
Substantive Representation

Substantive representation would be the tendency to vote, through an informed process, by someone who represents the thoughts, ideals and principles that you as a citizen want to see safeguarded.[1] Taking this and the democratic system which the UK operates in, I intend to argue that there needs to be an adequate improvement of both descriptive and substantive representation for it to be enough for women and ethnic minorities. The UK is a representative democracy, hence, the state should strive to incorporate all ethnic groups and genders into the political landscape. Furthermore, the legitimacy of parliament would be brought into question if ethnic minority and female interests were not focused upon enough within the House of Commons in particular. I intend to use an article by Karen Bird which details research about the presence of substantive representation in a representative democracy. This will be used to argue that “better representation of members of historically marginalized groups will improve the process of representative democracy.”[2]

In addition to this, I intend to use an article by Zingher and Farrer that argues that descriptive representation is an important tool for political parties to appeal to ethnic minority groups. Finally, I will refer to an article by Erzeel and Celis which gives the substantive representation of women an ideological arc. By using this source, I intend to argue that the moderation of ideologies has improved substantive representation for women as parties strive to articulate women’s interests.

If there was an influx of minority MPs in parliament, then substantive representation would inevitably rise. Historically, the lack of visible minorities has caused disillusionment among ethnic groups. They can potentially have doubts of the quality of substantive representation which is being delivered to them. As of the recent 2017 election, the current parliament is the most diverse since it was founded. There is “Currently around 8% of Members of both Houses are from an ethnic minority background. This compares with 13.6% of UK population.”[3] In addition to this, “The number of ethnic minority female MPs in the House of Commons increased from 3.0% in 2015 (20 of 650) to 4% in 2017 (26 of 650). Currently non-white female MPs make up 12.5% of all women MPs (208).”[4] Even with this parliament being the most diverse, ethnic minorities are still significantly under-represented. Leading on from this, because of the lack of proportional representation of ethnicities within parliament, the UK’s representative democracy, in England particularly, is inherently flawed.

Mansbridge inadvertently supports my argument by proposing that more diverse representation will provide access to more information, and will promote trust among distinct groups, ultimately enhancing policy outcomes.[5] Therefore, this diverse representation could’ve avoided

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disastrous policies which mainly affected working class areas with high ethnic populations. There would be a stronger interconnectedness between minority groups and parliament. An example of this is the Poll Tax of 1989 which led to the infamous Poll Tax riots. It could be argued that because of the lack of diversity within the parliament at that time, there were grave miscalculations from Thatcher and her cabinet when constructing this policy. There was a lack of embodied culture capital which seemingly hindered the policy making process. Embodied culture capital “comprises the knowledge that is consciously acquired and the passively inherited, by socialization to culture and tradition. Unlike property, cultural capital is not transmissible, but is acquired over time, as it is impressed upon the person's habits (character and way of thinking), which, in turn, becomes more receptive to similar cultural influences.”[6] There were only 4 minority MPs at the time, who were all members of the opposition party.

With this in mind, it is possible that the Tories only held their agenda in mind and did not consider the burden this tax would impose on the working-class minority groups. If, for example, there was a minority MP within the Tory cabinet at that time, the process might have been handled differently due to the MP being able to bring in his culture capital to drastically change the policy. However, the cabinet was exclusively white and mostly middle class; therefore they were more than likely concerned with their agenda and did not take into account the concerns of the politically marginalized. Historically, laws and acts, which affected marginalized groups in general, have had widespread opposition to them, such as Local Government Act 1988[7] and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994)[8]. The substantive representation for groups that were affected, homosexuals and young people, was relatively non-existent. Due to the marginal increases in representatives of different groups, this has been somewhat improved but not to a level where marginalized groups are truly represented. Hence, to fix the current flawed democratic system within the UK, the improvement of substantive representation for politically marginalized groups is a necessity.

Similarly, women argue “that their gender has a more consultative approach to politics than men, and that parity and the inclusion of more women in politics will improve the quality of representative democracy.”[9] I concur with this statement for the most part since there is evidence where countries with higher proportions of women in government, have higher levels of government effectiveness. On the other hand, it is difficult to conclude whether it is just women which make government effectiveness high or other omitted variables.[10] Tootell research results have found that governments with increased female representation “pass bills that increase funding for social services and alter the nature of the government, including decreasing corruption. Tootell's findings are in line with her theoretical hypothesis which is that “these changes make government more effective with more females are, in fact, more effective, better serving their people.”[11] I agree partially with Tootell's theory as the government would be more effective at serving their people with women who are more directly involved with government practice. This is because the UK's current state of representative democracy

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would be improved (along with the substantive representation of women) with the increase of female MPs in the House of Commons. Albeit this evidence is not conclusive, it is beneficial, overall, to include more representatives of politically marginalized groups within government as it will inevitably increase the quality of substantive representation for not only the groups I have mentioned, but the population as a whole.

Descriptive representation constitutes a segment of politicians who represent the larger population from which they come. These are representatives that advocate in the name of a specific group, or groups, that are homogenous to the background of the politician. [12]

Although the importance of substantive representation is evident, nominating descriptively representative candidates can be a tool which political parties are able to use to show that they are capable of showing commitment to certain group interests.[13] Some of the electorate do not necessarily vote based on the candidate's thoughts on current issues. Minority groups in particular tend to vote for members of their ethnic group, if applicable, since there is a perception that they share a common background and life experiences with "their representative is important for assuring quality representation." [14]

However, the question of whether the nomination of ethnic candidates would be more beneficial to party or more damaging. At the end of the day, parties are primarily looking to secure the largest number of votes which sometimes leads to there not being a more inclusive field of candidates because they want to sustain their larger, core voter base. This is why political parties have varying levels of success when they do have a significant amount of minority MPs. In the article, studies have provided evidence that "suggests that the nomination of ethnic minority candidates is associated with an increase in ethnic minority turnout and support for the co-ethnic candidate." [15] When looking at the 2010 election, research found that those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage were likely to support co-ethnic candidates. [16] This is evidence that certain groups of the electorate are focused more on the characteristics of candidates rather than their opinions on issues that affect them. As aforementioned, this is possibly due to having the belief that they will be the most effective candidate in addressing the particular issues which concern their ethnic group.

The effectiveness of having minority candidates differentiates in terms of what political party fields them. For example, parties on the left have had a "head start", so to speak, due to their long-standing affiliation with the politically marginalized which encompasses minorities. Therefore, there has been a historical perception that the Labour party is a more effective in representing the interests of ethnic minorities. [17] From this, we can conclude that there is a correlation between party's ideology and the effectiveness of descriptive representation. Traditionally left-wing parties are more capable of offering quality representation for these groups but they have lacked the reputation. This can be due to the lack of majority governments

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they have had, compared to the Conservatives, which makes it difficult for parties like Labour to bring ethnic interests to the forefront. This makes descriptive representation, in practice, very impractical and difficult to achieve because of how varied the levels of success would be spanning from parliament to parliament. In addition to this, there is a serious lack of minority MPs as it is so to even make it a legitimate model of representation. Therefore, it would not be enough, in a representative democracy like the UK, to implement descriptive representation.

Keeping on the theme of political parties and ideology, these factors also impact on the substantive representation of women. I argue that the position on the post-materialist scale, left or right wing, plays a role in the quality of substantive representation that is delivered to women. In terms of traditional ideology, they do not accommodate societal structures [18] so they are not a good indicator of whether or not women's interests are represented significantly. Firstly, we need to define what post-materialism is. Post-materialism is value orientation that emphasizes self-expression and quality of life over economic and physical security.[19] Parties that lean on the 'post-materialist left' promote the expansion of individual freedoms on post-materialist issues which, in theory, and would be the most suitable to engage with women's substantive representation.[20] This is because of the post-materialist agenda in the 1970s which led to a decline in class politics and embraced new social movements which were closely linked with egalitarianism, women's rights and feminism.[21]

There is a valid probability to why substantive representation for women has not been at a level it should have been. Left-wing parties, which were developed in line with the post-materialist's agenda, such as the Green party, have focused more attention to women's concerns than traditional socialist parties. [22] It can be argued that the reason there hasn't been a continuous improvement historically in women's substantive representation because the two-party system has not allowed more egalitarian parties to be the majority party within parliament. Ideally, within a democracy like the UK, there would be a major improvement in substantive representation for the groups in question, if parties like the Liberal Democrats and the Green party had more of a presence within parliament. In reality, the two-party system looks like it will not be derailed in the foreseeable future and first past the post makes it near impossible for these parties to even make a minute dent in seats to Labour or the Conservatives. However, the presence of intra-party women's organizations does force the issue on women's issues. They typically have "feminist/gender expertise" and "offer useful, accurate and first-hand policy information on women's issues." [23] In addition to this, this is not to say that less egalitarian left-wing parties, such as Labour, do not offer a relatively high level of substantive representation (not only due to the intra-party organizations). It is found in many studies that higher levels of left-wing activity on behalf of women is in part due to female MPs, especially for Labour, being the most active defenders of women's case.[24] It should also be noted that efforts to increase the number of female MPs in right-wing parties as well. Across the board, the increased presence of women in parliament has created a "favourable condition for the expression of women's interests" in both

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right-wing and left-wing contexts. [25] In summary, the quality of substantive representation for women is not at the highest it could be in a democracy like the UK, but it is adequate enough to where there is definitely a focus on women's issues but not to a degree where they are the predominant focus of political parties. This is mainly because of the lack of egalitarian values within these parties.

Is it enough to improve substantive representation for these groups? Of course, but the ability to do so is incredibly difficult considering the very rigid democratic system which the UK has. The improvement on the substantive representation hinges on the two-party system being disrupted and an alternative voting system being introduced. This would allow egalitarian parties to have more political power which in turn could bring a narrower focus on minority and gender issues and interests.

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