

**The Political Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities
in Established Democracies:
A Framework for Comparative Research**

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It is a common observation that political representatives tend to be drawn from the elite stratum of society. Even where representatives are chosen through fair and democratic elections, it is often said that legislative assemblies remain “unrepresentative,” and, in particular, that they are under-representative of women, ethnic minorities, and the poorer and less educated social classes. This is especially true of representation at the national level. When we say that a parliament is unrepresentative of certain groups, we are referring to a concept of descriptive or demographic representation, and implying that a parliament should be a microcosm of the nation.¹ To some extent at least, it should mirror the population from which it is drawn.² The concern that legislatures be demographically representative of the diverse classes of citizens is not new. Alexander Hamilton expressed this concern in the Federalist Papers when he questioned whether a representative body composed of “landholders, merchants and men of the learned profession” could speak legitimately for all people: “It is said to be necessary, that all classes of citizens should have some of their own numbers in the representative body, in order that their feelings and interests may be better understood and attended to.”³ Yet, over the last ten or so years, there has been growing concern within democratic societies with the facial composition of representative assemblies. It has become increasingly important that parties and legislatures be (or appear to be) inclusive and demographically representative of the broader society. Of special concern have been two under-represented groups, women and ethnic minorities.

¹ There are other meanings of the term as well. We may refer to representation in the symbolic sense, as when the Queen represents or embodies the nation, or when a hockey team represents its country. Or we may refer to a representative as a delegate or spokesperson for a particular interest, as a lawyer represents the interests of his or her client, or as an MP speaks on behalf of his or her constituency. On the concept of representation, see A. H. Birch, *Representation* (London, Macmillan, 1978), Hannah Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation* (Berkeley, CA. University of California Press, 1967), and Heinz Euleau and John C. Wahlke, *The Politics of Representation* (London, Sage Publications, 1978).

² Most advocates of descriptive representation do not agree that a parliament should *exactly* mirror society, such that children represented children, lunatics represented lunatics and so on, but rather that it should be *more* representative than it actually is.

³ Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist*, no. 35.

A number of countries have adopted measures intended to improve the political representation of women. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) global database on quotas for women lists 45 countries where quotas for female candidates are presently mandated (either by constitutional provision or by national law) at the national or sub-national level.⁴ And there are many more countries where parties have implemented voluntary quotas for female candidates. Whether or not these measures are effective is another issue, but countries and parties are at least interested in appearing to promote greater gender-balance in their representative assemblies.

A similar trend applies, though at a slower pace, to the problem of ethnic under-representation. Only a few states have passed laws to correct the under-representation of ethnic minorities, and in most cases these laws apply to dominant national minorities, and not to polyethnic immigrant minorities.⁵ In addition, most of the countries where parliamentary seats are reserved for national minorities are either new or non-democracies, where such measures are required to maintain ethnic peace or to limit the autonomy of national minorities.⁶ There are also a handful of established democracies where seats are reserved for designated indigenous communities.⁷ There are no established democracies that have adopted quota laws for ethnic minorities (in the fashion that many have for women). Yet there have been significant efforts among political parties to widen their support among ethnic communities and to recruit ethnic minority candidates, especially in local, but also in national elections. Many traditional parties have established ethnic liaison units, intended to

⁴ See www.idea.int/quota.

⁵ National minorities refers to those long-standing minority groups whose presence in a state may be the result of colonization, conquer, or forced migration. These groups are characterized by the maintenance of (at least some) separate institutions, and by demands for some level of political autonomy. Polyethnic minorities refers to those who (or whose ancestors) arrived more recently. These groups are not usually characterized by demands for political autonomy, but rather by demands for greater inclusion in the institutions of the state. See Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 10-33.

⁶ They include Croatia (where seats are reserved for Hungarian, Italian, Czech, Slovak, Ruthenian, Ukranian, German and Austrian minorities); Singapore (for Malay, Indian and other ethnic communities); Slovenia (for Hungarians and Italians); Jordan (for Christians and Circassians); Pakistan (for non-Muslim minorities); Western Samoa (for non-indigenous minorities); Colombia (for Black communities and indigenous peoples); and the Palestinian Authority (for Christians and Samaritans).

⁷ New Zealand, Norway, Finland, and Denmark set aside a number of parliamentary seats for members of the indigenous community. There are also a number of consociational democracies (such as Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands or Northern Ireland), which guarantee parliamentary representation for regional-, linguistic-, and religious-based interests. Finally, there is the United States, which has practiced the unique approach of redrawing the boundaries of legislative districts to create “majority Black” and “majority Latino” districts. The U.S. approach to racial districting is discussed below.

increase the party's profile within ethnic communities, and to serve as recruitment centres for ethnic minorities aspiring to become political candidates. A few parties have adopted explicit numerical targets for polyethnic minority candidates.⁸ And, in a very few cases, ethnic groups have created their own all- or mostly-ethnic lists.⁹

There has, in short, been a surge of interest and a variety of strategies adopted to promote the political representation of women and minorities. The mechanisms of representative democracy have never offered up elected assemblies that are a mirror image of the general public they are supposed to represent, nor have they been intended to do so. However, the distortions of representative democracy have become more apparent of late, and there is mounting pressure to correct them. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to the persistent obstacles to women's and ethnic minority representation in politics, and to examine conditions and strategies across various countries that appear to facilitate better political representation of these groups. In the process, we hope to begin to disentangle the idea of descriptive representation, as applied to women and ethnic minorities across Western democratic political systems, and to point out the conditions under which it may be easier or harder for some groups to achieve a voice in the political process. We will see that, while there are some common explanations for the under-representation of historically marginalized groups, there are vast differences *within* and *between* countries in the steps that have been taken to increase the political representation of those groups. In particular, there may be more differences than similarities in the challenges women and ethnic minorities are facing for improved political representation.

Descriptive Representation in Comparative Context: A Fragmented Area of Research

The scholarly literature addressing the political representation of marginalized groups offers little help in sorting out the disparities and differences in representation among groups and across countries. This literature can be categorized into two main bodies, each of which has developed largely in isolation from the other. The first body of research is theoretical in orientation, and

⁸ Two parties that have adopted quotas for ethnic minority candidates are the Ontario New Democratic Party and the Welsh Labour Party. These cases are discussed below.

⁹ For example, the municipal Pakistan People's Party was formed in the town of Bradford, England in 1970. In Australia, the deliberately multicultural Unity Party was created in 1996, in opposition to Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party. It fielded a slate of candidates in the 1998 national elections, 70 percent of whom were from non-English speaking backgrounds. In France, the "Liste Motivée" presented a highly multicultural slate of candidates in 2001 municipal elections in the city of Toulouse.

addresses the question of whether quotas and similar measures to enhance the descriptive representation of politically marginalized groups can be justified in modern democracies. Arising out of research on theories of multiculturalism, this work addresses the value of group representation in terms of equality and justice, and considers the effects of such measures upon the representative and deliberative functions.

Exemplary of this work is the writing of Iris Young, Will Kymlicka, Anne Phillips, Melissa Williams, and Jane Mansbridge, each of whom argue that there are certain groups who have been largely absent from elected political bodies, and that we need to develop mechanisms to ensure that they are adequately included in representative assemblies.¹⁰ These authors address an important set of problems about the role of descriptive representation in democratic societies. The first is that special measures and preferential treatment (including separate candidate selection procedures, for example) to assist groups such as ethnic minorities and women to obtain their fair share of representation, may undermine the idea of equal treatment for all individuals. The second concern is that such mechanisms can inadvertently serve to reify and essentialize groups, and fail to acknowledge or invite diversities within them. The third concern (a corollary to the second) is that mechanisms for group representation, in tending to overemphasize the differences between groups and to underemphasize their commonalities, may undermine the cohesiveness of the nation and promote its balkanization. The fourth is that linking representation to group-based characteristics may weaken political accountability, especially where descriptive representatives (and their constituents) accept the idea that a representative's identity matters more than the policy ideas and party platform that they presumably stood for when they were elected. Despite these concerns, these theorists argue that special measures to enhance the representation of women and minorities are justified by existing practices of representation in liberal democracies. For example, these practices already allow the representation of territorial interests, which are not all that different from the notion of group representation. Moreover, existing practices need to be improved. There are systematic biases inherent in candidate selection procedures and methods of election, that lead to the

¹⁰ Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1990), and *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000); Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1995), pp 131-151, and *Finding our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1998), chapter 7; Anne Phillips 1995; Melissa O. Williams, *Voice, Trust and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1998); Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes'," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 61 (1999), pp 628-57.

political marginalization of these groups, and that render representative democracy less legitimate than it could be. Significantly, the idea of group representation appeals to the notion of deliberation and communicative democracy. Young and Mansbridge argue that by including members of subordinate groups in a reflective, deliberative, democratic body, the horizons of understanding among *all* groups will be broadened, thereby avoiding the potential pitfalls of group ghettoization and essentialism. Williams also makes deliberation key to her arguments for group representation, pointing out that the simple presence of minority groups will not have an impact within majoritarian decision-making: “the only hope that marginalized-group presence will have a lasting effect on policy outcomes is that decisions are based not only on the counting of votes but also on the sharing of reasons.”¹¹ These theorists reject the principle that the legislature should exactly mirror the general population, as this would lead to an unworkable proliferation of group representation and undermine the process of representative government. In some cases, they suggest criteria for identifying groups that have a valid claim to special representation. Women and ethnic minorities are deemed to meet these criteria, because they have suffered some degree of historic, systematic exclusion from electoral politics.

There are two important weaknesses within this body of theoretical work. First, there is a failure to make necessary distinctions between the implications of descriptive representation for women and ethnic minorities. It is acknowledged that group representation rights for ethnic minorities are more problematic than similar measures for women, because the former may present a greater threat to social cohesion.¹² But there is little systematic attempt to assess these differences beyond examples drawn selectively from a few countries. Second, this literature pays scant attention to the implications of descriptive representation across existing societies, given their particular institutions and political dynamics. This problem of “disconnect” between multicultural theory and empirical realities is challenged by Adrian Favell (writing, in this case, about philosophies of citizenship and immigrant incorporation):

“There is a notorious disconnect between the ideal world of contemporary political philosophy – its happy discourse of rights and justice, or the idealisations of cultural difference and radical democracy – and the actual institutional and technocratic practice of liberal politics.... An explicit connection between liberal reflection and

¹¹ Melissa O. Williams, “The Uneasy Alliance of Group Representation and Deliberative Democracy,” in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (eds.), *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 125.

¹² Anne Phillips, 1995, pp 94-99.

liberal practice is generally missing, a fact which distorts the reality philosophers see through their theory.”¹³

The second body of literature on group representation is largely empirical. Included here are studies of the situation of women or ethnic minorities in elected assemblies of various countries, with a view to understanding how particular institutional structures (including electoral systems and party recruitment and selection practices) contribute to low levels of female and minority representation, and what effects enhanced representation for these groups can have upon policy directions and outcomes. This body of research is particularly diverse, because it looks at the place of different groups in various countries, and because it examines a very broad range of institutional and cultural variables and their effects upon those groups. The problem of women’s representation is the best developed within this literature, and there are number of excellent multi-case studies comparing the contextual factors that limit women’s political representation across countries.¹⁴ In contrast, most of the research on ethnic minority representation addresses the issue in terms of the institutions and dynamics of a single country (a hefty proportion concentrates exclusively on majority districts for Blacks and Latinos in the US), and rarely extends its findings beyond that. There are very few studies that compare ethnic minority representation across countries, or that address the under-representation of different groups within countries.¹⁵ Comparative studies that do exist are largely descriptive and theoretically underdeveloped.¹⁶

¹³ Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 12.

¹⁴ Wilma Rule, “Electoral Systems, Contextual Factors and Women’s Opportunity for Election to Parliament in 23 Democracies,” *Western Political Quarterly* vol. 40 (1987), pp 477-498; Richard E. Matland and Donley T. Studlar, “The Contagion of Women Candidates in Single-Member District and Proportional Representation Electoral Systems: Canada and Norway,” *The Journal of Politics* vol. 58:3 (1996), 707-733; Genvieve Pascaud-Becane, “Participation of Women in Political Life: An Assessment of Developments in National Parliaments, Political Parties, Governments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Five Years after the Fourth World Conference on Women.” (Geneva, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1999); Miki Caul, “Political Parties and the Adoption of Candidate Gender Quotas: A Cross-National Analysis.” *The Journal of Politics* vol. 63:4 (2000), pp 1214-1229.

¹⁵ Wilma Rule and Joseph F. Zimmerman (eds.), *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities* (Westport CT, Greenwood Press, 1994); Susan A. Banducci, Todd Donovan and Jeffrey A. Karp, “Minority representation, empowerment and participation in New Zealand and the United States.” Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Western Political Science Association, Seattle, WA (March 1999); Marian Sawer and Gianni Zappalà, (eds.), *Speaking for the People: Representation in Australian Politics* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2001); Mala Htun, “Toward equal representation in Latin America? Race and gender quotas in Brazil.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, MA (August 2002).

¹⁶ An exception is the comparative work that has been done on the conditions for political participation (but not specifically representation) among different immigrant groups within Europe. This includes work on groups in Denmark by Lise Togeby (“Migrants at the Polls: An Analysis of Immigrant and Refugee Participation in Danish Local Elections,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.25:4 (1999), pp 665-684); in the Netherlands by Meindert Fennema and Jean

Why comparative research on the representation of ethnic minorities should be so underdeveloped requires some explanation. Political opportunities and constraints for women are structured largely by macro-level factors, such as the electoral system, the organization of political parties, and widely held cultural beliefs about the role of women in society. The opportunities and constraints for ethnic minorities are shaped by many of the same macro-level factors, but also by micro-level factors, which play out at the local level. Important micro-level factors include the degree of ethnic concentration in a particular constituency, collective political mobilization within ethnic communities, the existence of ethnic rivalries and other ethnic-related disturbances within the local community; as well as the characteristics of individual candidates and the nature of his or her ties to a given ethnic community. These micro-level factors tend to be more important than macro-level factors in determining the political opportunities for ethnic minority candidates, and studying them requires deep familiarity with not only national but local race politics. Speaking of ethnic minority political representation in the UK, Saggat and Geddes write: “It is the local dynamics of race politics in the UK that are fundamental...because it is at the local level that the complex tapestry of British race politics has been woven.”¹⁷ Micro-level factors are less relevant in determining the opportunities available to female candidates, making it much easier to conduct cross-national research.¹⁸ While there may be some lessons that we can draw from studies of female representation to questions of ethnic representation, these will tend to be based on macro-level factors and will thus remain incomplete.

A separate problem arises in that the theoretical and political conceptualizations of ethnicity and ethnic minority representation often remain rooted in nationally specific contexts, and are difficult to translate meaningfully into other national contexts. A quite concrete manifestation of this problem comes in the question: who counts as an “ethnic minority” in a given country, and how can we compare their numbers (and the number of their representatives) to assess how well they are represented? At one extreme end, there are countries such as Belgium and France that refuse to

Tillie (“Political Participation and Political Trust in Amsterdam: Civic Communities and Ethnic Networks,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.25:4 (1999), pp 703-726); and in Belgium by Dirk Jacobs, Karen Phaet and Marc Swyngedouw (“Social Capital and Political Participation among Ethnic Minority Groups in Brussels: A Test of the Civic Community Argument of Fennema and Tillie,” Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Torino, Italy (March 2002)).

¹⁷ Shamit Saggat and Andrew Geddes, “Negative and Positive Racialization: Re-examining Ethnic Minority Political Representation in the UK,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol.26:1 (2000), p 28.

¹⁸ One micro-level factor that has been examined in the case of women’s representation is the impact on candidate selection of having another female candidate running in a given constituency (Matland & Studlar 1996).

distinguish among citizens and collect no data on ethnicity (only on nationality) for the general population.¹⁹ In other countries, second- and even third-generation citizens of non-European stock are counted as members of the ethnic minority, though a distinction is usually made here between ethnic and *visible* ethnic minorities.²⁰ The categorization of ethnicity differs from country to country, and may include a series of criteria including place of birth, mother tongue, race/ethnic origin, and birth country of parents.²¹

We also need to distinguish between two different kinds of ethnic minorities – territorially concentrated national minorities and more dispersed polyethnic minorities – and consider the nature of their claims to group representation. It is difficult to compare the levels of representation across these groups, because they may demand and achieve representation through very different types of institutions. For example, a national minority may demand representation through federal arrangements and sub-national institutions (e.g., band councils for indigenous groups, or territorial/provincial legislatures for regionally distinct groups) and may actually resist inclusion within the institutions of the nation-state.

Finally, we need to keep in mind that the ethnic minority in any country is itself highly heterogeneous. There may be an over-representation of some groups and an under-representation of others, making broad, cross-national comparison of ethnic minority representation less meaningful. It is, in sum, a relatively easy task to compare the proportion of women elected to office across countries. The Interparliamentary Union has done so for years (IPU 1999), and more recently, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has published a global database comparing quotas for women. Given that women make up roughly 50 percent of the

¹⁹ French officials, for example, categorize the French-born children or grandchildren of Arab-speaking immigrants, as well as Black citizens born in the hexagon or originating from French overseas departments and territories, as simply “French” without any other distinction.

²⁰ This is the approach in most work quantifying ethnic minority representation in Canada. See Jerome Black and Aleem Lakhani, “Ethnoracial Diversity in the House of Commons: An Analysis of Numerical Representation in the 35th Parliament,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 29:1 (1997), pp 1-21; Alain Pelletier, “Politics and Ethnicity: Representation of Ethnic and Visible-Minority Groups in the House of Commons,” in Kathy Megyery (ed.), *Ethno-Cultural Groups and Visible Minorities in Canadian Politics: The Question of Access, Volume 7 of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing*, (Toronto, Dundurn Press, 1991), pp 101-159; Jerome Black, “Ethnoracial minorities in the Canadian House of Commons: The case of the 36th Parliament” *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 32:2 (2000), pp 105-114; Livianna Tossutti and Tom-Pierre Najem, “Minorities and elections in Canada’s fourth party system: macro and micro constraints and opportunities” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* vol.34:1 (2002), pp 84-111.

²¹ While the Canadian census has recently adopted the self-categorization approach, it has been estimated that many citizens of ethnic descent prefer to call themselves “Canadian,” thus producing a significant under-count of ethnic minorities. The U.S. census only recently (in 2000) allowed people to identify themselves in terms of multiple race categories.

population in every country, it is a simple matter to assess the extent to which a legislative body is numerically representative of women. Counting and assessing the political representation of ethnic minorities is a far more challenging task.

One further explanation for the underdevelopment of comparative research on ethnic minority representation may be chronological. In most democracies, the political incorporation and inclusion of women began in the middle of the 20th century, not long after their enfranchisement, as parties began to court them as an increasingly important electoral force. In general, party interest in the votes of ethnic minorities is a newer phenomenon, corresponding with recent changes that have facilitated global migration and the acquisition of citizenship. Of course, movements of peoples across borders have shaped states and societies from time immemorial. What is distinctive in recent years, and important in terms of the increasing political relevance of ethnic minorities, is the global scope of migration and the increased diversity of newcomers, the increasing rate of naturalization of foreigners within many countries, and the political coming-of-age of the second generation (the children of original immigrants, who are automatically citizens). In the case of research on ethnic minority populations and women, the initial focus among political scientists has been on the political emancipation and participation of the group. Once reasonable levels of participation have been achieved, activists and researchers then turn their attentions to the matter of access to elite decision-making structures.

International Mobilization for Enhanced Representation

One of the focus points in the struggle for improved political and human rights for women and ethnic minorities has been organization at the international level. In their book *Activists Beyond Borders*, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink make a case for the increasing importance in international affairs of transnational advocacy networks.²² The term transnational advocacy networks refers to the set of non-state actors working together on an international issue that are bound together by shared values, common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services, who coalesce and operate across national frontiers and whose targets may be international organizations or the policies of particular states. Historical examples of such trans-border alliances include anti-slavery and woman suffrage campaigns. Women have tended to be more successful than ethnic

²² Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1998).

minorities in cross-border mobilization for improved political representation. Women's organizations have been able to mobilize and to achieve a high degree of cross-national cooperation to help them promote their case at home for more representatives in parliament. While there are numerous ethnic and anti-racist organizations working at a local and national level in most countries, they do not appear to be organized across ethnic, national or religious lines.²³ Given the diversity of ethnic minorities across countries, they are less able than women's groups to agree on similar goals and strategies concerning political representation. Within countries, diverse ethnic communities may even be in direct competition over a limited number of legislative seats.

International recommendations concerned with women's representation have been clear and resounding. The principal mechanism advanced in several conventions has been quotas.²⁴ Many individual countries have responded by introducing quota measures for women.²⁵ In contrast, the international recommendations for improved ethnic minority representation have been far vaguer, and this has weakened the potential impact these agreements upon particular states. For example, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities Rights of Minorities (adopted 1992) provides, under Article 2, that "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life," and that "Persons belonging to minorities have the right to participate effectively in decisions on the national and, where appropriate, regional level concerning the minority to which they belong or the regions in which they live, in a manner not incompatible with national legislation." The European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1998) calls under Article 4 for signatory states to undertake to adopt "adequate measures in order to promote, in all areas of economic, social, political and cultural life, full and effective equality between persons belonging to a national minority and those belonging to the majority." As well, the United Nations World Conference Against Racism (held in Durban in 2001) called attention to racial discrimination and the need for adequate representation of ethnic minorities in politics, but failed to

²³ Bashy Quraishy, "Ethnic Minority Experiences of Participation in Democratic Decision Making Processes," lecture at Pesaro, Italy (24 February 2002). Also see Quraishy at http://www.bashy.dk/ethnic_minorities.htm (no date).

²⁴ Quotas to increase the proportion of female representatives have been recommended under the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), under the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and under various regional conventions, including Resolution 855 on Equality Between Men and Women (1986) and Recommendation 1269 on Achieving Real Progress in Women's Rights (1995) adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

²⁵ See the IDEA Global Database on Quotas for Women at www.idea.int/quota/.

advance any clear recommendations on the matter. Given the diversity of ethnic groups across countries, local differences in their level of geographic concentration and degrees of political cohesiveness, and differences in electoral systems, it is impossible to recommend a single measure (like parity, or proportional representation in the case of women) that would have a uniformly positive effect on political representation for all ethnic minorities. Among the mechanisms that could enhance political representation for ethnic minority groups are proportional representation, guaranteed minority seats, reduced thresholds for representation of minority parties, minority legislative vetoes, and administrative, advisory and consultative bodies. But which mechanisms work best often depends on local circumstances and in some contexts, certain measures could even be detrimental to ethnic groups striving for full integration in their country's political system.

Selecting and Electing Female and Minority Candidates

If the possibilities for international mobilization for better political representation of women and ethnic minorities are different, so are the domestic dynamics. At the domestic level, the focus for addressing the under-representation of these groups has been on electoral rules, on the role of political parties in candidate recruitment and selection, and on rules for affirmative action or quotas. The relationship between either of these factors and the representation of women or ethnic minorities is not automatic, but is influenced by many intervening variables. While it is impossible to generalize across national contexts, it is important to note that women and ethnic minorities often fare very differently under similar rules. There is no single approach that is a panacea for the political under-representation of women and ethnic minorities.

Electoral Systems

Electoral systems are commonly categorized into three types. Proportional and semi-proportional systems of representation (PR) work on the basis of multi-member districts and party lists, which may be open or closed, and in which seats are distributed to candidates on a party list based on the proportion of the vote won by that party. Majoritarian systems work on the basis of single-member districts (M-SMD), where one candidate is elected once he or she receives more than 50 percent of the vote. Finally, under mixed systems some representatives to an assembly are elected following majoritarian rules, while others are added using proportional rules.

In general, the PR system is thought to produce more balanced and representative tickets. The candidate selection process under PR is more centralized. Under PR, because of the greater visibility of the whole slate of candidates, there is greater incentive for parties to present a list that *looks* like the voters. In contrast, in majoritarian systems, where candidates are selected for single-member districts, the selection process is often in the hands of the local constituency party, and there is little incentive for each to pick candidates that will produce a balanced ticket at the national level. Nominations under the PR system are also more idea-centred, whereas nominations in single-member constituencies are more candidate-centred. When the focus is no longer on a single candidate, parties are freed to nominate candidates who may fit less closely the stereotyped image of a political leader. Within PR systems, there are a number of electoral variations that can be used to enhance the representation of women and ethnic minorities. One of these is cumulative voting, wherein each voter has as many votes to cast as there are candidates for a position, and may allot all or some of those votes to a single candidate. Another is preference list voting, which allows voters to specify their own order of preference within a party's list of candidate.²⁶ A similar variation, "panachage," allows voters to vote for more than one candidate across party lines. Each of these variations enables women's or ethnic associations to organize electoral support for the candidates who seem best to represent their group interests.

The claim that PR facilitates the entry of women into elected office in established democracies has been confirmed in a series of studies. For example, in their study of stable democracies, Darcy, Welch and Clark conclude that, "on average twice a proportion of women (20.2 percent) are currently elected to list PR systems as compared to SMD (10.2 percent)."²⁷ Based on her study of 23 democracies, Rule suggests that whether elections are run using some form of proportional representation, or using a single-member district system, is the most important predictor of women's levels of political representation.²⁸ We also know that this relationship is contingent on a number of factors, including district magnitude and the number of candidates in each district.

²⁶ For example, municipal elections in Denmark employ preference list voting. Following the 2001 elections in Copenhagen, the Social Democratic Party obtained 16 seats. Two candidates of non-European origin were placed in 16th and 22nd position on the party's list, but scored 7th and 8th respectively in preference voting. Both were elected. Lise Togeby argues that this feature of the Danish local electoral system creates important opportunities for the collective political mobilization of ethnic immigrants. See Togeby (1999).

²⁷ R. Darcy, Susan Welch and Janet Clark, *Women, Elections & Representation*, 2nd Edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), p 142.

²⁸ Wilma Rule (1987).

But, while much is known about the effect of PR on women’s representation, relatively little is known about the circumstances under which PR facilitates the election of ethnic minority candidates. Most assume that PR will work the same way for ethnic minorities as it does for women.²⁹ Yet there are reasons to believe that this is not always the case. Minority groups that are geographically concentrated can do very well under a M-SMD system, especially if their geographic concentration coincides with constituency boundaries. So may groups that organize into parties, or that at least demonstrate cohesive support for a traditional party. Because of its greater focus on candidates, the M-SMD system may also facilitate a “contagion effect” among ethnic minority candidates: if one party selects an ethnic minority candidate in a constituency, other parties feel pressure to name ethnic candidates as well. Again, this effect is limited to constituencies with a dense concentration of ethnic minority voters.³⁰

In the U.S., large multi-member districts involving candidate slates proved to be a significant *obstacle* to the political representation of African-Americans. After the enactment of the 1965 Voting Rights Act ensuring fair registration of Black voters, some southern states found that they now included legislative districts where the majority of the eligible electorate was African-American, though African-Americans remained a (large) minority in the state at large. Fearing that such districts would return Black state legislators, white lawmakers in many southern states deliberately redrew district boundaries and created large multi-member districts. In one Mississippi county for example, lawmakers abandoned the single-member district approach and combined all ten of the county’s house seats into one multi-member district where a 60 percent white majority population ended up electing all ten members.³¹ The creation of so-called “majority-minority districts” provides a means for electing ethnic minorities in a M-SMD system. Initially used to dilute African-American political influence, the creative re-drawing of district boundaries became a key strategy for increasing first Black, and then Latino political representation. Following the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and amendments in 1982, the Supreme Court in its 1988 decision in *Thornburg v. Gingles*, created an impetus for drawing a maximum number of House districts that African-Americans and Latinos could win. Changes to district boundaries following the 1990 census led to a

²⁹ See, for example, Will Kymlicka (1998), p. 105, but also most of the claims about proportional representation made by groups advocating electoral reform.

³⁰ Tossutti & Najem (2002).

³¹ Frank R. Parker, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi after 1965* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

significant increase in the number of Black elected officials nationwide. But the heightened use of race in drawing district boundaries soon became controversial. Social scientists remain divided over whether descriptive representation achieved via racial districting undermines or enhances the substantive representation of African-Americans.³² For example, the packing of minorities into a majority-minority district can cause their votes to be “wasted” in the sense that they could have influenced outcomes in neighbouring white districts. The creation of such districts may also depress voter turnout. In a series of decisions beginning with *Shaw v. Reno* (1993), the Supreme Court has significantly limited states’ ability to redraw districts for the predominant purpose of race. Fashioning such bizarrely shaped districts, the Court has said, presumes that all members of the ethnic minority think and vote alike and share the same political interests, and sends a message that may encourage racial balkanization of the electorate.

The circumstances of residential concentration and strongly cohesive political identity do not apply to women to the extent that they apply to ethnic minorities, making M-SMD systems more uniformly disadvantageous for women’s representation. Women’s organizations interested in increasing the level of female political representation are right to focus on the adoption of PR,³³ while for ethnic minority groups, PR alone (*i.e.*, without preference voting features) may not be sufficient.

Candidate Selection

The candidate recruitment and selection process is a key factor in accounting for the social biases of a representative assembly. Parties face “supply-side” problems in attracting sufficient numbers of female and ethnic minority candidates. But there are also significant “demand-side”

³² See Carol Swain, *Black Faces, Black Interests: The Representation of African Americans in Congress* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1993); L. Marvin Overby and Kenneth Cosgrove, “Unintended Consequences? Racial Redistricting and the Representation of Minority Interests” *Journal of Politics*, vol. 58:2 (1996), pp 540-550; Charles Cameron, David Epstein and Sharyn O’Halloran, “Do Majority-Minority Districts Maximize Substantive Black Representation in Congress?” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 90:4 (1996), pp 794-812; Stephen Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *American in Black and White: One Nation Indivisible* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1997); David Lublin, “Racial Redistricting and African American Representation: A Critique of ‘Do Majority-Minority Districts Maximize Substantive Black Representation in Congress?’” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 93:1 (1999), pp 183-186.

³³ The submission of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women to the Canadian Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (the Lortie Commission), for example, demanded proportional representation and quotas as a means to increasing the political representation of women.

problems in failing to select as candidates qualified women and minorities who do come forward.³⁴ Candidates suffer in particular from “imputed prejudice” wherein the party selectorate argue that the voters are not ready to elect a woman or a minority. Norris and Lovenduski emphasize that the composition of the party selectorate matters a great deal in determining who is elected into parliament:

“In marginal seats, who gets into parliament is determined by voters. But in safe seats with a predictable outcome the selectorate have a *de facto* power to choose the MP.... In choosing candidates the selectorate therefore determines the overall composition of parliament, and ultimately the pool of those eligible for government.”³⁵

Where women or ethnic minorities are absent from the selectorate, parties will continue to nominate mainly white males as political candidates. One of the explanations for the fairly high level of ethnic minority representation in Canada (see Table 1) is that the candidate selection process among the major Canadian parties allows for the participation of resident non-citizens. In addition, the selection process among Canadian parties tends to be highly democratic and responsive to the grass-roots of the party membership. This peculiarity of the candidate selection process among Canadian parties, with candidates chosen by the whole party membership, leads to mass recruitment drives to sign up as many new party members as possible before the candidate selection meetings begin. It has become an increasingly common practice among Canadian parties to recruit ethnic minorities as “instant” party members, a practice facilitated in constituencies with high ethnic concentration, and tightly knit ethnic communities with extensive social networks. This practice can produce a certain degree of manipulation of ethnic minorities by party elites and ethnic power brokers. However, the openness of the candidate selection procedures in Canada arguably allows for significant input from ethnic minorities who are not always willing to be used as pawns by the party establishment.

Another significant structural hurdle facing women and ethnic minorities is the “incumbency factor.” The electoral success of a party is regarded with extreme importance, and there is a strong belief that it is better to field an incumbent with proven electoral appeal than to run an unknown and unproven candidate. Incumbency is always a problem for under-represented groups, however, the extent of incumbency and therefore its effect on the entry of those groups varies from country to

³⁴ Norris and Lovenduski (1995).

³⁵ Norris and Lovenduski (1995), p. 2.

country. Consider the case of France, which allows sitting members of parliament to hold several elected offices simultaneously. Thus, even when a deputy loses his seat in the National Assembly, he usually remains incumbent elsewhere, usually as mayor of his hometown, and often as a regional councillor as well. This “cumul des mandats” is rarely practiced by women or ethnic minorities. And so the party selectorates see them as less desirable candidates, and choose instead (and almost invariably) white, male party stalwarts. For French parties, the advantages of incumbency are so significant that, even when faced with significant financial penalties for non-compliance with the new parity law, parties maintained their normal practice of nominating incumbent men.³⁶

Thus far we have examined two external obstacles – the party selectorate and the incumbency factor – to the selection of women and ethnic minorities as candidates. But for ethnic minorities, there are factors related to the groups themselves that can influence whether parties perceive minorities as viable candidates. Ivor Crewe has suggested four characteristics of ethnic voting behaviour that produce ethnic electoral power, and that therefore tend to produce ethnic candidacies within traditional parties:

- a) the full electoral mobilization of the ethnic minority, *i.e.*, high registration and high turnout;
- b) an ethnic bloc vote, *i.e.*, uniform support for one party, or at least against one party...;
- c) a strategic location of this ethnic vote in marginal constituencies such that it has the potential to deliver seats to one party at the expense of another;
- d) a net effect in terms of seats over the country as a whole that outweighs that of the white anti-ethnic vote.³⁷

In general, an ethnic group must form a substantial enough part of the population to attract attention in terms of the competition among traditional political parties (or to form their own parties). Additionally, the group must express a fairly strong collective identity, such that members will tend to vote as a bloc for a party that appeals to group identity and interests. The geographic location and concentration of a group are important as well: the likelihood of a traditional party selecting an ethnic candidate is greatest where the party believes that such a candidate can deliver new voter support where the party has historically not performed well. Yet parties will also be cautious to avoid being identified exclusively with the interests of ethnic minorities: in order to win

³⁶ See Karen Bird, “The Effects of Gender Parity in Elections: The French Case.” In John Gaffney (ed.), *The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002* (Aldershot, UK, Ashgate, 2003).

³⁷ Ivor Crewe, “Representation and the Ethnic Minorities in Britain,” in Nathan Glazer and Ken Young (eds.), *Ethnic Pluralism and Public Policy* (London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), p. 268.

the election, they need to garner votes not only from the ethnic community but also from the rest of the population. Finally, constituencies that contain a *diversity* of ethnic groups (including competing groups) may yield more ethnic candidates as parties seek to mobilize and capture distinctive portions of the ethnic vote. Thus one party may nominate an Asian muslim, while another nominates an Arab muslim, while still another tries to bridge the cleavage by nominating an ethnic Chinese candidate.³⁸

Ethnic communities that satisfy more of these conditions will tend to be better represented (as candidates and, potentially, as members of parliament). It should be noted that women, as a group, rarely satisfy these conditions. There may be a significant gender gap in voting in many countries,³⁹ but it is quite rare for women to share a strong collective political identity or vote as a bloc, or to have the potential to deliver seats to one party at the expense of another.⁴⁰ In many countries then, and in particular in many cities, there seems to be a more realistic prospect for the accommodation of ethnic minority interests within party structures than for the accommodation of women.

While women are obviously a large group, they do not share a strong collective political identity. By contrast, minority ethnic groups are relatively small, but often demonstrate cohesive and consistent allegiance to particular political parties. Race is a major political cleavage in the US, with African-Americans voting overwhelmingly for the Democratic Party. At approximately 12 percent of the population (but with a much lower turnout overall than whites) they can exert some influence over parties, especially in local areas where they are highly concentrated. A similar pattern applies among Blacks in Britain, who tend to vote overwhelmingly for the Labour Party. That these patterns have persisted despite growing socio-economic differences within these groups suggests that racial identity holds a stronger influence over political outlooks than socio-economic factors. Strong and cohesive party support among ethnic minorities is often the result of a historic link to the party, a

³⁸ Shamit Saggat describes such local contests in *Race and Representation: Electoral Politics and Ethnic Pluralism in Britain* (New York and Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).

³⁹ Women tended historically to vote more conservatively than men and give less support than men to socialist and social democratic parties. In recent years this pattern has reversed, with women's votes swinging leftwards in most countries. See, for example: Pippa Norris, "Mobilising the 'Women's Vote': The Gender-Generation Gap in Voting Behaviour," *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 29:2 (1996), pp. 333-342; Pippa Norris, "Gender Realignment in Comparative Perspective" in Marian Simms, ed., *The Paradox of Parties* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1996); David De Vaus and Ian McAllister, "The changing politics of women: gender and political alignment in 11 nations," *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 17 (1989), pp. 241-269; Steven Stark, "Gap Politics," *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 278:1 (1996), pp. 71-80

⁴⁰ Analysis by Jane Jenson and Mariette Sineau of the strategic approach of the French Socialist Party to female voters suggests that French women may have held some of these advantages in the early 1980s. Jane Jenson and Mariette Sineau, *Mitterrand et les françaises* (Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1995).

link that endures (to a point) even when the party fails to advance the material and political interests of the group.⁴¹

Yet cohesive and durable party identification among an ethnic group can be a double-edged sword. If a party already enjoys unwavering support from the vast majority of voters within an ethnic group, it gains little by promoting candidates from that group. Paradoxically, in these cases, it may be the parties with *weaker* support among ethnic groups who adopt a recruitment strategy to court the ethnic vote. This is the case in France where it is the major center-right party, the Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle, that is presently making the strongest effort to win electoral support among ethnic minority voters – using community liaison strategies, as well as recruiting and appointing ethnic minorities to administrative and government posts.⁴² It also appears to be the case of the Tories in Britain. The Conservative Party has established a Cultural Unit that promises to “act as an advice centre for members of cross-cultural communities who are interested in furthering their knowledge of Conservative politics.” The Party says that increasing the number of Conservative voters among ethnic communities is one of the Unit’s objectives.⁴³ As well, the Tories increased significantly the number of ethnic minority candidates in 1997 over 1992, and the former party leader has stated publicly that the party should have pursued the strategy of short-listing both female and ethnic minority candidates.⁴⁴ But, while right-wing parties may reach out to ethnic minority voters *symbolically*, they are far less likely to introduce any significant minority-friendly changes to their traditional platforms. These observations prompt the hypothesis that ethnic candidacies will be more frequent in countries where ethnic communities are highly mobilized politically, but where no one party can be confident of their on-going support.

In their study of ethnic minority political representation in the U.K., Saggar and Geddes show that very few ethnic minorities have been selected as candidates outside of areas with sizeable minority communities.⁴⁵ They argue that, while pressure for increased political representation and actual increases over time in the number of ethnic minority candidates has been a positive step in

⁴¹ On loyalty of African-Americans to the Republican and then Democratic Party in the U.S., see Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983).

⁴² Jonathan Laurence, “The new French minority politics,” Washington: Brookings Institution, 2002); Nadia Amiri, “Les beurs en ont rêvé, la droite l’a fait,” *Le Monde* (14 May 2002); Didier Hassoux, “Français d’origine étrangère: L’échec de l’intégration citoyenne. Ils se détournent de leur vote traditionnel de gauche,” *L’événement* (7 June 2002), p. 2.

⁴³ See <http://www.conservatives.com/party/culturalunit.cfm>.

⁴⁴ See Saggar and Geddes (2000).

⁴⁵ Saggar and Geddes (2000), pp 25-44.

race-relations, the spatial limitation of these changes and the failure to mainstream the policy and participation concerns of ethnic minorities remains problematic. Ethnic minority voters are not motivated by an exclusively racial agenda, and their political concerns and attitudes are increasingly indistinct from those of majority voters.⁴⁶ Yet parties continue to perceive ethnic minority candidates as good prospects in areas of high minority concentration only, and as unlikely to win many votes elsewhere.

This problem of representative ghettoization is less salient for women than for ethnic minorities. Female candidates neither enjoy the benefits nor suffer the disadvantages of spatial concentration. In some constituencies, an ethnic minority candidate will seem the natural choice to represent the interests of the people; rarely will parties see women in the same way. Conversely, if elected, an ethnic minority representative may find it difficult to establish his or her credibility within the party as anything *other* than the ethnic spokesperson. While women may still be seen as defenders of women's interests, they are not limited to this role.

Quotas and Affirmative Action

Quotas, reserved seats, minority districts and similar statutory mechanisms of affirmative action are another route to enhancing the representation of women and ethnic minorities. Quotas for women have become especially common over the last decade. The IDEA global database on quotas for women lists 45 countries (out of 90) where quotas for female candidates are presently mandated at the national or sub-national level, either by constitutional provision or by national law. And there are many more countries where one or more parties have implemented voluntary quotas for female candidates. But whether or not a country has a quota is *not* a good predictor of the level of women's political representation. The average percentage of seats (lower house) held by women in countries that have a constitutional provision or a law establishing quotas for women in the national legislature, is actually *lower* than the percentage of seats held by women in countries without such a quota law. On average, women hold 15.8% of parliamentary seats in countries with quotas, compared to 16.9% percent of parliamentary seats in countries without quotas.⁴⁷

There are a number of intervening variables that can determine the effectiveness of quotas. In particular, it is important to consider whether there are effective sanctions for non-compliance. The

⁴⁶ Saggat (2000).

⁴⁷ Data drawn from the IDEA Global Database of Quotas for Women: <http://www.idea.int/quota/>.

best approach is to make non-compliant lists or parties ineligible for election. Financial penalties or rewards are less effective and, in particular, they tend to have differential effects depending on the size and resources of a party. This is clearly the case in France, where the financial sanction for non-compliance with the parity law was designed deliberately so that its effect on small parties, with faint hope of winning legislative seats, is greater than its effect on large parties.⁴⁸ In the French case, Duverger's "iron law of oligarchy" is patently evident, as incumbents who voted for the parity law (it was passed almost unanimously by both chambers) did their best to ensure that parity would not result in the loss of their own seats.⁴⁹

Quotas are much less common for ethnic minorities than for women. To my knowledge, only two parties – the NDP in Ontario⁵⁰ and the Labour Party in Wales⁵¹ – have adopted explicit numerical targets for visible ethnic minority candidates. Rather than affect the demand-side of the equation, most of the affirmative action measures adopted by political parties have been intended to expand the supply of ethnic minorities who might seek a candidacy, usually through the establishment of formal or informal liaison structures within ethnic communities.⁵²

The allotment of reserved seats is another means for ensuring parliamentary representation of particular cultural groups. This approach has been taken by several countries, though in all cases the seats are reserved for indigenous and national/territorial minorities. In New Zealand, there are six

⁴⁸ This is because the penalty for non-compliance is a reduction in one portion of the public funding available to parties – that based on the number of votes a party receives in national elections. The other portion – based on the number of seats a party wins – is unaffected by the parity law. Larger parties, assured of winning many legislative seats, are thus less compelled to respect parity. In its first application to legislative elections in 2002, the parity law did increase the number of female candidates among smaller parties, but had little effect on the gender distribution of seats held by the winning parties.

⁴⁹ See Bird (2003).

⁵⁰ The Ontario NDP maintains a target for the nomination of affirmative action candidates (including women, visible minorities, aboriginals, disabled persons, gays, lesbians, Francophones, and youth). The party aims to name affirmative action candidates to 50 percent of the constituencies it contests and specifies that 75 percent of non-incumbent or winnable ridings should have affirmative action candidates. There is no specific target for ethnic minorities within this overall goal. The targets are not mandatory, however riding associations that fail to seek potential candidates among the aforementioned groups must present reasons for this omission to the party's Elections Planning Committee. The party also maintains an "affirmative action fund" that is divided among affirmative action candidates. Ontario NDP Affirmative Action Guidelines (approved by Provincial Council, 9-10 December 1989, and revised February 1998).

⁵¹ The Welsh Labour Party in 2003 voted in an all-member ballot for five Black and ethnic minority prospective candidates. The selected minority candidates were then zipped in among regular candidates in the party's regional lists.

⁵² For example, the Liberal Democrats in Wales have a special task force in place to encourage ethnic minority candidates to apply. The Cultural Unit of the Conservative Party in Britain seeks to promote interest in the Party among ethnic minorities. Also in Britain, the major political parties participate in an MP shadowing scheme as part of a strategy to encourage greater political representation for ethnic minorities.

special seats for Maori representatives (the number is based on the number of Maori voters choosing to enroll on the special Maori roll as opposed to the general electoral roll). In Colombia, two indigenous Senators are elected to the Federal Senate from a special national electorate. In India, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have reserved seats in the lower house of Federal Parliament.⁵³ Communal rolls and special electoral requirements to accommodate the representation of cultural groups based on language or religion have also existed in Lebanon, Belgium, Cyprus and Zimbabwe. Finally, autonomous regions, and local governments responsible for policy advice and opinions on issues of special importance to ethnic or indigenous nations exist in the Philippines, Spain, Nigeria, Greenland, Faroe Islands, Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Indonesia, and proposals for special representation have been made in other countries as well.⁵⁴

All affirmative action measures have distinct drawbacks, and the suitability of a measure varies for different groups. One general problem with establishing a separate electoral roll to fill reserved seats is that the very process may exacerbate differences and mistrust among cultural groups. Within the legislature, it may cause majority representatives to relinquish completely any responsibility for minority interests. Yet reserved seats grant the ethnic groups greater control over the selection of their candidates, whereas quotas allow the majority group to assert control over the selection of the minority candidates.

Comparing Relative Under-representation across Established Democracies

We turn now to examine actual levels of political representation of women and ethnic minorities in a number of countries. Table 1 reports the percentage of seats held by women and visible ethnic minorities, and the representational ratios for both groups, in fourteen established democracies. In general, the table reveals better ratios of representation for women than for ethnic minorities. However, ethnic minorities achieve higher ratios of representation – in some cases even exceeding the relative performance of women – in countries where they comprise at least 9 or 10 percent of the population. Below this threshold, they are probably less able to attract attention in terms of the competition among traditional political parties.

⁵³ under a constitutional amendment passed in 1993, one-third of seats in India's local councils are reserved for women.

⁵⁴ In Canada, the 1992 the final Consensus Report on the Constitution – the Charlottetown Accord – included a proposal for constitutional recognition of Aboriginal Canadians' inherent right of self-government within Canada, and proposed that Aboriginal governments be recognised as one of the three orders of Government. The Accord was rejected by Canadian electors in a referendum in October 1992.

A key factor for ensuring adequate ethnic minority representation is the level of political and social integration of the minorities within a country. Political integration of minorities has proceeded much further in the Netherlands and Canada, for example, than in Germany or France. In the Netherlands, immigrant ethnic minorities have had the right to vote at the local level since 1985. Also citizenship laws in the Netherlands have been more liberal than either Germany or France. The Dutch have a longer tradition of affording both dual citizenship and easier access to citizenship for newcomers. This may be one reason why ethnic minorities have achieved virtually proportionate representation in the Dutch national parliament. In Canada, as discussed above, resident non-citizens do not enjoy voting rights, but they can become party members and participate in the candidate selection process. The less restrictive criteria for party membership and selectors, compared to the criteria for electors (who must be Canadian citizens) is intended so that the parties can serve a role in citizenship training.⁵⁵

Another important factor is the existence of practices of consociational accommodation. Consociational societies have a potential for political incorporation of newcomers, established through the practice of accommodating longstanding national, linguistic or religious minorities. Yet consociational practices do not automatically afford better political opportunities for polyethnic minorities. Switzerland is a consociational polity, but its accommodation and guarantees for fair representation of ethnic minorities is limited to the statutory *national* minorities: the German, French, Italian, and Romansch language groups. Beyond those groups, Switzerland (like France) does not acknowledge the concept of ethnic minorities. The formation of ethnic parties in Switzerland and France is illegal, and the political participation and representation of polyethnic communities is guaranteed only through ordinary law and their adaptation to a majority society. But where nationally or linguistically divided states *do* also acknowledge polyethnic minority groups, as in the Netherlands, Canada and Belgium, it appears that those groups will tend to achieve higher levels of political representation. Not only is there greater public acceptance in such countries that newer minority groups should (like the traditional groups) have representatives in parliament. There may also be competition between the traditional parties for the votes of non-aligned polyethnic minorities. Dirk Jacobs argues that, in Belgium, competition between the Flemish and Francophone

⁵⁵ Daiva K. Stasiulis and Yasmeen Abu-Laban, "The House the Parties Built: (Re)constructing Ethnic Representation in Canadian Politics." In Kathy Megyery (ed.), *Ethno-Cultural Groups and Visible Minorities in Canadian Politics: The Question of Access*, Volume 7 of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto, Dundurn Press, 1991), pp 3-99.

parties over the votes of new citizens has led to greater political mobilization among minority groups, and to the inclusion of more ethnic minority candidates on the lists.⁵⁶ In Canada, and especially in Québec, the Liberal Party has deliberately positioned itself as a multicultural alternative to the nationalist Bloc Québécois and Parti Québécois. The Liberals have made a particular effort to attract ethnic minorities who worry that a sovereign Québec would fail to protect non-French linguistic and cultural rights.⁵⁷

Differences in electoral systems appear to be an important factor accounting for the number of women elected to national legislatures. Proportional representation (practiced in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Switzerland) or a mixed system (used in Germany, New Zealand and Wales) has tended to produce better representation for women. But PR does not necessarily help ethnic minorities, who can be just as well represented under the M-SMD system in Canada and the U.S., as they are under PR in Belgium or Norway.

Variation in levels of representation for women and ethnic minorities is only marginally and indirectly related to affirmative action strategies. In all countries but the U.S., there are (or have been) party quotas for women, and in two of these countries (France and Belgium) there are also national quota laws. Yet there are wide differences in the proportion of seats held by women in those countries. For example, half of the seats in the Welsh Assembly (where there are party quotas) are held by women, compared to only 12 percent in France (where there are party quotas and a national quota law, as well as a constitutional requirement for equality of women and men in elected office). In only two countries (Canada and Wales) are there quotas for ethnic minority candidates, but in both cases these strategies are practiced by minor parties that win few or no legislative seats. Whether affirmative action strategies are effective depends on a number of mediating factors, including electoral rules and whether or not there are strict sanctions for non-compliance.

⁵⁶ Dirk Jacobs, "Multinational and polyethnic politics entwined: Minority representation in the region of Brussels-Capital" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 26:2 (2000), pp. 289-304.

⁵⁷ On ethnic representation within the federal parties in Canada, see Tossutti and Najem (2002). On ethnic representation among parties within Québec, see Carolle Simard, "Ethnic Minority Representation in Montréal," paper presented at the Fourth National Metropolis Conference, Toronto, Canada (March 2002).

Table 1: Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities in Established Democracies

Country (Election year) Quotas for w: women e: ethnic minorities	Women			Visible Ethnic Minorities ^a			
	Number in lower house	% in house	Ratio % house to population ^b	Number in lower house	% in house	% in population ^c	Ratio % house to population
Majoritarian-Single Member District							
<i>Australia</i> (2001) Quotas: w	38/150	25.3%	0.49	1/150	0.7%	6%	0.12
<i>Belgium</i> (1999) Quotas: w	35/150	23.3%	0.45	6/150	4.0%	10%	0.40
<i>Canada</i> (2000) Quotas: w e	62/301	20.6%	0.40	13/301	4.3%	13.4%	0.32
<i>France</i> (2002) Quotas: w	70/577	12.1%	0.23	0/577	0%	8%	0.00
<i>U.K.</i> (2001) Quotas: w	118/659	17.9%	0.34	12/659	1.8%	8.7%	0.21
<i>U.S.A.</i> (2002) Quotas: none	62/440	14.1%	0.27	69/440	15.7%	28.1%	0.56
Mixed System							
<i>Germany</i> (2002) Quotas: w	194/603	32.2%	0.62	5/603	0.8%	8.5%	0.09
<i>New Zealand</i> (1999) Quotas: w	36/120	30.0%	0.58	2/120	1.7%	10.9%	0.16
Proportional Representation							
<i>Denmark</i> (2001) ^d Quotas: none	68/179	38.0%	0.73	2/179	1.1%	5.8%	0.19
<i>Ireland</i> (2002) Quotas: w	22/166	13.3%	0.26	0/166	0	1%	0.00
<i>Netherlands</i> (2003) Quotas: w	57/150	38.0%	0.73	13/150	8.7%	9%	0.96
<i>Norway</i> (2001) Quotas: w	60/165	36.4%	0.70	1/165	0.6%	2.5%	0.24
<i>Portugal</i> (2002) Quotas: w	44/230	19.1%	0.37	0/230	0	1.8%	0.00
<i>Switzerland</i> (1999) Quotas: w	46/200	23.0%	0.44	0/200	0	6.0%	0.00
<i>Wales</i> (2003) Quotas: w e	30/60	50.0%	0.96	0/60	0	2.7%	0.00

^a Does not include aboriginals, or members of dominant linguistic or national minority groups.

^b A ratio of 1.00 indicates that the % of representatives in the lower house is equal to the group's % in the general population. The ratio for women is based on the assumption that women comprise approximately 52% of the population in each country.

^c The percentage of visible ethnic minorities in a country is based on census reports for each country or, where these are not available, on academic reports. Non-visible immigrants (eg., of European descent) are *not* included in these figures. The percentage of *eligible* ethnic minorities in most countries is likely lower than the reported figure, for two reasons. First, the reported figures for ethnic minorities include both citizens and non-citizens. Second, ethnic minority groups tend to be disproportionately young (compared to the majority population) and so include a larger than average number of non-eligible youths.

^d Parties in Denmark previously applied quotas for female candidates. These were abandoned by all parties by 1996.

Finally, the case of the United States requires some explanation. There are a number of factors that explain why the U.S. is one of two countries (along with the Netherlands) where minorities are better represented relative to their numbers in the population than are women. First, ethnic minorities in the U.S. tend to enjoy very high levels of political incorporation. Compared to many European countries, immigrants to the U.S. can become naturalized citizens (and therefore eligible to vote) quite easily. Also, African-Americans and Latinos comprise a vast proportion of the ethnic minority category in the U.S., and while political participation rates tend to be lower within these populations, these groups enjoy full political rights. The minority population in the U.S. is also very large, and politically cohesive, and thus attracts considerable attention among political parties. Finally, the use of racial districting, along with a fairly concentrated spatial distribution of ethnic minorities (especially among African-Americans and Latinos) has produced a much more advantageous opportunity structure for ethnic minorities than for women. Women, by comparison, do especially poorly in the U.S., partly because of the majoritarian-single member district system that is used there, partly because of the absence of quotas, and possibly because of the absence of a credible left-wing party which could trigger competition for women's votes.

These statistics suggest that there are few common explanations for the under-representation of historically marginalized groups. Proportional representation is especially important for women. Quotas and other affirmative action strategies are necessary but insufficient to help women overcome obstacles to recruitment and election. Among ethnic minorities, there are other features that can help them to achieve better levels of political representation. The size of the minority population, the political integration of minorities, the degree of residential concentration, politicization and political cohesiveness among ethnic voters, as well as official practices of multiculturalism, all appear to be factors that contribute to higher levels of political representation for those groups.

Substantive Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities

Chronologically speaking, the first area of investigation into the place of women and ethnic minorities in politics has focussed on the theme of women and minorities as candidates. This research has sought and offered explanations for political under-representation among each group – including the role of political parties as gatekeepers, the rules governing elections, political culture, and lower rates of political participation and willingness to run. As the numbers of women and

ethnic minorities in office has grown, a newer area of research has evolved to look at what happens once under-represented group members get elected – who do they speak for, and what impact can they have upon public policy and the quality of democracy more generally?

It is common to encounter claims that better representation of members of historically marginalized groups will improve the process of representative democracy. Proposals for access and inclusion of women and minorities have thus become a common ingredient in demands for regional political autonomy (in Scotland, Québec and Nunavut, for example). The new Scottish parliament has trumpeted that this kind of inclusiveness is essential to the establishment of “a new kind of politics, rooted in a more open and participatory democracy.”⁵⁸ And theorists who emphasize the role of deliberation in democracy suggest that more diverse representation will provide access to more information, and will promote trust among distinct groups, ultimately enhancing the policy outcomes.⁵⁹

On a similar key, many 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. Probably there is some truth to this. Research has noted that female representatives are less comfortable than men with the Burkean view of the representative as a trustee – that is, a representative who is superior in civic virtue and competence to the average voter, and able to make decisions that reflect the best interests of his constituents irrespective of public sentiment. Women tend to put more stress on adequate consultation and participation, and are more likely to speak of representation in terms of process than in terms of their own judgement.⁶⁰ The explanation, following feminist psychoanalytic theory, is that feminine personality defines itself in relation and connection to other people more than masculine personality does.⁶¹ It may be that these broad differences between the female and male personality lead to a more independent approach among male representatives, and a more consultative approach among female representatives. Or, there may be other explanations for the apparent difference in male and female

⁵⁸ “Politics, Representation and Engagement: Race and Political Parties,” Report of the Commission for Racial Equality in Scotland.

⁵⁹ Jane Mansbridge, “What does a Representative Do? Descriptive Representation in Communicative Settings of Distrust, Uncrystallized Interests and Historically Denigrated Status” in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman (eds.), *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp 99-123.

⁶⁰ Marian Sawer, “Representing trees, acres, voters and non-voters: Conceptions of parliamentary representation in Australia.” In Sawer and Zappalà (2001), pp 36-63.

representative approaches. Perhaps representatives with less experience (this would normally include many female MPs) simply feel more need to consult regularly with constituents.

While there may be some differences in representative style between groups, there are probably larger variations within groups. The argument that women are more consultative than men cannot account for a figure like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, for example. A more nuanced approach is to look at the *conditions* under which women and ethnic minority representatives are nominated and elected, to determine whether they will bring a different representative style to politics, or whether they will be more responsive and accountable to citizens. Descriptive representatives, like any representatives, are political entrepreneurs. In the case of women or ethnic minorities, this means taking advantage of their background and their relationship with their constituency, and making it work for them within the existing structure of political opportunity. Descriptive representatives may find themselves under pressure to represent many different interests simultaneously, which may lead to considerable role conflicts, and necessitate careful strategic choices. Female and minority politicians will adopt a representative strategy that they believe will be popular among their party and their constituents, and thus enhance their likelihood of being elected to office.⁶²

Which strategy of representation a member chooses can depend upon a number of factors. Representatives of more excluded groups may have incentives to mobilize cleavages, even in a conflictive way. Leaders and representatives from some ethnic groups will probably find it effective to mobilize political support along ethnic lines, and to emphasize rather than downplay their ethnicity. More integrated groups, including women, are likely less likely to emphasize their group identity. The degree to which a descriptive representatives seeks to mobilize or neutralize cleavages also depends critically on the position of his or her political party. Women and ethnic minorities within right-wing parties generally find it more difficult to speak for the substantive interests of their groups.

It also matters how many representatives a group has in parliament. If there is only one female representative, she may find that it is strategically advantageous to become “the voice” of

⁶¹ See Nancy Chodorow, “Family structure and feminine personality,” in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds.), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1974).

⁶² See Thomas Saalfeld, “Representation, Integration and Political Entrepreneurship: Institutions and Strategic Options for Ethnic-Minority Elites in Western Europe.” Paper presented at the European Consortium for Political Research, Joint Sessions of Workshops, Turin, Italy (March 2002).

women's interests, and will thus devote more attention to women's interests than might otherwise be the case. A related argument comes from "critical mass theory" which holds that female-friendly policy is unlikely to evolve until women have attained a critical mass in the legislature (perhaps 30 percent) and are able to influence men to support their policies as well. This line of argument suggests that the intensity and exclusivity of group representation will decline as the number of representatives for that group increases.

The nature of representation – *who* does a descriptive representative speak for – will vary depending on the type of mechanism used to enhance the level of group representation. Those who sit in reserved seats, or in majority-minority districts or highly ethnic constituencies, will have been elected more or less exclusively by group members. This gives them more incentive to speak for the interests of that group. In contrast, those elected through quotas will find it necessary to act as representatives of a more general constituency. The quality of representation – how *well* is the group represented by the descriptive representative – can vary as well. A core supposition of theories of descriptive representation is that these special measures will help to incorporate marginalized citizens into the political process,⁶³ the assumption being that citizens will become more engaged in politics once they sense that representatives of their own group are in a position to promote policy responsiveness to their interests. However, a study by Banducci *et al.* suggests that different mechanisms for enhancing group representation can have quite contrasting effects on the level of political participation among citizens, and by implication on the degree of responsiveness and public accountability of descriptive representatives.⁶⁴ The Banducci study compared the effects of the U.S. majority-minority districting method on African-American political attitudes, to the effects of reserved seats on the political attitudes of Maoris in New Zealand. It showed that majority districts in the U.S. *enhance* voter turnout and perceptions of government responsiveness among minorities (and this is especially true among the least educated and politically informed citizens), while separate electorates in New Zealand *depress* turnout and perceptions of responsiveness among minorities. Why this is so is not entirely clear, but one suspects that the achievement of Maori representation through guaranteed seats – since 1867 – may have reduced the incentive to participate in order to enhance minority representation. It may also be that those who self-select onto the Maori electoral roll (as compared to those Maori who self-select onto the general roll, or as compared to

⁶³ See Kymlicka (1995; 1998).

⁶⁴ Banducci, Donovan and Karp (1999).

African-Americans who land more or less accidentally in a majority-minority district) are already more politically disenchanted, and thus less likely to perceive traditional political participation as an effective means for interest representation. There may even be a self-fulfilling prophesy at work here, whereby Maori representatives, elected by a less politically engaged body of constituents, are in turn less likely see the necessity of behaving in an accountable and responsive manner to those citizens.

We still know very little about the effects of the increased presence of women or ethnic minorities upon the deliberative and representative processes, upon configurations of collective identity and interest, or upon policy directions. A key area for future research is thus to examine how particular strategies for group representation affect the nature and quality of representation, and which of these strategies have the greatest potential to translate into policy reform.

A Framework for Future Research

Much of the writing on descriptive representation treats the question of representative fairness for women and minority groups as a largely undifferentiated problem. Legacies of exclusion and discrimination, biased party selection criteria and electoral rules, are assumed to apply in a consistent manner to perpetuate the political marginalization of these groups. This view is mistaken. I have tried to show in this paper that the obstacles to fair political representation for women and ethnic minorities are not alike, nor are the conditions and strategies for enhancing the representation of different groups. So different are their situations that, in some cases, women and ethnic minorities see little use in forming alliances for better representation.⁶⁵

Table 2 summarizes the various factors that appear relevant for enhancing levels of political representation among women and ethnic minorities. It should be clear from this table that little will be gained by considering women and immigrant minorities (not to mention Blacks, indigenous and

⁶⁵ In France, for example, women's organizations lobbying for better gender representation tried to soften resistance to quotas by arguing that these measures should be *only* for women, and not for other groups. Quotas for racial, ethnic, religious, or other "socially constructed" groups, they argued, would be too divisive and arbitrary. Women, on the other hand, make up half of humanity and encompass all other social groups. These arguments were persuasive. The constitutional revision and national law that were eventually passed foreclose the possibility of similar measures to promote ethnic minority representation. See Karen Bird, "Liberté, égalité, fraternité, parité... and diversité? The difficult question of ethnic difference in the French parity debate," *Contemporary French Civilization*, vol. 25:2 (2001), pp 271-292.

national minorities) indistinguishably as groups whose political marginalization can be solved through simple and uniform measures.

The research that has been carried out on descriptive representation has been fragmented. Much of the work is theoretical. While this work has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the concept and need for representational fairness for marginalized groups, it has not been sufficiently attentive to the obstacles facing various groups (or the advantages enjoyed by them) within real political contexts. Empirical studies have helped to articulate some of the macro- and micro-level factors that shape the political opportunity structures of women and ethnic minorities, but too often these studies have failed to draw comparisons across different groups. There is much that a comparative approach can contribute. There is a need for detailed empirical work that pays close attention to different macro-institutional arrangements within countries – including the effects of electoral rules, candidate nomination and selection processes, party competition, and incumbency rates – upon the election of female and ethnic minority representatives. There is also, in the case of ethnic minority research, a need for comparative micro-analysis that attends to the effects of group size, spatial concentration, participation in ethnic associational life, political cohesiveness and mobilization, educational attainment and language skills, and length of residency in host country among ethnic groups. As well, we should examine intra-group dynamics, especially the complex and contingent nature of relationships between minority groups and the majority, as well as relations among different minority groups, to see how these affect levels of minority ethnic representation. More comparative research on the factors that facilitate or obstruct ethnic minority representation in states that are already accommodating long-standing national cleavages would be particularly useful. Furthermore, there is a need for data – especially at the local level where women and minorities have achieved significant levels of representation – that allow us to examine how these individuals approach their role as representatives, and under what conditions changes in the facial composition of assemblies lead to policy decisions more reflective of the needs and interests of previously neglected sections of the community. There is a broad and richly promising line of research here.

Table 2: Summary of Factors Enhancing the Political Representation of Women and Ethnic Minorities

	Women	Ethnic Minorities
Macro-level factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. electoral system (proportional-list) 2. culture of attitudes toward women (including household division of labour, educational attainment levels of girls, role of Catholic church) 3. quotas for women (with sanctions for non-compliance) 4. strength of left-wing parties 5. support of women among party leadership (eg., women's committees within parties) 6. presence of women within parties (especially among party selectorate) 7. centralization of candidate nomination process 8. incumbency factor (higher turnover rates) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. political integration and participation of ethnic minorities (full voting rights) 2. presence of minorities within parties (eg., opening party membership to resident non-citizens) 3. magnitude of ethnic minority population (at least 9 percent) 4. electoral system (proportional-list with preference features) 5. culture of attitudes toward minorities (especially, the existence of state policies of multiculturalism) 6. accommodation of language barriers (eg., preparing electoral information and ballots in non-official languages) 7. party outreach/ethnic liason structures 8. role of ethnic associations (eg., stable lines of communication between ethnic groups and administrative bodies) 9. incumbency factor (high turnover rates)
Micro-level factors	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. contagion effect (other female candidates running in the same riding) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. spatial concentration of ethnic minorities 2. strategic location of ethnic vote in marginal constituencies 3. strong ethnic associational life 4. collective political identity 5. diverse ethnic communities