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INTRODUCTION

Representation of minorities: perspectives and challenges

Licia Cianetti[a] and Jelena Lončar[b,c]*

[a]Department of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, UK; [b]Department of Politics, University of York, York, UK; [c]Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade, Belgrade, Serbia

Recent years have brought a remarkable shift in the theory of political representation. Our understanding of representation has moved beyond the traditional static and unidirectional approach, which envisions representatives as simply responding (more or less successfully) to their constituents' needs and demands. We now know that representation is a dynamic and multidirectional process in which the representatives' claims at least partially construct the constituents' interests (Saward 2010). Thus, constructivist scholars have convinced us that representation is not merely about responding to the preexisting and static interests of constituents; rather, it is a dynamic process in which representatives also construct their constituencies' interests, views, and perceptions through the claims-making process. This theoretical shift is most often advanced in discussions of women's representation (Campbell, Childs, and Lovenduski 2010; Celis et al. 2014), but it is bound to have a strong impact also on the study of ethnic minority representation in contemporary democracies. Indeed, if representation is a two-way process through which politically relevant constituencies are constructed, this should apply to ethnocultural minorities, whose "groupness" (Brubaker 2004) cannot be taken as fixed and prepolitical.

However, while the empirical literature on the representation of women has taken this approach, there is a disconnect between theory and empirical research on ethnic representation. Indeed, empirical research on minority representation tends to work within a traditional framework, often resorting to a more or less explicit essentialization of minority interests. Most scholars of minority studies agree with Brubaker's (2004, 2) warning against "the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis (and basic constituents of the social world)." Nevertheless, an "underlying essentialism" still persists in empirical studies of ethnic politics (Zuber 2013, 192). Thus, the tendency remains to assume homogeneous and fixed minority interests as the basis for assessing minority representatives' performance. This assumption neglects within-group differences as well as the fact that group interests are at least partially constructed in the process of representation.

The first aim of this Special Section, and of the workshop from which it originated,[1] is to present ways in which empirical research on minority politics can integrate a more nuanced, nonessentializing theoretical understanding of representation that takes into account both the complex relationship between representatives and represented and the nonhomogeneity of minority communities.

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*Corresponding author. Email: loncar.jelena@gmail.com

Pitkin's (1967) understanding of descriptive and substantive representation has been especially influential on past research on minority representation. In this framework, *descriptive representation* refers to the presence of elected representatives who belong to a defined group (i.e. who "look like" the represented), while *substantive representation* refers to the championing of minority interests and needs – what Pitkin calls "acting for." Starting from this distinction, a debate ensued about whether descriptive representation is sufficient, necessary, or even potentially detrimental to the attainment of substantive representation. This debate has taken place mostly in the US context, and three competing arguments have emerged. The first is that descriptive representation is not necessary to guarantee substantive representation because nonminority representatives can be responsive to minority electorates as well as (and under certain conditions, even better than) minority representatives (Welch and Hibbing 1984, 329; Lublin 1997). The second is that excessive focus on descriptive representation can in fact be detrimental for substantive minority-friendly outcomes as it can polarize majority voters against the minority (Brace, Grofman, and Handley 1987; Overby and Cosgrove 1996). The third is that minority descriptive representation is necessary to ensure substantive representation and has generally positive effects for the minority, both symbolically and in terms of policy outcomes. Along these lines, Phillips (1995) argued in favor of a "politics of presence" – that is, the need to have minority representatives in order to guarantee minorities' effective democratic equality. Authors who support this view have suggested that descriptive representation incentivizes minority participation (Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Spence, McClerking, and Brown 2009; Keele et al. 2013; Clark 2014), enhances minority trust in institutions (Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Tate 2001; Gay 2002; Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 2004; Marschall and Ruhil 2007), enhances policy-makers' responsiveness to the minority (Ueda 2008), and constitutes a communicative advantage that improves the quality of minority-related policies (Mansbridge 1999).

As this debate has slowly spread to the European context, the language of descriptive and substantive representation is increasingly used in discussing European minorities (Severs, Celis, and Meier 2013). In particular, from a focus on descriptive representation and minority voters' behavior (Goodin 1999; Anwar 2001; Togeby 2008; Teney et al. 2010; Bloemraad 2013), researchers are turning their attention to whether and under what conditions representatives with minority backgrounds respond to minority interests.[2] The second aim of this Special Section, therefore, is to contribute to the development of the European-based debate on descriptive and substantive representation, proposing ways in which the vocabulary developed by US-based scholars can be adapted to and enriched by the European context, and introducing a more nuanced understanding of representation.

The three articles in this Special Section propose three ways to rethink the meaning and content of minority groups' representation in light of recent developments in the theory of political representation. They all propose potential alternatives to traditional, essentialist studies of minority representation and try to capture and make sense of the complexity of group representation. Lončar's article does this by proposing a new operationalization of accountability that considers the constructivist turn in representation theory. Toró shows how minority representatives modulate their representative claims depending on their audience, while Aydemir and Vliegenthart introduce the effect of media in shaping representatives' claims. As they grapple with the difficulties of integrating new theoretical insights into the empirical pull of groupness, the authors in this Special Section do not make a complete shift toward constructivism. Instead, they incorporate some contributions of the change, while keeping what they believe is important from the traditional approaches.

Lončar invites us to move beyond the static and traditional understanding of representation and proposes a way to methodologically embrace the constructivist turn in the study of minority political representation. Her paper aims to extend the focus of ethnic minority research in two ways: first, by introducing the notion of constitutive representation of ethnicity and second, by operationalizing accountability for empirical research of minority representation in accordance with the constructivist representative turn. Criticizing the previous research on minority representation for failing to take into account the constructed nature of ethnicity, Lončar suggests that we need to be interested in the performance of representation of ethnic minorities: how representatives frame minority interests and communicate their claims to the affected constituencies and under what conditions members of minority groups accept or reject these claims. Rather than asking who acts in the interest of minorities and assuming that we know what these interests are, we should be interested in the process of bringing minority groups and their interests into being through representative claims and the democratic legitimacy of these claims. The paper challenges the traditional understanding of accountability as reelection and suggests that accountability should be understood in more discursive and plural ways. Aiming to operationalize accountability for empirical research, Lončar introduces three systemic conditions necessary for the accountability of minority representatives: publicity, competition, and outlets for objection. Based on them, the paper further develops system accountability indicators that allow for empirical evaluation of the conditions under which minority constituencies can hold representatives accountable. In developing these indicators, Lončar particularly had in mind postconflict East European societies.

Focusing on the "how" of representation, Toró argues that representation should be understood as a context-dependent process. Exploring the representation of Hungarians in Romania, he challenges the argument made in previous studies that representatives need to ethnicize their demands if they are to be perceived as substantive representatives. Rather than understanding substantive representation as responsiveness, Toró defines substantive representation as a set of discursive and political strategies through which minority interests are constructed. He argues that there is a difference in the ways minority MPs formulate their claims in legislative debates and open political statements. His analysis suggests the importance of the audiences that representatives aim to address, and he shows how representatives can modulate their claims depending on the audience in order to maximize the substantive effects of their representation. In legislative debates, where the goal is to affect policies, MPs primarily address fellow MPs and pursue a strategy of cooperation and deethnicization. In contrast, in open political statements, which serve to bring more political and symbolic benefits, MPs address their constituents as an intended audience, constructing them as a unified group with a distinct identity. Contrary to previous literature, Toró suggests that both approaches are instances of substantive representation. In doing so, Toró makes an additional contribution to the field by operationalizing substantive representation in constructivist terms from the perspective of minority interests and by suggesting that we should look at the representative claims to see how MPs define what it means to act for minorities.

In their contribution, Aydemir and Vliegenthart explore how the audience constructs meaning, that is, how discursive opportunities shape representative patterns in the Netherlands and the UK. They look at how the cultural incentives (that is, what is and is not culturally acceptable to say) affect representative behavior. They do so by examining the influence of media coverage on how often and in what ways minority representatives address immigrant minorities. Thus, they shift the focus from the electoral system and institutional design of the country toward more cultural incentives. They find that the Dutch

minority MPs address minority constituencies less and adopt more negative framings when media are more negative on minority issues. In contrast, the British minority MPs show more interest in minority issues when media attention declines. This is an important contribution that expands the discussion of representation to the context in which representation takes place. They find a complex relationship between media background and representatives' behavior: background incentives are relevant in shaping the behavior of representatives, but they do not determine it. Instead, MPs actively engage with the media background, challenging, reinforcing, or modifying background incentives.

All the papers in this Special Section take minority representatives as a heterogeneous rather than homogeneous group, recognizing that minority representatives (exactly like majority representatives) can respond to a variety of incentives, ideas, and interests. Some of them may portray themselves as acting in favor of cultural and religious rights and freedoms, while others may advocate a restrictive stance toward groups-based rights. Taken together, the three articles do not aim to present a unified answer to the issue of how to study the representation of ethnic minorities empirically. Rather, each of them puts forward one proposal on how the debate on this issue can be opened up and deepened. We hope other scholars will engage with these proposals and push the debate further.

Notes

1. The workshop was titled "Representation of Minorities: Perspectives and Challenges" and was held at the University of York on 15 May 2015 (http://minorityrepresentation.wordpress.com/). It was funded by the British International Studies Association Postgraduate Network (BISA PGN); and the Department of Politics; the Conflict, Security, and Development cluster; and the Morrell Centre for Toleration, all at the University of York.
2. The research project "Pathways to Power: The Political Representation of Citizens of Immigrant Origin in Seven European Democracies" (www.pathways.eu) is a notable example of this.

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