Introduction to the American Political Process

Class 3: Representation and Responsiveness

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Overview

1. Week 3 Readings

   Pitkin, “The Concept of Representation”

   Mansbridge, “Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent Yes”

   Gilens, “ Affluence a nd I nfluence”

   Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, “The Unheavenly Chorus”

Week 3 Readings

Pitkin

A few words on division of labor in political science:

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

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

Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. In *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press, 1972. © University of California Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/.

Pitkin

Purpose of the reading: Noting that the word "representation" has many (sometimes contradictory) uses, Pitkin sets out to clarify its meaning:

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

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

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Pitkin

Applications of representation:

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

Pitkin

Formalistic representation:

- Hobbesian version: *"Representation is a kind of 'black box' shaped by the initial giving of authority, within which the representative can do whatever he pleases."*
- Second version: after-the-fact accountability
- Either way, focused on **elections**
    - Problems left unresolved: how often should elections take place? what constitutes fair elections?

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Pitkin

Descriptive representation:

- *"reflecting without distortion"; "the perfection of the portrait consists in its likeness"*
- *"a representative body is an arena in which each opinion in the nation can produce itself in full light"*
- Problems: which features matter? (Mansbridge); is it all about appearance?

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Pitkin

Substantive representation:

- Considers the content of representative's behavior
- Problem: trusteeship vs. substitution

Mansbridge

Purpose of the reading: to argue that **descriptive representation** is a (contingently) good path to **substantive representation**.

What are the relevant features we want to see reflected?

- *"no one would argue that morons should be represented by morons"*
- Not all features are meaningful: left-handed, redheaded, Italian, Lithuanian...

Answer has to do with **deliberative** and **aggregative** democratic functions.

- Deliberative: descriptive representation brings new information, perspectives
- Aggregative: electoral incentive may be enough

Mansbridge, Jane."Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'." *Journal of Politics* 61, no. 3 (1999): 628–57. © University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Southern Political Science Association. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/.

Mansbridge

However, there may be costs to descriptive representation:

- Essentializing
- Subgroup identities may erode ties of nationhood, political movement or party
- May not lead to good substantive representation

Mansbridge

So when do benefits outweigh the costs?

- Enhanced communication in contexts of distrust (dominant-subordinate group dynamic)
- Contexts of uncrystallized interests

Note: two further benefits accrue from descriptive representation:

- Creation of social meaning
- Legitimacy of policymaking

Mansbridge

TABLE 1

Institutionalizing Fluid Forms of Descriptive Representation

LEAST FLUID

1. Quotas in constitutions
2. Quotas in law
3. Quotas in party constitutions
4. Majority-minority districts
5. Quotas as party decisions
6. Proportional representation and/or cumulative voting
7. "Enabling devices"
   a. schools and funding for potential candidates
   b. caps on nomination campaign expenses
   c. public funding of nomination campaign expenses
   d. establishing formal search committees within each party to help identify and nominate potential candidates from disadvantaged groups
   e. high-quality public day care for elected officials
   f. scholarships to law schools and public policy schools for members of historically disadvantaged and proportionally underrepresented groups

MOST FLUID

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Gilens

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

Purpose of the reading:

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

Gilens, Martin. "Citizen Competence and Democratic Decision Making." Chapter 1 in *Affluence & Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America*. Princeton University Press, 2012. © Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/.

Gilens

Democratic theories of citizen participation:

1. **Deliberative**
    - Citizens' views are *endogenous to* (i.e., shaped by) political process
    - E.g. New England town hall, Athenian democracy
2. **Aggregative**
    - Citizens' views are *exogenous to* political process, which serves only as a mechanism for incorporating these views into governance

Gilens

A **minimalist view** says citizens are unfit from both deliberative and aggregative perspectives.

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

Maybe the best we can do is **retrospective voting**, where citizens select incumbent or challenger and leave them to govern.

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

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Gilens

It turns out that even retrospective voting may be too high a bar for citizens.

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

Gilens

Three ways out of the grim view:

1. Cue taking
2. Issue publics
3. Aggregation

Schlozman et al

"The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent" (Schattschneider 1960).

Purpose of the reading:

1. Identify expressions of "political voice"
2. Demonstrate inequalities in these dimensions of political voice in the U.S. context

Schlozman et al

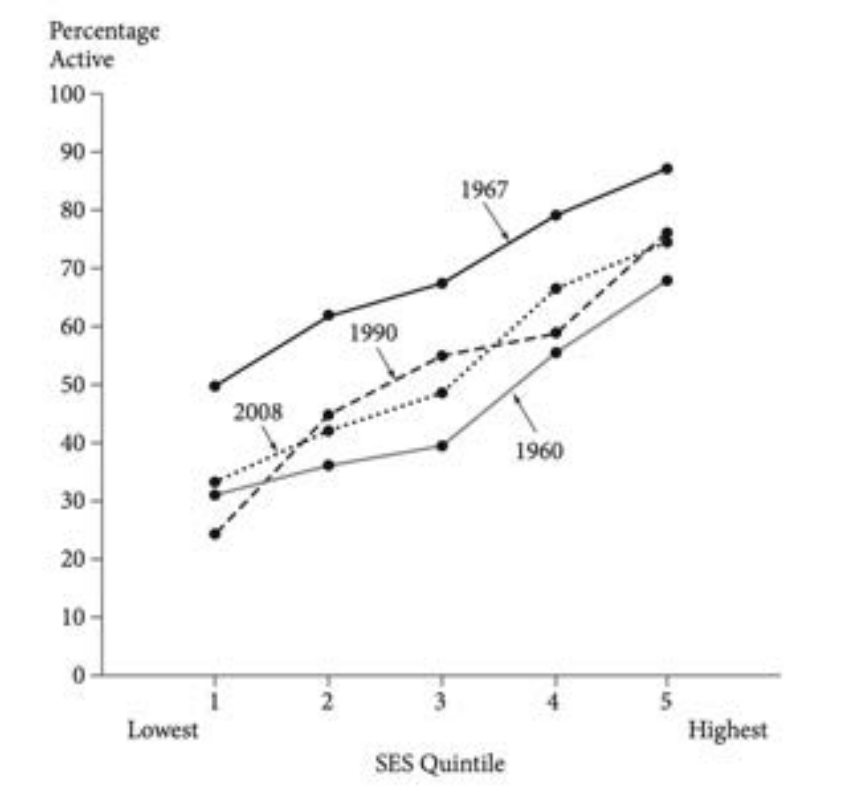
Political voice includes:

- Voting, contributing to campaigns, responding to surveys, protest, advocacy, calling your legislator, canvassing, posting political content on social media...

Political voice plays dual roles: **informational** and **accountability**

But unequal representation in nearly all aspects of political voice $\rightarrow$ unequal responsiveness

Schlozman et al



Schlozman, Kay Lehman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady. "Introduction: Democracy and Political Voice." Chapter 1 in T*he Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. Princeton University Press, 2013. © Princeton University Press. All rights reserved. This content is excluded from our Creative Commons license. For more information, see https://ocw.mit.edu/help/faq-fair-use/.

The data are based on five measures of activity: working in a political campaign, contributing to a candidate or campaign, contacting a government official, belonging to a political organization, and working with others on a community issue.

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