided to the public by representatives who can be held accountable to citizens through the traditional democratic processes of elections. Representation by bureaucrats, as a result, is controversial and generally opposed by elected officials since they see representation as an infringement on their own political role (see Daley 1984).

Proponents of representative bureaucracy (Long 1952) contend that representation by political institutions is incomplete and often hampered by majority rule provisions that

consider some interests and ignore others. A bureaucracy representative of the diverse population and the wide range of preferences and interests unique to this population, advocates contend, is one way to improve democratic representation. Bureaucratic representation provides a means for the interests and preferences of the minority to be represented by allowing the minority to regain the representation lost through the electoral process. The argument continues that bureaucrats, as public officials, are also accountable for the results of their work (Lipsky 1980; Hupe and Hill 2007). They are subject to performance evaluations, loss in funding or budgetary support, and loss of their clientele base, making them equally, if not more, accountable to citizens than public officials.

Although many scholars justify the study of representative bureaucracy by arguing that bureaucracies can be more responsive to the needs of politically under-representative groups, the representativeness of bureaucracies merits study in its own right. A representative bureaucracy is a symbol of openness and equality to citizens. What characteristics should be represented? Any individual has multiple identities – German, immigrant, woman, Lutheran, Hessian, plumber, and so on. Issues of passive representation might deal with the full range of potential identities; but, in practice, a nation's politics defines which identities are likely to be pushed for representation. This means that the identities seeking representation vary across nations and can vary within a nation across time. Ethnicity/race is frequently the variable that demands representation in the bureaucracy. Although the literature is dominated by American scholars who focus on race and ethnicity, ethnic political cleavages are common in a great many countries (e.g., South Africa, Belgium, Columbia, Zambia; see Dresang 1974). Many ethnic identities are tied to indigenous populations as in much of North and South America and Australia. Others exist owing to long-standing conflict and perceived oppression (Serbia, Bosnia, Macedonia, etc.).

Immigration also contributes to additional ethnic conflict and reinforces the distinct identities of the immigrant populations, a process currently playing out in many of the developed countries in Europe, including France, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Ethnicity often correlates with religious and language differences, and so representation might focus on a bundle of identities such as in Quebec, Belgium, or Lebanon.

Demands for representation in the bureaucracy also focus on geographic regions (early United States, South Korea), social class (United Kingdom, Thailand, India), disability (numerous countries), and gender (numerous countries). In most cases these cleavages are also strongly linked to political issues about equity, such as political movements for gender equality, the Cholla province issue in South Korea (P. S. Kim 1993; H. Kim 2005) or the economic status of poor, rural areas in Thailand.

Politics will define the identities that are salient. Naff (2007) shows that South Africa's concerns have moved from race to tribal affiliation. This shift is consistent with recent work on other African countries, for example, that shows over a period of time how politics favors some groups rather than others; and, as a result, can have a dramatic impact on ethnic identification (Posner 2006; Habyarimana et al. 2009). Just as national politics and history shape identity salience, so do specific bureaucratic actions. Bureaucracies can emphasize one identity or downplay others in implementing policy, and citizens are likely to recognize this pattern.

WHAT ARE THE DETERMINANTS OF PASSIVE REPRESENTATION?

Empirical studies of the determinants of representative bureaucracy have been dominated by examinations of US bureaucracies and focused on US salient identities – race, ethnicity, and gender. That is unfortunate

since it limits our knowledge about both the extent of bureaucratic representation and the determinants of that representation. The nature of these limits can best be illustrated by two overly simplified but polar types – the Weberian rational bureaucracy and the patronage bureaucracy. Weber's (1946) ideal-typical bureaucracy seeks to maximize rationality and, therefore, uses merit or surrogates for merit such as education as a recruitment criterion. Patronage bureaucracies are less concerned with merit and more concerned with loyalty and use that as a recruitment criterion. Neither bureaucracy is likely to be widely represented of the general public simply because neither education nor political loyalty is likely to be evenly distributed in society.

Because there is so little research on patronage bureaucracies, this review of the determinants will focus on the determinants in Weberian-style bureaucracies. Clearly, the most important barrier to representative bureaucracies is the education level of the population (see Subramaniam 1967; Meier 1975: 537). Although bureaucracies are never a microcosm of the population, they approach equality as the population becomes better educated. To the degree that access to education is not equally distributed across the salient identities for representation in a country, bureaucracies will be unrepresentative of the population.

The US empirical research with different studies examining local, state, and national bureaucracies generally finds that the strongest determinant of minority representation in a bureaucracy is the minority population in the jurisdiction. This is essentially a trivial finding since population can be the strongest predictor whether bureaucracies are highly representative or not representative at all; what matters in these cases is the magnitude of the regression coefficient: i.e., whether the group gets 90 percent of the representation needed for equity or only 10 percent.

The political nature of representative bureaucracy is reinforced by the scholarship that shows representation at the bureaucratic level is related to political representation by the same groups. The work has discovered significant relationships in US cities for representation on the city council (Dye and Renick 1981; Eisinger 1982; Lewis 1989) or as the elected chief administrative officer (Stein 1986; Saltzstein 1989) for racial groups. A parallel literature shows similar impacts in US cities for gender (Saltzstein 1986; Sigelman 1976); and, cross-nationally, Whitford, Wilkins, and Ball (2007) find that political representation for women in high ministerial positions is positively related to gender representation in the bureaucracy in 72 countries. Within a bureaucracy, studies show that representation at top administrative levels in the organization is generally the strongest determinant of representation at lower levels for both race and gender (Meier, O'Toole, and Nicholson-Crotty 2004; Goode and Baldwin 2005; Whitford et al. 2007). The implementation of specific policies, such as affirmative action or quotas, to increase bureaucratic representation, is also linked to more representative bureaucracies (Saltzstein 1986; Naff 2007).

A key limit to these studies, in addition to their US orientation, is that they generally are not effective in separating out how much of the representation is determined by the available labor pool and how much is determined by these other factors. Cross-sectional studies on race and ethnicity, in particular, examine jurisdictions with widely varying labor pools, particularly when one considers the educational requirements for bureaucratic jobs. Minority populations are also highly collinear with minority political resources, and few studies seek to separate out these factors.

The avoidance of a second key causality issue also comes up in a set of studies that challenge what is presented as a top-down process of representation: that is, political representation generates representation at high levels of the bureaucracy and this bureaucratic representation produces correspondingly high representation at the street level of bureaucracy. Two studies, both on school systems in the United States, demonstrate that these relationships are reciprocal. While political representation does influence bureaucratic representation, bureaucratic representation also influences the level of political representation (Meier and Smith 1994; Meier and O'Toole 2006).

WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN PASSIVE AND ACTIVE REPRESENTATION?

The basic theory for expecting passive representation to generate active representation is fairly simple, but in recent years the theory has been elaborately revised to focus on the specific situations when active representation might occur. Thompson (1976) effectively summarized the early theory between passive and active representation. He highlights the potential barriers to active representation, yet contends that under certain circumstances these barriers may be breached so that passive representation leads to active representation. He concludes that a passive-to-active linkage is possible when groups and institutions recognize and "press" for minority interests; when issues hold obvious ramifications for one's group; and when there is employee mobilization, support, and discretion (Thompson 1976).

Scholars examining this relationship have found mixed support for the argument that passive representation does in fact lead to active representation. Researchers such as Hindera (1993) and Selden (1997) examining passive and active representation linkages in federal bureaucracies have found evidence of such linkages. Researchers have also found evidence of likely linkages within local and state governments (Bradbury and Kellough 2008). Other bureaucratic agencies such as social service providers and school districts have also been used to investigate and support linkages between passive and active representation (Meier 1984; Wilkins and Keiser 2006).

Keiser et al. (2002) attempted to integrate the previous findings on representative bureaucracy and build a full theoretical framework for when passive representation might result in outcomes favorable to the group in question (which they defined as active representation). They identified seven key variables that constitute the core factors affecting the bureaucratic representation process – discretion, organizational mission, organizational socialization, hierarchy, stratification, critical mass, and professionalization.

First, bureaucrats must exercise discretion, and this discretion must overlap with the issues/values that are salient to the identity in question. Many issues that bureaucrats deal with are not related to the relevant identity, and many other bureaucracies, including the patronage ones, have little discretion (see Van Gool 2008). Keiser et al. (2002) provide an elaborate discussion of when an issue becomes salient, focusing on their concern – issues linked to gender. The specifics of their arguments about salience are less crucial here than their basic contention that such issues are defined politically either by the state or by individuals not benefiting from state actions.

Subsequent studies have revealed that the degree of discretion itself varies at different levels within an organization as well as across organizations. Policy discretion linked to representative bureaucracy has been found at lower levels in schools, police forces, and firefighters (Meier and Stewart 1992; Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006; Ashworth and Andrews 2010), at mid-management levels in child support enforcement (Wilkins and Keiser 2006), and at upper levels in schools and federal contracting decisions (Theobald 2007; Smith and Fernandez 2010). In each case, bureaucratic discretion worked to alter policy implementation to allow outputs and outcomes favored by a particular group to occur.

Scholars such as Hindera and Young (1998) contend that the link between passive and active representation is conditional. That is,

only under certain situations or conditions will passive representation lead to active representation. Hindera and Young's (1998) research shows a dynamic relationship between passive and active representation. More specifically, they find that when minorities are the plurality, majority, or there is a critical mass, the link between passive and active representation varies among the range of bureaucratic environments (Hindera and Young 1998). Unlike the studies focused on finding a link, this study observes challenges to the link and the conditions under which the link is likely to vary. Minorities are expected to represent differently once a critical mass in the bureaucracy is met and surpassed.

Second, bureaucratic agencies are goal-oriented collectives, and so their mission greatly influences whether discretion is relevant to the identity in question. Some agencies are set up to advocate, particularly the clientele agencies in most countries that implement policy in regard to farmers, labor, business, veterans, and others. In other cases, the organization is not set up to directly advocate for individuals; but in the process of making bureaucratic decisions, individual bureaucrats can advocate for a specific group of people or for an individual from that group.

Third, organizational socialization seeks to instill the values of the organization in the individual bureaucrats. Socialization can include training programs, standard operating procedures, incentives for promotion, and even the history of the organization. Much of the orientation, policies, and procedures of the various agencies try to squeeze out the influence of the bureaucrat's individual characteristics and generate uniform decisions via a common acceptance of values. Wilkins and Williams (2008, 2009) demonstrate that some police forces successfully manage to suppress ethnic identities via organizational socialization. While all agencies and public services socialize employees, the extent of socialization varies a great deal. As the degree of socialization increases, the

link between passive and active representation will be attenuated, except in those cases where the agency's mission is to serve the population of the represented group.

Fourth, hierarchy is used by organizations to limit discretion and, therefore, prevent bureaucratic representation. Bureaucratic representation should be enhanced, theoretically, in more decentralized agencies where bureaucrats are allowed greater discretion, allowing them to make decisions in the interests of the represented group. Meier and Bohte (2001) found that representational outputs are enhanced in more decentralized organizations, as did Keiser et al. (2002). Sowa and Selden (2003) show a corresponding result for US state government agencies. A decentralized organization can also cultivate different values in different parts of the organization and thus permit representation across a wider spectrum of interests.

Fifth, stratification concerns the location of the representative group within the bureaucratic hierarchy. As individuals move up the hierarchy in a bureaucracy, they should have a greater ability to affect agency outcomes; therefore, passive representation at the top of the bureaucracy should increase active representation. Theobald (2007) shows that Latino superintendents, the key decision makers for school districts, are able to allocate more funds to bilingual education. Smith and Fernandez (2010) demonstrate that US federal agencies with more minorities in top management positions also allocated a larger percentage of contracts to minority-owned businesses. Keiser et al. (2002), in their study of gender and schools, discovered an interaction effect; while top-level women were not directly associated with better performance by female students, the impact of female teachers was substantially larger when women were well represented in management.

Sixth, many scholars argue that a single isolated bureaucrat is unlikely to have much influence in an organization, and may, in fact, feel uncomfortable advocating the interests of a group. This logic implies that there

needs to be a critical mass of bureaucrats who share some identity before any representation will occur, a position first articulated by management theorist Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1993), who postulated that 15 percent was the critical mass. While the argument has intuitive appeal, the evidence of it is mixed and appears to depend on the level of the organization. Work on US schools shows that teachers, lower-level personnel, do not need a critical mass to influence student assignments, discipline, and performance. At the management level, a critical mass is needed; but the level is closer to 25 percent than the 15 percent that Kanter hypothesized. These results held for both racial minorities (Meier and Stewart 1992) and women (Keiser et al. 2002).

Seventh, professionalism is a major alternative source of bureaucratic identity, and it can act counter to other identities. Much of professional training includes sets of values and ways to approach problems; these values and processes rarely allow for such things as race, ethnicity, or similar factors. Professionalism's impact on bureaucratic representation, however, can also act in a different way. Sometimes, professionalism supports advocacy and the resulting development of active representation. Helping professions such as teaching, nursing, and public health often contain a normative commitment to helping disadvantaged clientele in dealing with bureaucracy or other problems (see Guy, Newman, and Mastracci 2008). Professionals are also likely to have more job security and autonomy, which permits them to exercise greater discretion should they opt to do so.

Other theoretical work has raised the issue that existing studies do not actually demonstrate that there is active representation; rather, they have found a correlation between passive representation and bureaucratic outcomes that benefit the represented. With only few exceptions (see Selden 1997; Bradbury and Kellough 2008), the empirical literature deals with collective representation not individual representation in this way.

Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard (1999), in their study of minority teachers, suggest that the correlation taken as representation can occur for four different reasons.

First, there might actually be active representation: that is, the bureaucrat acts for the client and in the process benefits the client. Second, the representation might occur indirectly because the presence of the minority bureaucrat influences other non-minority bureaucrats to change their behavior. In this case, a bureaucrat does something different, but it is not the bureaucrat who shares the representative trait with the client. Third, the representation might occur through changes in the policies and procedures of the organization. The bureaucratic representatives are likely to play a role in the discussions in the organization and whether or not policies or procedures have institutionalized biases in regard to the represented clientele. The bureaucrat, therefore, represents by advocating for changes in the standard operating procedures of the organization. All three of these processes include some aspects of active representation in the sense of the adoption of a representation role by the bureaucrat (Selden 1997). Finally, the client changes his or her behavior as a result of the characteristics of the bureaucrat. In the education context, this is termed the "role model" effect, but the process can occur outside the education arena (see Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006). In this last case, active representation does not occur.

Lim (2006) takes a compatible view and argues for passive representation's other substantive benefits beyond leading to active representation, which he considers "direct source benefits." It may also produce indirect substantive benefits that are overlooked in studies on the linkage between active and passive representation. His theoretical evaluation of the literature suggests that passive representation may lead to behavioral changes for bureaucrats (both minority and non-minority) and clients, leading to greater benefits for minority clients. Therefore, studies on passive representation

that do not consider passive representations' independent effects on group benefits may be wrongly attributing benefits to active representation.

Meier and Nicholson-Crotty (2006) test this theory, finding clients and bureaucrats do change their behavior with increases in passive gender representation. Women were more likely to report sexual assaults as the level of passive representation increased via more female police officers (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006). Additionally, they credit having more female officers on a police force to changes in male colleagues' sensitivity to gender issues. Similar to Lim's (2006) argument, their findings also indicate an additional benefit to passive representation without any action from the bureaucrat. Changes in client behavior make passive representation more important and suggest an additional linkage complication to the literature, highlighting passive and active linkages based on observed policy outcomes.

Building somewhat on Lim's (2006) research and Meier and Nicholson-Crotty's (2006) findings, Herman's (2007) research considers how passive representation in the bureaucracy may produce benefits to clients from client action. Clients may decide that having some type of passive representation is enough to change their behavior and opinions toward the bureaucracy (Herman 2007). Specifically, he looks for two ways that passive representation may produce benefits: better communication between the client and the bureaucrat (or bureaucracy) and increasing the likelihood that the client will use the bureaucracy's services – termed "demand inducement," (Herman 2007). He finds that passive representation does produce the expected benefits, but only under certain conditions. The extent that passive representation produces benefits is dependent on a clients' past experiences with the bureaucracy, their need for the bureaucracy's services, and the institutional structure of the bureaucracy; these findings are particularly strong for African-American respondents (Herman 2007).

Theobald and Haider-Markel (2009) also question the literature on the linkage between passive, or symbolic representation in their study's context, and active representation. They consider the symbolic effect that passive representation may have on clients' attitudes toward a bureaucratic agency. Similar to Meier and Nicholson-Crotty (2006) and Herman (2007), their work also notes the effect passive representation may have on clients. By examining the public attitudes on the legitimacy of police actions after their interactions with an officer of the same race or a different race, Theobald and Haider-Markel (2009) find that passive representation influences clients' perceptions and attitudes toward bureaucratic action. Black respondents confronted by Black officers were more likely to view the bureaucrat's action as legitimate.

Additional extensions further probe the passive representation–policy outcome linkage in education. Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard (1999) conduct research on the effects of passive representation on students' academic performance to determine if the presence of minority teachers will improve the performance of minority students. However, their research moves beyond looking at the benefits of passive representation to also consider the possible negative consequences of greater passive representation for one group and less passive representation for another group. Essentially, they seek to find the range of consequences for passive representation. They find a positive relationship between the percentage of minority teachers and minority students' academic performance. They also find an increase in white students' pass rate as the percentage of minority teachers increases, suggesting a benefit to minority passive representation for whites also, particularly in districts with greater equity.

Similarly, Weiher (2000) also finds a relationship between passive representation and student performance outcomes. He notes that the performance of minority students are "consistently depressed" when there is a

shortfall of minority teachers. For Latino students, a decrease in the percentage of Latino teachers could lead to a 14 point decrease in Latino students' performance overall. Black students could experience a 26 point decrease in their performance overall if the percentage of Black teachers decreased (Weiher 2000). Although this research is similar to Meier et al.'s, Weiher uses distinct model specification techniques. He operationalizes minority teacher population by taking the difference between the percentage of Black/Latino teachers and percentage of Black/Latino students, while Meier et al. simply use a combined percentage of Black and Latino teachers. Weiher's measure highlights the "minority teacher shortfall" issue, and it also allows one to see the exact effects for Black and Latinos when not lumped together as a "minority" group.

There have also been less quantitative studies that pose questions of passive representation and representative bureaucracy. Thielemann and Stewart (1996) examine the "demand side" of representative bureaucracy. More specifically, they investigate if there is an actual demand or desire from represented clients for a representative bureaucracy. Thielemann and Stewart (1996) theorize a client's willingness to seek out services, treatments, or preventive measures may depend on who is providing the services, essentially affecting the effectiveness of service delivery. Using survey data of people living with AIDS in Dallas, Texas, they find results suggesting a demand for a more representative bureaucracy (Thielemann and Stewart 1996). Passive representation on the dimensions of race, gender, and sexual orientation mattered; however, representation from service providers compared to service directors mattered more (Thielemann and Stewart 1996). This suggests that active representation matters greatly and possibly more than passive representation; however, passive representation is still relevant to receiving this active representation. As the population of people affected by AIDS becomes more diverse, the demand and competition for resources and services increases. Consequently, a representative bureaucracy in AIDS services is becoming increasingly important (Thielemann and Stewart 1996). This research is particularly interesting because it checks the relevance of representative bureaucracy in an area where it would seem to matter a great deal – health care. It provides proof to an assumption that is made in nearly every representative bureaucracy service – the services provided by the "representative" bureaucracy are those that the client wants, needs, and would be interested in receiving.

REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY AND PERFORMANCE: EVALUATING BUREAUCRATIC EFFECTIVENESS

A general perception is that there is a trade-off between representation and organizational performance (Lim 2006). The argument is based on the idea that organizations maximize efficiency and that any deviation from that such as representation will reduce performance. At the same time, if the representativeness of the bureaucracy causes the client to change behavior, then there is a possibility that improvement – particularly in cases of co-production – in results will occur. The relationship between bureaucratic representation and performance was first examined in a study of representative bureaucracy and education in Texas (Meier et al. 1999, 2001). Those articles examined cross-group tradeoffs: that is, whether an increase in minority teachers negatively affected the performance of non-minority students. As part of the analysis, a bold, aggressive hypothesis was put forth that representative bureaucracies would be more effective than non-representative bureaucracies. The hypothesis was supported theoretically by the work of Gary Becker (1993), who argued that discrimination in employment would create inefficiencies for an organization. Meier et al. (1999, 2001) suggested that an unrepresentative

bureaucracy would reveal management's preferences for certain types of employees and those preferences would likely result in reduced organizational performance. The empirical study found that not only were White students (non-minorities) not negatively affected by minority teachers, but they actually experienced higher performance with minority teachers than did minority students.

The relationship between representative bureaucracy and organizational performance was taken a step further by David Pitts and his co-authors. Relying on private sector research that indicates more diverse organizations are likely to generate a greater range of ideas and consequently perform better, Pitts (2005) finds that as the bureaucracy more closely mirrors the clientele in terms of ethnic composition, performance does increase. A subsequent analysis (Roch, Pitts, and Navarro 2010) shows that schools with more representative teaching faculties tend to shift from punitive disciplinary policies to more corrective or ameliorative disciplinary policies. The implication of this change in policy is that the organizations are more likely to get positive results in terms of performance. The work on how representative bureaucracy affects the performance of organizations is clearly in its infancy, but sufficient evidence exists to conclude that it is not necessarily the case that bureaucracies must give up performance if they seek to be representative.

CONCLUSION

Although the study of representative bureaucracy has generated a substantial body of work, there remains much to be done. We know something about which identities should be represented, what the determinants of representation are, whether passive representation leads to active representation, and whether bureaucratic representation affects the performance of the organization. Much of the research is based in the United States, and the bulk of the US research focuses on a single type of organization, public schools. Organizations take many forms and they exist in many national contexts that vary greatly in terms of politics, structures, public activities, and development. The findings based on local school districts in the United States are unlikely to be relevant to all the bureaucracies in all these contexts. As a result, there are numerous opportunities for theoretically informed research, especially outside the United States. Only by taking the study of representative bureaucracy elsewhere can we get definitive answers on when bureaucracies represent and what difference it makes if they do.

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