The Legislative Scholar
The Newsletter of the Legislative Studies Section of the American Political Science Association

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORS

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Research on Race and Ethnicity in Legislative Studies

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In this issue, I’m joined by guest editor Chris Clark, Associate Professor of Political Science at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and author of *Gaining Voice: The Causes and Consequences of Black Representation in the American States* (Oxford University Press, 2019). The Fall 2020 newsletter has two parts. In the first section, we explore research on racial and ethnic politics (REP) as it applies to legislative studies. The second section focuses on the experiences of scholars who work in this area. With so few REP scholars in political science identifying as legislative scholars or maintaining membership in the Legislative Studies Section (LSS), yet so many REP scholars doing important and timely research on legislative politics, our goal is to highlight cutting edge research at the intersection of REP and legislative politics—illuminating and reinforcing connections between the two areas of scholarship. Second, in hearing directly from scholars about their experiences carrying out research at the intersection of REP and legislative studies, we aim to gain insights on when and why some scholars are more (less) likely to identify with the LSS section; to understand the ways that a focus on REP research structures how scholars approach questions in LSS and vice versa; and to hear advice from successful scholars about how to thrive as a REP and LSS scholar. We conclude the newsletter with reviews of three monographs that further exemplify the new and exciting research at the nexus of REP and legislative studies.

It is a critical time to examine the intersection of REP and legislative studies. By 2040, the US is expected to become a majority nonwhite country, and a handful of states have already reached this status. This suggests that, moving forward, more non-whites will serve in legislatures across the country, and at multiple levels of government. Moreover, this increased diversity ought to influence the way in which white legislators behave, given that the composition of a person’s district has been shown to affect a person’s legislative behavior.

Research at the Nexus of LSS and REP

In the first section of the newsletter we turn to research. In doing so, we showcase a range of scholarship that directly engages both questions relevant to minority representation and questions relevant to legislative studies. In reviewing this research, two observations are clear: one, there is already copious research being carried out at the nexus of LSS and REP; and two, these scholars’ creativity, insights, and cutting-edge approaches lay a clear foundation for an exciting stream of future work in this area. It is important to draw explicit attention to work that cuts across these two fields. Even though this work exists, many scholars tackling questions at the confluence of these fields tend to largely identify with and speak to only one of the two fields. And yet, LSS would be much stronger, have a wider reach, and be of greater relevance if more scholars working at this nexus identified with the section.

Much of the foundational research on legislative studies takes a rational choice approach to studying legislatures and institutions. We typically assume that legislators are self-interested utility maximizers who seek chiefly to retain office. Over the last several decades, this simplifying assumption has brought us copious insights regarding the causes and consequences of legislative institutions. With this being said, models adopting this assumption are not perfect predictors of political phenomena. There is ample room to improve our models—perhaps by relaxing or altering assumptions or considering variation in actors’ utility functions. We rarely consider, for instance, how the identities of the individuals who make up these institutions influence their utility function, and instead assume a constant utility function across all groups.

At the same time, much of the research on identity politics tends to be born out of a behaviorist tradition. As a result, REP scholars often focus less on institutions than on individuals. It is critical to consider the racial attitudes of people, how these attitudes are linked to membership in political parties, and the different rates at which racial and ethnic groups participate in political activities, to name a few topics of research. In fact, to assess the health of any democracy, it is imperative to understand how people relate to one another—which is shaped by the racial attitudes of people, among other things—and it is critical to consider whether certain groups face greater obstacles when it comes to engaging in political acts such as voting. That said, an emphasis on behavior often comes at the expense of considering the role race and ethnicity play within (and outside of) institutions.

This, of course, is not to say that research on legislatures never takes identities seriously, or that work on identities never takes institutions seriously. We are aware that there are scholars who have made major strides on this front. And, as a matter of fact, many of the scholars featured in this newsletter have dedicated their careers to scholarship at the nexus of institutions and identities. They stand on the shoulders of pioneering scholars, such as Rodney Hero, Gary Segura, Katherine Tate, and the late Hanes Walton, who paved this path. And yet, the point remains that by and large, institutions are not at the center of research on race and ethnicity, just as race and ethnicity is not at the center of work on in-
stitutions. To this end, this newsletter offers the opportunity for us to take a closer look at the overlap between identity politics and institutions.

The research section of the newsletter consists of eleven essays that cover a variety of topics. Some essays discuss Congress, whereas others focus on state legislatures. Some essays discuss intersectionality, while others do not. Contributions are from scholars across all stages of their careers, ranging from graduate students to full professors—and, a sociologist even makes an appearance.

Kelly Dittmar, Catherine Windiger, and Kira Sanbonmatsu describe how in the book, *A Seat at the Table*, it is shown that the presence of women of color matters for understanding substantive representation. The scholars point to women of color recognizing the diversity present within the communities they represent and being willing to bring their own lived experiences to bear in Congress, especially when it comes to serving on committees. The scholars also argue that, moving forward, studies that take an intersectional approach should factor in the role that party identity plays in understanding the behavior of lawmakers.

LaGina Gause describes how protest by lower resource groups is actually effective, shaping the behavior of reelection-minded lawmakers. Gause argues that because protest is costly for racial and ethnic minorities, it becomes clear to lawmakers that the issue(s) protested is (are) salient to nonwhites. As a result, lawmakers are inclined to address the problem(s) identified by protest. In an ongoing book project, Gause even shows that protest can lead to white Republicans representing minority interests. All told, Gause’s work points to protest as an, albeit costly, act that can exert a positive impact on minority representation in Congress.

Matthew Hayes and Bryce Dietrich explore symbolic politics in the US House, paying particular attention to race. They find black members mention civil rights far more often than their white peers do, although it is worth noting that white members of Congress from districts with larger black populations discuss civil rights more in their speeches than coethnic peers from districts with smaller black populations. Moreover, blacks punish white members of Congress that misuse civil rights symbolism in their speeches, an important finding as it relates to the constituency-legislator relationship.

James Jones considers the experiences of black congressional staff, pointing to their overall underrepresentation in Congress, yet their overrepresentation on the staffs of minority legislators. Jones points to the irony that congressional staff are exempt from laws governing workplace equality, as these very laws are the creation of Congress. Moreover, Jones points to the lack of black staff in Congress mattering not only for how policy is made within Congress, but also impacting how political power is exercised outside of Congress, as former congressional staff often go on to work in think tanks and as lobbyists. Jones’ research illuminates the importance of racial inequality within the walls of the very institution tasked with remediying the ill effects of systemic racism nationwide.

Nazita Lajevardi and Liesel Spangler examine the tweets of US House members over multiple years, looking for mentions of Muslims. They find that Democrats mention Muslims more, but that white Republicans are more likely to use a negative tone when referencing Muslims, especially after 2016. Their work examines an underrepresented and politically marginalized group, pointing to the need for additional scholarship on the representation of Muslim Americans, across levels of government.

Danielle Lemi encourages us to critically examine intra-group diversity when conducting studies on race and legislative politics, in particular examining multiracial legislators. Lemi’s research pushes scholars to recognize that racial identity is far more complex than it is often treated in extant studies. Lemi’s work on black women (co-authored with Nadia Brown) shows inter-generational differences exist among this subset of the population, especially when it comes to how to present one’s self on the campaign trail.

Christian Phillips describes findings from a forthcoming book that examines how Latinos and Asian Americans attain state legislative office. Most importantly, Phillips’ research provides an intersectional approach, and in the process shows that majority-minority districts help men of color more so than women of color. This finding in particular re-shapes how we think about the link between race-based districting and the descriptive representation of marginalized groups. Phillips’ research is critical, shedding light on the need for intersectional research to become the standard in the discipline, as opposed to an approach that only a subset of scholars employ.

Beth Reingold describes findings from a forthcoming Oxford University Press book, *Race, Gender and Political Representation*, which is co-authored with Kerry Haynie and Kirsten Widner. Reingold mentions that when women of color are centered, as called for by intersectionality theory, they emerge as distinct from men of color and white women. In particular, women of color behave differently when it comes to bill sponsorship. The takeaway point is that it is clear that single-axis approaches, which look at race or gender only, are incomplete, failing to reveal the ways in which race and gender simultaneously explain legislator behavior.

Jamil Scott discusses campaign finance, paying particular attention to black women state legislators. Compared to other women, black women rely more on PAC money, yet lag behind women of other races when it comes to total contributions. That said, incumbency advantages black women, making them no different from other women in terms of total contributions. Scott’s research examines a key topic: money. Understanding how black women raise money is critical for gaining insight into one of the key determinants of whether candidates win any office, especially higher-profile offices such as US House member, governor, or US Senator.

Paru Shah, Eric Gonzalez Juenke, and Bernard Fraga discuss an often-overlooked topic: the presence of racial and ethnic minority candidates in state legislative elections. They point to a couple of noteworthy findings. First, there
is more of a supply problem than a demand problem. In other words, it is less about voters in majority-white districts being unwilling to vote for non-white candidates, but more that these candidates are less willing to run in such districts. Moreover, the existence of racial and ethnic minority candidates in races for higher-level offices confers an electoral benefit on similar candidates running down the ballot. Shah, Juenke, and Fraga also describe the Candidates Characteristics Cooperative (C3), a database that provides information on state legislative candidates in 2018; it is publicly available effective August 2020 and is a rich resource that others should take advantage of.

Reflecting on the state of research on Latino representation, Walter Clark Wilson makes the point that scholars need to go beyond traditional approaches to the topic, which typically entail examining the link between Latino representatives and their constituents. Wilson makes a compelling point that, moving forward, interest groups need to play a central role in studies on Latino representation; in the same way that organized interests affect the behavior of legislators more generally, we should expect these entities to shape the behavior of Latino lawmakers. Wilson also highlights an important point: as it now stands, only one party seeks to represent Latino interests as they are usually defined, and that is the Democratic Party. Such asymmetry is not often recognized, in part because unlike African Americans, there are a considerable number of Latino Republicans in Congress.

Experiences of Scholars Studying Work at the Nexus of LSS and REP

Not only does identity influence the study of institutions, but it also influences the experiences of scholars studying institutions. It is no secret that the LSS section of the American Political Science Association (APSA) has been fairly homogenous over the years. The section aims to welcome a broader range of scholars, of course, but there is still more work to be done.

This was most recently made overtly apparent when Molly Roberts (2018) showed the gender breakdown of all APSA sections, and LSS fared among the worst with respect to gender. Although we are not aware of similar data regarding the racial and ethnic composition of APSA sections, we know that scholars of color are underrepresented in the discipline at large. According to the Survey of Earned Doctorates data reported by the National Science Foundation, Black scholars earned 42 out of 753 (3.2%) of Ph.D.s awarded in PS in 2017. Latinos are likewise underrepresented in the discipline.

These patterns are replicated (to a greater or lesser degree) in APSA sections. Although we do not have data on the share of underrepresented minorities in the section, we suspect they may be less well represented in the section than in the discipline. Look around at any LSS business meeting and it becomes readily apparent that people of color are dramatically underrepresented in the room. Moreover, even when considering that whites study REP, it is the case that the study of racial and ethnic politics is itself rare, being seen as a subfield as opposed to central to the study of politics more broadly.

In the Winter 2019 newsletter edited by Laurel Harbridge-Yong and Gisela Sin, we heard from a group of women legislative scholars, in an effort to gain insights into the underrepresentation of women in the LSS section. They told us about their experiences with the section and working in the field. Inspired by former editors Harbridge-Yong and Sin, we hope to advance what they started by hearing from scholars working at the nexus of identity politics and LSS. In hearing from these scholars, we have the opportunity to reflect on the ways that the academy as an institution reproduces the same patterns we observe in political institutions. We can use our scholarship on institutions to learn about ourselves, and to ask about policy prescriptions for becoming a more inclusive section.

In an honest and reflective essay, Nadia Brown chronicles her experiences of being a black woman who studies black women and points to the dearth of research that centers black women elected officials. Although it is not the case that only black women can effectively study black women, Brown’s essay highlights the important perspective that black women bring to bear when studying black women lawmakers. Next, in an interview with Kristen Smole, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman describes her experience as a woman of color studying legislatures. Sinclair-Chapman mentions that though it was initially difficult to find her way as a graduate student, a year on Capitol Hill in the office of Maxine Waters changed the trajectory of her career. Sinclair-Chapman also discusses why she thinks it is important to study minority representation in legislatures, and mentions several questions that scholars can answer by studying the intersection of these two topics. In a related essay, Armesia Stansberry challenges the field to take up the study of Black lawmakers, especially in this time of awakening and racial reckoning, bringing to bear her vast experience on Capitol Hill and her experiences teaching at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Next, Niambi Carter honestly articulates why she considers herself a scholar of racial and ethnic politics (REP) and not a legislative studies scholar, despite conducting research on legislators. She pushes the discipline to make space for and to center the experiences of marginalized groups. Anna Mahoney discusses the benefits and the challenges of conducting community-engaged research, and makes a compelling argument for why more people should take part in research that advances the public good. By engaging in community-engaged research, perhaps scholars are more likely to be compelled to grapple with the ways identity intersects with research on political institutions. Renita Miller describes how her training in REP and LSS has allowed her to thrive as an administrator in the realm of higher educa-
tion, showing that a Ph.D. in political science does not have to circumscribe one’s career choices. In doing so, she explains how findings from LSS and REP research inform her approach to her job.

Book Reviews

The final section of the newsletter is dedicated to book reviews. In this section, Kevin Roach provides a succinct discussion of Losing Power: African Americans and Racial Polarization in Tennessee Politics (University of Georgia Press, 2020), by Sekou Franklin and Ray Block. Franklin and Block’s book sheds light on the ability of blacks to wield power in a rim southern state that has long been known to be more racially liberal than its peers, yet it is also a state where a smaller non-white population circumscribes the ability of blacks to hold elected office at the rate that blacks do in other southern states. Sherelle Roberts-Pierre comments on Walter Clark Wilson’s book, From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation in America (University of Michigan Press, 2017). In this work, Wilson examines the representation of the largest minority group in the country, and in the process highlights the factors that are critical for how well Latino interests are advocated in one of the most visible and powerful legislatures in the country. Lastly, Kristen Wylie reviews Christopher Clark’s book, Gaining Voice: The Causes and Consequences of Black Representation in the American States (Oxford University Press, 2019). In this work, Clark explores the descriptive and substantive representation of blacks in state legislatures, and in the process shows the demographic and institutional factors that structure both components of black representation. Blacks play a pivotal role in politics at all levels of government, in particular in the American South, and this will continue to be the case for decades to come.

Concluding Thoughts

In conclusion, we hope that reading about the newest research at the intersection of LSS and REP will spark new and exciting ideas for LSS and REP scholars alike and will lead to opportunities for scholars in these two subfields to connect. One possibility is that coauthoring relationships are created, with members from both sections coming together to produce new knowledge that is more creative, insightful, and accurate than what would have been produced otherwise. Political Science is increasingly producing research based more on the lab model, and regardless of whether this trend is a fad or a sign of things to come, we are confident that our research will be stronger and answer more interesting questions as more scholars from different perspectives engage with one another’s work. Finally, in hearing directly from scholars about their research and research experience, we hope to better understand the experiences of scholars working in this area so that the LSS section can have useful insights on how to improve the diversity among scholars and scholarship in the section.

Tiffany D. Barnes and Christopher J. Clark

References


Research Contributions

Studying Legislatures at the Intersection of Gender and Race: The View from the 114th Congress

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Whereas the racial or gender background of legislators is commonly used to interrogate the representational relationship, research located at the intersection of the two categories is rare.² Our interviews with women in the U.S. Congress from diverse racial backgrounds reveal (1) the significance for legislative studies of attention to race and gender, and (2) the significance for public policy and American politics broadly of the presence of women of color in legislative office. We were fortunate at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) to have an opportunity to study these relationships with in-person interviews with the vast majority of women serving in the 114th Congress (2015-2017)—research that is reported in the CAWP report, Representation Matters: Women in the U.S. Congress, and our book (by Dittmar, Sanbonmatsu, and Carroll), A Seat at the Table: Congresswomen’s Perspectives on Why their Presence Matters.³ What follows are a few examples from our semistructured interviews that attest to the value of scholarly attention to the ways gender and race simultaneously shape legislators’ experiences, behavior, and influence. With the rise of women of color serving in Congress (currently 47 of the 127 total women, a historic high), legislative scholars would be wise to incorporate intersectional analyses into their research agendas.⁴

²Exceptions include Hawkesworth (2003), Garcia Bedolla et al. (2005), Smooth (2008), and Brown (2014).
³cawp.rutgers.edu/research/impact-women-public-officials.
⁴cawp.rutgers.edu/fact-sheets-women-color.
The women we interviewed were cognizant of the need to unpack the “women of color” category, emphasizing the ways that race and ethnicity contribute to differences in members’ personal and legislative experiences, as well as representational responsibilities. Being present in the institution matters. For example, both Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and Representative Lucy Roybal-Allard (D-CA) reported the impact of being in Congress as it affects their colleagues’ understanding of racial and ethnic categories—observations that reminded us of Jane Mansbridge’s (1999) concept of horizontal deliberation. Women legislators also bring attention to aspects of policy discussions and debates that might otherwise go unaddressed in their absence. Representative Linda Sánchez (D-CA) shared an example of how she intervened in a debate over childcare access and affordability in a Ways and Means Committee hearing. Explaining the myopic view of some privileged white men on the committee, she pointed out the need for them to hear from individuals who have had different life experiences and familial situations. She concluded, “I feel like my role as a woman on the committee is very important because I don’t just speak for myself. I speak for many similarly situated women, and if I were not there that perspective [would be] totally absent from the debate.”

Sánchez’s sense of responsibility to similarly situated women was common among the women—and more specifically, women of color—we interviewed, reflecting the surrogate representation that they offer to those individuals and communities living outside of their district lines. Representative Barbara Lee (D-CA) explained, “I think as a woman and as an African-American, I have a duty and responsibility to, in addition to representing my constituents, to represent who I am as an American and recognize that the barriers in terms of systemic and historical and structural racism and sexism still exist. And so all of my legislative efforts really have that lens, to try to help those barriers.” Lee’s lived experiences navigating, simultaneously, those distinct barriers are both integral to and inseparable from her approach to governing. She told us, “I bring, like other Black women bring and other women of color bring, whatever they went through and the barriers they faced, [and I’m] trying to knock down some of those to make things better for everybody.”

Many congresswomen emphasized the ways in which their personal experiences have shaped their perspectives and priorities as legislators, while also being careful not to assume homogeneity in the experiences and perspectives of women of color. The interrogation of difference among women legislators of different racial backgrounds is necessary for understanding the full range of effects of increasing women’s representation. Women legislators of different racial backgrounds might have somewhat different issue priorities. For example, Representative Robin Kelly (D-IL) noted that immigration is likely to be more salient to Latinas than to Black women in Congress, whereas the reverse may be the case with some housing and economic issues. Even within racial groups, women legislators emphasize the diversity of experience, culture, and perspective. Representative Roybal-Allard (D-CA) challenged any “cookie-cutter” approach to understanding the Latino community, noting that her perspective is distinct as a Mexican-American, while other Latinas in Congress have roots in Puerto Rican or Cuban communities, among others. Intra-group dynamics also reveal gender differences. For example, Representative Brenda Lawrence (D-MI) explained, “The things that we encounter as an African-American woman is different from what an African-American male will encounter, and so . . . when I talk about education of girls, I know what it feels like—the barriers that girls have, and also African-Americans.” Research that analyzes the role of identity in legislative institutions along singular axes risks incomplete and inaccurate conclusions that do not address the interaction of identities in shaping legislative experience and behavior.

At the same time, women in Congress can champion multiple communities simultaneously; nearly all of the women we interviewed seek to represent “women” broadly. Many also talked specifically about their unique perspectives as mothers and caregivers, creating bonds of understanding and policy prioritization across other lines of difference. When asked if they believed women of their racial group have a somewhat different agenda than other women in their party, most women of color responded that they share priorities with other women, but also expand agendas and/or the range of policy discussions. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ) said about Black congresswomen, “I think that we have an expanded agenda. But at the end of the day, it should be to eliminate any barriers of discrimination that precludes someone fulfilling their potential. I think that we recognized that we are dealing with two issues: race and gender. And that we may, we obviously see it from those perspectives.”

Party is too often absent within studies of racial politics because people of color disproportionately give their votes to one party. But we do see hints in our research of how party interacts with race and gender within Congress. For example, Representative Karen Bass (D-CA) noted that race is a more consequential divide within the Democratic party than gender. And while the Democratic women we interviewed, and particularly those in the U.S. House, were dismayed by the extent of partisan polarization combined with their status as the minority party, polarization’s effects seemed especially acute for the women of color we interviewed; women of color in Congress seemed to feel the effects of anti-immigrant attitudes and threats to social welfare and health care spending disproportionately in their communities. The shift in party control of the U.S. House has had a particular impact on the power of congresswomen of color. Since we conducted our interviews in the 114th Congress, the Democrats have regained control over the U.S. House, putting women of color in powerful leadership positions. Two Black women and one Latina are among the six women who currently chair House committees. As Representative

3Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) chairs the Financial Ser-
Barbara Lee (D-CA) pointed out in our interview with her, “We have a lot of women and minority women running the show for Democrats.”

Meanwhile, only three women of color in Congress identified as Republicans at the time of our study—only one of whom agreed to an interview. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) was the first Latina elected to Congress and the only Republican woman of color to ever chair a congressional committee. Yet despite the fact that she ranked tenth in seniority among Republicans, she was no longer serving in a full committee leadership position in the 114th Congress. Unlike Democrats, House Republicans have created a committee leadership selection process that limits the power of seniority, including implementing six-year term limits for committee chairs and ranking members. During her time in Congress, Ros-Lehtinen served four years as ranking member and only two years as chair (2011-2013) of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs before her leadership term expired. In her interview with us, Ros-Lehtinen noted the unique perspectives she brought as both a Cuban-American woman and the representative of a majority-Latino district; she viewed herself, for example, as taking a “more family-oriented” approach to immigration policy and placing greater emphasis on U.S.-Latin America relations than many of her colleagues. That these types of perspectives, stemming from the lived experiences of women of color, are more limited in the Republican Party—both in terms of numbers and institutional power—raises questions about the way party structure, rules, and ideology affect political representation. Research that addresses the simultaneous function and influence of intersecting identities like race, gender, and party in legislative institutions is best suited to answer these questions.

Intersectional research in legislative studies must also grapple with the distinction between institutional presence and power. As decades of research and practice have proven, the effects of increasing the numbers of women in legislatures depend on the power those women have to alter policy agendas and debates, as well as institutional norms and practices. Women of color continue to confront racism and sexism within the institution of Congress as well as from voters and constituents. But they have also been integral in disrupting those institutional power dynamics, telling us that they refuse to tolerate the inequity that has so deeply informed their histories. Beyond assessing the proportional presence of women within parties, racial groups, and Congress overall, legislative studies must consider the variance in women legislators’ individual and institutional power.

Analyzing legislative institutions through the interlocking lenses of gender and race allows us to better interrogate the representational effects of longstanding institutional norms and practices. While our research focused specifically on women, it also offers frameworks for understanding the gendered and racialized realities that have long advantaged white men in U.S. legislatures. Far from being neutral spaces of deliberation and policymaking, U.S. legislatures are raced-gendered institutions that women of color are both learning to navigate and working to change. We call on scholars to continue to build on our research by delving deeper into the myriad ways intersecting identities shape the individual and collective priorities, perspectives, and policy outcomes of legislators.

References


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References


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Inequalities in representation persistently disadvantage racial and ethnic minorities. But this disadvantage is not absolute. My research proposes a context in which legislative behavior favors minority groups. In “Revealing Issue Salience via Costly Protest: How Legislative Behavior following Protest Advantages Low-Resource Groups” (forthcoming, British Journal of Political Science), I demonstrate that protest characterizes an exceptional circumstance in which reelection-minded legislators are motivated to represent low-resourced groups more often than their higher resourced counterparts. While the argument applies to a wide range of protesters’ resource disparities, I focus here on the parts of the argument that assist in understanding the representation of racial and ethnic minority groups.

Protest is an opportunity for aggrieved populations to express their concerns. It is especially valuable for politically marginalized groups who do not find traditional, institutional channels responsive to their needs. While a growing literature finds that protest is effective in influencing legislative behavior (Gillion 2013; Wouters and Walgrave 2017), my work demonstrates that who is protesting matters for whether legislators support protesters’ preferences. Indeed, I find that legislative behavior following protest advantages the groups with the most to gain from representation. Why might this be the case when the interests of racial and ethnic minorities are generally underrepresented in U.S. legislatures?

Reelection-minded legislators worry that citizens with salient concerns will punish them during the next election for their (in)action regarding their salient preferences. While public opinion polls and elections can inform legislators about the direction of their constituents’ preferences, these tools are insufficient in conveying the intensity of those preferences. Protest is remarkable. It can inform legislators when issues are salient even when protesters do not focus their efforts on legislators. For example, employment strikes for increased wages may not directly target legislators, but they can communicate to legislators the salience of minimum wage increases for their constituents at the time of the protest. Nevertheless, legislators’ ability to discern issue salience from protest varies with the protesting group. Some groups can protest regardless of issue salience because their protest costs are sufficiently low. Others can protest only when they have high issue salience because their protest costs are relatively high (Banks, White, and McKenzie 2018; Klandermans 1984). In general, White protesters are among the former, while protesters from a racial and ethnic minority group are among the latter group.

For racial and ethnic minorities, protest is exceptionally costly. They tend to pursue representation on issues that challenge the status quo, like equal employment opportunities, criminal justice reforms, or anti-discrimination policies. Protest by racial and ethnic minorities is also more likely to be discouraged than protest by White groups. For example, public support for protest issues decreases with the presence of a foreign flag (Wright and Citrin 2011). It is also the case that demonstrations of White anger are encouraged, while Black anger is dissuaded or delegitimized (Phoenix 2019). Furthermore, Black protest is more likely than White protest to encounter police presence and arrests (Davenport, Soule, and Armstrong 2011).

Consequently, racial and ethnic minorities must be motivated by salient issue preferences, and they must have an intense desire for representation to overcome the protest costs that are unique to their social and political marginalization. On the other hand, protest by White groups is possible even if issue salience is low because their protest costs are relatively low. Reelection-minded legislators are, therefore, more likely to legislatively support interests communicated during protest by racial and ethnic minorities than by White groups because it provides a more credible signal of issue salience than White protest.

This argument emerges from a formal theory. I empirically evaluate it using the roll call votes of members of the U.S. House of Representatives in the 102nd through 104th Congresses and data on protests reported in the New York Times from 1991 through 1995. The empirical findings confirm that legislative behavior after protest supports racial and ethnic minorities’ interests more often than the those of White protesters.

**Book project**

I expand on this argument in my book, tentatively titled The Advantage of Disadvantage: Costly Protest and Legislative Behavior. As in the article, the book explores a variety of protestor resource disparities, but, again, I focus here on what the book reveals about minority representation.

In the article, I focus on the difference in the probability of legislative support for non-White protesters compared to their White counterparts. While protest by Black, Latino, Asian American, and other racial and ethnic minority groups is on average more costly than protest by White groups, the circumstances defining their protest costs differ. Consequently, in the book manuscript, I theoretically and empirically disaggregate racial and ethnic minority groups to ascertain legislative behavior following protest.

Even when evaluating racial and ethnic minority groups separately, legislators remain more likely to legislatively support the interests of Black, Latino, and Asian American protesters than White protesters. This suggests that no one racial or ethnic minority group is driving the relative legislative advantage associated with racial and ethnic minority protesting groups on protest-related legislation.

After establishing the pervasiveness of minority representation following protest, the book explores the role of de-
scriptive representation in improving the representation of racial and ethnic minorities. Indeed, one reason for the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities is a lack of descriptive representation in Congress. Constituents are more likely to be represented by legislators who share their race or ethnicity, but there are fewer racial and ethnic minorities in Congress than in the general population. However, the book demonstrates that the strategic representation of protesters’ interests is different. The empirical findings suggest that both Black and White Democrats are motivated to legislatively support the interests of Black protesters more often than White protesters. And while the coefficient size is smaller than for Democrats of any race, White Republicans are also more likely to support the interests of Black protesters than White protesters.

Next, the book engages an original dataset of protests reported in newspapers in 2012 from 20 major U.S. cities to understand how digital technologies might complicate the ability of legislators to discern the salient interests of their constituents revealed during protest. Since the advent of the Internet, protests have increasingly shifted from marching in the streets and picketing before storefronts to signing online petitions and sharing hashtags on social media pages. Digital technologies also facilitate the ability to attend in-person protests, like when websites share information about when and where protests will occur or provide spaces for people to discuss their grievances and preferences.

Still, even with digital technologies, protest is more costly for racial and ethnic minorities than White groups. Racial and ethnic minorities have relatively less access to the Internet, which impedes their ability to benefit from the reduced costs to participation that come with digital technologies. And, whether it be in physical or virtual spaces, racial and ethnic minorities continue to encounter efforts to delegitimize and criminalize their protest.

Accordingly, the book demonstrates that legislators still find the costly protest of racial and ethnic minorities informative and that costly protest demands representation, particularly when compared to relatively less costly protest by White groups. After both offline and online protest, legislators are more likely to vote in support of the interests of Black protesters than White protesters. They are also more likely to support the interests of offline protests by Latinos than by White protesters.

Discussion

As a whole, my research suggests that legislators are likely to support protest by racial and ethnic minorities more often than protest by White groups. But this strategic support is secondary to legislative behaviors that contribute to the underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities.

To be sure, many legislators only strategically support protesters’ interests on a roll call vote so that they can appear responsive to constituents with salient concerns. They may give some support to protesters’ concerns, but they are unlikely to champion the protesters’ goals beyond strategi-

cally placed roll call votes. There are legislators who are sympathetic supporters of protesters’ efforts. These legislators demonstrate their support for protesters’ concerns in public statements or by introducing and (co)sponsoring legislation, among other activities. They are also likely to vote in support of protesters’ preferences before and long after specific protest events.

While this research highlights the agency of racial and ethnic minorities who participate in protest, it simultaneously underscores the struggles that minorities must endure to receive even marginally improved representation. Indeed, even as racial and ethnic minorities brave costly protest to increase their representation, they remain underrepresented by U.S. legislatures.

References


Race and Symbolic Politics in the U.S. Congress

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The contestation over symbols is a fundamental part of political discourse. On July 22, 1993, Senator Carol Moseley-Braun, the first Black woman Senator in U.S. history, took to the floor of Congress to oppose a Senate amendment that would grant trademark protections to the Confederate battle flag. Denouncing the meaning of the flag as a symbol of racism and chattel slavery, she said, “It is absolutely unacceptable to me and to millions of Americans, black or white, that we would put the imprimatur of the United States Senate on a symbol of this kind of idea.” There is similar contestation over the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. For example, White House counselor Kellyanne Conway referenced Dr. King in defending President Trump from impeachment by saying, “I don’t think it was within Dr. King’s vision to have Americans dragged through a process where the president is not going to be removed from office. . . . And I think that anybody who cares about ‘and justice for all’ on today or any day of the year will appreciate the fact that the president now will have a full-throttle defense on the facts, and everybody should have that.” By invoking the memory of Dr. King, Conway was attempting to make a symbolic appeal to the principles of justice that were central to the Civil Rights Movement.

As these examples make clear, politics is often symbolic. Yet, scant attention has been paid to the ways legislators use symbols to engage with and represent their constituents. This oversight is particularly problematic when thinking about the representation of racial and ethnic minorities in general, and African Americans in particular. Because African Americans are both a numeric minority and historically underrepresented in government, achieving significant substantive progress in the form of new bills and laws can often be extremely challenging without sympathetic white allies. As a result, alternative forms of politics, from symbolic politics to protest, are often used to make progress on racial issues when traditional legislative avenues remain shut. In our view, understanding Black political representation requires us to investigate the important role played by symbolic politics, especially on issues closely tied to race.

Our ongoing research contributes to this understanding by providing the most comprehensive analysis conducted to date of race and symbolic rhetoric in the U.S. Congress. We first collected every floor speech on the floor of the House of Representatives from 1996 to 2014, nearly 800,000 speeches in total. To examine symbolic politics in the domain of racial issues, we focus on speeches that mentioned civil rights. Although this is by no means an exhaustive collection of speeches in Congress on racial issues, the issue of civil rights remains central to most African American voters and legislators, and legislation on this issue is often used as a proxy for attention to racial issues by legislative scholars.

To identify the use of symbolic rhetoric in these speeches, research assistants hand-coded the 5,545 speeches that mentioned civil rights for symbolic content. We identified every instance in which symbols of the Civil Rights Movement were invoked. These included references to important civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or Medgar Evers; prominent civil rights actions, including the March on Washington or Selma; and historical injustices like Jim Crow or lynching.

With a focus on these symbols of the struggle for African Americans’ civil rights, we find that speeches invoking symbolism play an important role in members of Congress’s behavior. Across the nearly 800,000 floor speeches in our data, we find striking racial differences in how often, and how, members of Congress talk about the issue of civil rights. Our data show that Black representatives mention civil rights in about one out of 35 of their speeches. Although this may appear rare, that is nearly 16 times the rate at which white members of Congress mention civil rights (less than one in 500 speeches).

Importantly, in addition to discussing civil rights more frequently, African Americans in Congress also discuss civil rights in different ways. We find that Black MCs are significantly more likely than white MCs to invoke symbols of the Civil Rights Movement. When discussing civil rights, Black representatives invoke symbolism in about one out of every four speeches that directly mentions civil rights, compared to about one out of every eight civil rights speeches for white members of Congress. It is worth noting, however, that our findings also suggest that white MCs are responsive to district characteristics: White MCs who represent districts with a higher percentage of Black residents are not only substantially more likely to give speeches about civil rights, but also more likely to invoke symbolism when they do so.

Not only do Black and white lawmakers invoke symbols differently, but this rhetoric matters to Black voters. In 2017, we fielded a survey to 500 white and 500 Black respondents drawn from a Qualtrics panel that included a survey experiment asking respondents to evaluate a representative on the basis of his floor speech. Respondents read the text of a floor speech, and viewed an accompanying image of the purported speaker. Respondents were randomly assigned to read one of four speeches. The speeches were either about civil rights or renewable energy, and differed in whether we edited the speech to remove symbolic references to the Civil Rights Movement. We also selected accompanying images of either a white or a Black representative.

We found that these differences mattered, but only for Black respondents, and primarily when evaluating white representatives. We found no statistically significant differ-
ences in Black respondents’ evaluations of a Black representative when speaking about civil rights versus renewable energy, nor when invoking civil rights symbolism or not. But for white representatives, the choice to invoke symbolism matters. Black respondents, on average, provided the most favorable evaluations of white representatives when they gave a speech on civil rights that invoked symbols of the Civil Rights Movement. When those same symbols were used outside the domain of civil rights, however, white representatives receive a significant punishment. That is, Black respondents were significantly more negative in their evaluations of white representatives who (mis-)used civil rights symbolism to advance renewable energy than in any other experimental condition.

What does this tell us about contemporary politics? We believe that our research shows that, while most voters might care first about substance, symbolic politics still matters. When White House counselor Kellyanne Conway invoked the legacy of Dr. King, to call for President Trump’s impeachment acquittal in the Senate, she was attempting to contest the meaning of political symbols. Our evidence suggests that not only will such appeals fall on deaf ears in the Black community, but they may further erode evaluations of those who misappropriate important symbols of the struggle.

Racism and Inequality in Congress

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Typically, we look at lawmakers and the laws they pass to understand race and racism in the Capitol. This expansive literature has provided invaluable insight into how lawmakers’ racial identities shape representation and deliberation (Grose 2011; Fenno 2003; Mintu 2011), social interactions and the formation of informal groups among lawmakers (Tyson 2016; Hawkesworth 2003), and the creation of public policy. In all, these works have an outward look that investigates how lawmakers use their power to shape the racial world outside of Capitol Hill. However, in my research, I study congressional staff to understand how racism unfolds within the halls of the Capitol. My current book project, The Last Plantation, investigates racial inequality in the congressional workplace by analyzing the career experiences of Black congressional staffers. The title draws on the fact that members of Congress and their staff have applied this telling nickname to the legislature in order to highlight how the institution is exempt from the very policies and principles it is tasked to create and implement (including federal workplace laws).

Congressional staff are known as the invisible force in American lawmaking (Fox and Hammond 1977). They provide critical advice, guidance, and analysis to members of Congress, and without them, much legislative work could not be done. The invisibility of congressional staff also hides deep-seated inequality within the congressional workplace. White staffers are overrepresented in top staff positions in the House (Scott et al. 2018) and Senate (Jones 2015) and even dominate entry-level positions like internships (Jones 2020). Moreover, staffers of color primarily work in the offices of the Black, Latino, and Asian lawmakers. Racial stratification and segregation in the congressional workplace (which results in staffers of color missing from top staff positions in the offices of White lawmakers and overwhelmingly concentrated in offices of lawmakers of color) demonstrates a clear and persistent racial hierarchy. These racial dynamics demonstrate how Congress and its workplace is a racialized governing institution.

I use sociological literatures on racism and organizations to explain how racism functions in the congressional workplace. Sociologist Victor Ray (2019) argues that racialized organizations 1) enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups, 2) legitimate the unequal distribution of resources, 3) credential Whiteness, and 4) decouple formal rules from on-the-ground organizational practices. Congress embodies all these criteria as a workplace and governing institution. The implications of this racialized system is the production of legislative inequality, which I term to describe as the unequal distribution of resources and rewards among workers and which influences the creation of public policy and the organization of the American political system. I discuss below how Congress functions as a racialized governing institution and produces inequality on and off Capitol Hill.

First, racial inequality in the congressional workplace enhances the agency of White staffers to participate in areas of policymaking, oversight, and representation and, similarly, constrains the agency of staffers of color to do the same. I interviewed over 75 congressional staffers about their jobs. These data revealed that staffers not only support lawmakers’ political enterprises but help guide their political and policy agendas as well. Senior staff have considerable influence and power, especially in areas where a lawmaker’s agenda is uncrystallized and malleable. Black staffers I interviewed described how they used their position to facilitate inclusive policymaking, to advocate for communities of color in their districts who might be otherwise be overlooked and to incorporate anti-racist policy solutions in lawmaking. In contrast, in interviews with White staffers, they provided race-neutral job descriptions and rarely discussed communities of color or systemic racism. The underrepresentation of Black staffers and other staffers color in top staff positions diminishes inclusive policymaking in the same way that we have come to understand why descriptive representation among elected officials is important.

Second, racial inequality among congressional staff is legitimated by lawmakers practicing the old adage “do as I say and not as I do” in the management of the congressional
workplace. This is most evident in how lawmakers have exempted the congressional workplace from federal workplace law. They have argued that executive branch agencies, which enforce these provisions, would encroach upon legislative prerogatives, constituting a breach in the separation of powers between two co-equal branches of government (Jones 2019). While Congress applied several federal workplace provisions to itself in the 1995 Congressional Accountability Act, it did not mandate the collection of demographic data about their employees (even though it has compelled almost all other employers to collect this information). These data have been extremely important for scholarly research that investigates and documents lingering racial and gender inequality in American workplaces. However, without these data for the congressional workplace, it is difficult to know who works on Capitol Hill, let alone hold Congress accountable for diverse hiring practices.

Last year, I surveyed over a hundred congressional offices about the interns they hired and over a third refused to participate, saying that it was “against office policy” to do so. Congressional offices operate under the assumption that personnel decisions are private and not relevant for public knowledge. However, these types of management decisions are problematic for three key reasons. First, although staffers work for lawmakers, engendering a typical employee-employer relationship, it is more fitting to say that staffers help lawmakers do their jobs. The latter perspective more accurately describes how staffs actively participate in important legislative functions like representation, deliberation, negotiation, and oversight. Second, these jobs are a form of citizenship since lawmakers often prioritize hiring professionals from their districts. Third, legislative jobs are representations of political power since staff have incredible influence over the creation of public policy during and after their congressional employment. To this end, we should consider congressional employment comparable to other types of government employment and similarly ask who obtains these positions and if they are distributed equitably. Lawmakers’ refusal to collect these data and not participate in demographic surveys is problematic and prevents government accountability.

Third, among the more insidious consequences of this racial arrangement stems from the fact that this is an important credential that allows former Hill staffers access to even more influential political and policymaking roles in Washington and beyond. For example, congressional staffers routinely go from Capitol Hill to work in the White House and other executive branch offices, to join the lobbying and consultancy industry on K Street, and to lead think tanks and policy institutes. In addition, congressional employment provides a pipeline to elective office on the local, state, and federal levels. To this end, Whiteness that is cultivated on Capitol Hill is maintained and reproduced throughout the American political system. The recruitment and cultivation of predominantly White political talent in Congress, which then is credentialed and promoted to work in other elite political workplaces, provides compelling evidence for Charles Mills’ (1997) argument that we should conceive of White supremacy as a political system.

Finally, accounting for the ways Congress and its workplace are racialized demonstrates how formal rules are often decoupled from on-the-ground practices. We can see this most clearly in how congressional staffers are hired. Formal rules require congressional offices to post official job announcements for vacancies and forbid racial and gender discrimination. However, the actual hiring process is quite different. Members of Congress aim to hire someone that they can trust and often this means a job candidate must have a proven work record or someone who can vouch for them. While senior staffers are required to post job announcements, real hiring is done through social networks. For instance, it is more likely that these staffers have shared the job announcements with their close associates and established a small pool of competitive applicants before the announcement is made public. What happens as a result is that this insular process facilitates opportunity hoarding for the dominant group in the congressional workplace, White workers, and shuts out racial minorities from meaningful opportunities simply for not knowing the right set of people. Hiring is just one example of racialized decoupling and is likely more pervasive influencing the daily work experiences and careers of staff. More broadly, Hawkesworth (2003) has shown that racialized decoupling affects the careers and daily experiences of members of Congress, too.

Amid a moment of racial reckoning, it is important to study the inner workings of Congress as a racialized governing institution. There is considerable attention on how Congress will respond to unprecedented protests against police brutality and systemic racism. However, there has been little focus on racial inequality within Congress itself and the far-reaching consequences of segregation and stratification among congressional staff. In this moment, legislative scholars can play a pivotal role holding Congress and other legislatures accountable for legislative inequality.

**References**


There is growing concern about the status of Muslims in the United States today. Anti-Muslim attitudes are pervasive (Kalkan, Layman, and Uslaner 2009; Oskooii, Dana, and Barreto 2019; Panagopoulos 2006; Williamson 2019), and matter for shaping candidate (e.g., Kalkan, Layman, and Green 2018; Lajevardi and Abrajano 2019) and policy support (e.g., Dunwoody and McFarland 2018; Lajevardi and Oskooii 2018). The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that both anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate groups have soared in response to the 2016 presidential campaign; in 2017, anti-Muslim hate groups grew for the third straight year to 114 chapters, and hate crimes increased by at least 19% from the previous year.10

Even more troubling for the prospect of Muslim American inclusion is evidence of large-scale negative and explicit rhetoric about Muslims espoused by political elites, indicating perhaps that Muslim political representation is greatly lagging. For example, scholarship has linked the xenophobic rhetoric spewed by the most powerful officeholder in the country—President Trump—with increased anti-Muslim hate crimes across the country (Müller and Schwarz 2018). The 2016 presidential campaign saw politicians on both sides of the aisle frequently remind the public that Muslims intrinsically differ from other Americans. Republicans called for the wholesale policing of Muslim neighborhoods, advocated for a ban on Muslims entering the country, proposed a national database of all Muslims in the U.S., and espoused the wholesale surveillance of mosques (Lajevardi 2020), while Hillary Clinton characterized Muslims’ utility as lying in their ability to prevent terrorist attacks (Lajevardi 2020).11

In this heightened climate of hostility, Muslims perceive a great deal of societal and institutional discrimination (Dana et al. 2019; Gillum 2018; Lajevardi et al. 2020; Oskooii 2016), and have even retreated from visible spaces in response to heightened discrimination (Hobbs and Lajevardi 2019). Notwithstanding their seemingly worsening status, Muslims have remained a relevant group in American politics. American Muslims regularly vote, with more than one million registered to do so. In addition, scholarship finds that mosque attendance politically mobilizes congregants (Barreto and Dana 2010; Calfano 2018; Calfano and Lajevardi 2019; Chouhoud, Dana, and Barreto 2019; Dana, Wilcox-Archuleta, and Barreto 2017; Dana, Barreto, and Oskooii 2011; Jamal 2005; Ocampo, Dana, and Barreto 2018).

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of political underrepresentation are particularly pronounced when groups that are descriptively underrepresented are ignored as constituents (Costas 2017), and research has shown that constituents value descriptive representation independently of substantive representation (Hayes and Hibbing 2017).

Descriptive Representation

In evaluating the communications between members of Congress and federal agencies, recent scholarship on descriptive representation has found that women, racial and ethnic minorities, and even veterans are more likely to work on behalf of constituents with whom they share similar identities (Lowande, Ritchie and Lauterbach 2019). Nonetheless, empirical research on Muslim American descriptive and substantive representation is quite nascent. Evaluating the effects descriptive representation has on Muslims’ feelings of belonging is made all the more difficult because Muslim candidates and elected officials are scarce and are at times difficult to identify.

In 2007, Keith Ellison (MN-5) was the first Muslim to occupy a seat in the House of Representatives, followed by André Carson (IN-7) in 2008. It was not until 2018 that a wave of political activism saw Muslims rush to vie for political office, with Rashida Tlaib (MI-13) and Ilhan Omar (MN-5) winning congressional office. A record number of Muslims—more than 100—filed to run for political office that year, with many candidates reporting their motivations stemmed from growing anti-Muslim sentiment around the country and Trump’s anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies. Despite these record numbers, Muslim candidates faced tremendous backlash. Examples of Islamophobic attacks candidates endured include: (1) Abdul El-Sayed, who ran for Governor of Michigan, routinely being accused of ties to the Muslim Brotherhood; (2) Kia Hamadanchy, who ran for the CA-45 congressional seat, facing remarks such as “Nice try but your first love is Satan (AKA Allah)”; and (3) Deedra Abboud, who ran for a senatorial seat in Arizona, facing harassment on Facebook and by right-wing extremist groups at campaign events (Pintak 2019).

Despite a dearth of empirical work on the effects of descriptive representation on Muslims’ feeling of belonging and representation, we can hypothesize that descriptive Muslim representatives can make a difference through the symbolic representation they afford, by espousing policies Muslims support, and discussing and defending the rights of Muslim Americans in venues such as their websites, Twitter feeds, and interviews (Lajevardi 2020). Both Omar and Tlaib were sworn into office on the Qur’an, a symbolic moment of representation and belonging for Muslims across this country who reported feeling represented in national politics. Since assuming office, the congresswomen have overtly espoused domestic and foreign policies that Muslims support. They also have even hosted an iftar on Capitol Hill—an historic first.

Scholarly work, however, has begun to evaluate whether Muslim Americans are likely to gain descriptive representation by assessing whether the public is willing to vote for Muslim candidates. Candidate evaluation experiments have been employed to experimentally isolate the causal link between racial bias and vote choice, and have been used to estimate whether racial bias affects evaluations of Black, Latino and Asian American candidates, largely finding that Whites evaluate minority candidates more negatively than White candidates (e.g., McConnaughy et al. 2010; Sigelman et al. 1995; Terkildsen 1993; Visalvanich 2016). This body of work sheds light on the prospects for minority incorporation because the unwillingness of citizens, and especially Whites, to vote for minority candidates not only reveals a great deal about their racial biases, but also impacts the ability of stigmatized groups to gain representation (Lajevardi 2020).

Three published candidate evaluation studies—Braman and Sinno (2009), Kalkan, Layman, and Green (2018), and Lajevardi (2020, Chapter 4)—have tested whether Muslim American candidates can successfully receive electoral support from the public in fictional races and win elections. All three studies, to varying degrees, find differences of support between Muslim and non-Muslim candidates. Braman and Sinno conduct an experimental study on 54 undergraduate students, and find differences in the role that respondents assign Muslim candidates in explaining political action. Kalkan, Layman and Green conduct two candidate evaluation experiments in 2007 and 2010 on the CCES, testing differences in respondents’ ratings of White versus Muslim candidates, with varying racial backgrounds. Lajevardi similarly examines differences in support between White and Muslim candidates, and varies the partisanship and the race of the Muslim candidates. The latter studies also find that anti-Muslim sentiment shapes public support for Muslim candidates with differing racial backgrounds.

Together, then, it appears that at least anecdotally, when they do run, Muslim candidates for elected office and elected representatives appear to descriptively represent the interests of U.S. Muslims. However, the challenge lies in garnering support from the public to vote in Muslim representatives.

Substantive Representation

Given that the prospects for Muslim American descriptive representation are slim, another question remains: do Muslims experience substantive representation from those

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17 https://post-gazette.com/news/politics-nation/2019/01/03/Muslim-women-Illhan-Omar-Rashida-Tlaib-sworn-in-Quran-
18 connect.apsanet.org/s3/
elected officials who do not descriptively represent them? Extant scholarship reveals that elected officials substantively underrepresent minorities along racialized lines (e.g. Hajnal 2009; Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019; Wallace 2014). Scholarship has also begun to assess whether non-Muslims can represent the interests of their Muslim constituents. Here, we highlight three ways in which scholarship has examined the substantive representation of American Muslims: (1) policy alignment through roll-call votes, (2) responsiveness through audit studies, and (3) legislator speech about Muslims.

To our knowledge, only one published study to date has examined the substantive representation of the group through assessing whether roll call votes favor the Muslim community or not. Martin (2009) finds that elected representatives in the 109th Congress were responsive to the presence and size of Muslims in their districts during roll call votes, and voted in line with the community’s preferences on key domestic anti-terrorism votes.

Next, similar to scholarship testing responsiveness to constituents from other marginalized groups (e.g. Butler and Broockman 2011; Einstein and Glick 2017; White, Nathan, and Faller 2015), audit studies may reveal the extent to which legislators are responsive to Muslims. Lajevardi (2018), for example, explores the quality of Muslim American representation through two audit studies on state legislators. The first study tests whether recent Muslim college grads can integrate and find work in America's political system, and finds that elected officials across all 50 states are significantly less likely to respond to Muslim Americans compared to Whites, regardless of where that person graduated from college (e.g. Harvard versus a community college) or the legislator’s party identification, suggesting even Democrats cannot be relied upon to assist Muslim constituents. The second study explores whether leaders of Muslim congregations—or imams—have more success than pastors in attaining a meeting for a legislative visit and obtaining an opportunity to advocate on behalf of their communities. The experimental results indicate that efforts by Muslim leaders to gain access to politics are often ignored by legislators, though in instances where they are not ignored, imams are significantly more likely than their Christian counterparts to be offered an opportunity to meet with elected representatives. This rather counterintuitive finding provides some optimism that Muslim community leaders can be afforded opportunities to integrate themselves and their communities into politics, to obtain meaningful representation.

Substantive representation can also be measured by evaluating legislators’ speech. The rise of social media offers an opportunity to not only communicate with their constituents, but to the public more generally. Every day, politicians and their offices make strategic statements on social media to reinforce their brand. When legislators view publicly positioning themselves with or against a racialized group as politically expedient, they will do so. Legislators may make positive statements in an effort to engender trust and signal attentiveness (for further discussion, see Spangler, In Progress). Conversely, legislators may make negative statements about Muslims as a means of positioning themselves in ways that foster the support from voters who harbor anti-Muslim animus.

Given the current electoral and political climate, one might expect that Democratic legislators will find it more politically strategic to reference Muslims more positively than Republican legislators. In this way, Democrats can signal attentiveness and cultural competence to their stakeholders through their positive communications. In doing so, those legislators who speak to issues relating to Muslims offer them a form of representation through recognition and acknowledgement. In the same vein, Republicans may choose to signal attentiveness to their constituents through negative statements about Muslims, as negative tone of messaging has been a substantial feature in discussions around immigration policy for many Republican legislators through their more frequent use of dehumanizing language (e.g., “illegals”) relative to Democrats. One also may expect Republican legislators to exhibit relatively numerous references to Muslims given the centrality of Muslims in the 2016 Republican presidential campaign. Overall, we may expect volume to be higher and sentiment to be more positive when references to Muslims appear in tweets by non-white legislators than white legislators, insofar as non-white legislators may treat Muslim Americans as a group that they broadly represent. Overall, the descriptions of when, how frequently, and with what tone legislators discuss Muslims in the current political climate offers a cursory yet unique view at how legislators seek to represent Muslim Americans.

To descriptively explore these hypotheses, we explore here the volume and sentiment of U.S. House members’ tweets that reference Muslims.\footnote{Data come from Spangler (In Progress).} The data used here is a subset of a larger near-universe corpus of tweets from U.S. House members’ official (non-campaign) handles from 2011-2017. This subset was created by identifying those tweets that explicitly mentioned the terms “muslim” or “Islam.” This produced a corpus of 1,196 tweets spanning the time period. The volume of tweets (as shown in Figure 1) is standardized by dividing the number of tweets by the number of legislators who belong to the same race/party category. This strategy allows for better comparison across legislators in different parties and racial/ethnic groups. The sentiment of a given tweet (as shown in Figure 2) is calculated by creating a sentiment score for each of the three primary sentiment tweet—Hu & Liu, AFINN, and NRC. The sentiment score we display subtracts the number of negative words from the positive words, and then averages across the three sentiment scores calculated for the tweet.

Turning first to the volume of tweets, Figure 1 has certain takeaways. First, the discussion of Muslims increased for Democratic legislators leading up to the 2016 election. This finding is further substantiated by the scholarship that finds Muslims’ media portrayals increased in the news dur-
ing a similar time period (Lajevardi, Forthcoming). Second, Democrats mention Muslims more than Republicans, and this is most apparent after the 2016 election. Third, among Democrats, non-white legislators are more likely to discuss Muslims than white legislators. Non-white Democrats also persist in their discussions for longer than white Democrats. Finally, and perhaps contrary to expectations, white Republicans exhibit relatively consistently low levels of explicit discussion of Muslims.

Figure 1: Volume of Tweets about Muslims/Islam by Legislator Race and Party

Next, we evaluate the sentiment of the discourse when legislators mention Muslims in their tweets by the race and party of the legislator. Figure 2 demonstrates that when white Republicans do explicitly mention Muslims, they do so more with a negative than positive tone. This is particularly the case after the 2016 election, when all of the explicit mentions of Muslims harbored negative tone. Democrats across the board discuss Muslims with a positive tone more often than with a negative tone, apart from during the lead up to the 2016 presidential election. Though, given that legislators across the aisle made disparaging remarks about Muslims during this time (Lajevardi 2020), this is perhaps unsurprising.

Conclusion and Avenues for Future Research

Together, the scholarship so far presents nuanced findings about the prospects of Muslim American political representation today. While descriptive representation is rare and difficult to achieve given the public’s reluctance to elect Muslim candidates, when it does occur, Muslim candidates appear to (at least anecdotally) provide immense descriptive representation and enhance Muslims’ feelings of belonging. Future work should test this hypothesis through observational data and survey experiments. When it comes to substantive representation, Muslims do appear to encounter responsiveness and inclusion from Democratic legislators in certain contexts. Nonetheless, much less is known about whether Muslims’ political preferences—especially with respect to immigration and foreign policy—are substantively represented by their elected officials, and future work would be well served to answer this important and pressing question.

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What is a Descriptive Representative?

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What is a descriptive representative? The study of descriptive representation by race, or the presence of elected officials who reflect descriptive characteristics of their constituents (Pitkin 1967; Mansbridge 1999; Dovi 2002), is a hallmark of American politics research (e.g. Tate 2003; Swain 1993; Canon and Posner 1999; Lublin 1999; Gay 2002; Casellas 2010; Grose 2011; Minta 2011; Butler and Broockman 2011; Minta and Sinclair-Chapman 2013; Rouse 2013; Brown 2014a; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016). Although the literature has tended to treat race as a binary construct and focus on intergroup diversity (e.g. Sen and Wasow 2016; but see Brown 2014b; Bejarano 2013; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016), there are fruitful opportunities to pursue agendas that focus on intragroup diversity and consider the wide variation within racial categories. Examining such diversity serves two purposes: 1) un-essentializes members of group categories (e.g. Haywood 2017; hooks 1991), and 2) more accurately reflects the malleability of “race” (e.g. Sen and Wasow 2016; Masuoka 2017; Davenport 2020).

I argue that in the midst of conversations about electorate diversity, increasing interracial marriage, legislative organizational diversity, and attacks on the relevance of race to policymaking and scholarship, future research on representation must engage this question. Without considering this question in studies of race and legislative politics, our work neglects the hierarchies that exist within racial groups (e.g. Hunter 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2013; Nadal 2019) and sidesteps questions about why those hierarchies exist at all (e.g. Haywood 2017; Tallbear 2013, 31-61; Masuoka and Junn 2013; Omi and Winant 1994). Racial categories and processes are a part of everyday “common sense,” in that you know what race is when you see it (Omi and Winant 1994), and yet racial logics, such as notions of racial purity and race-mixing, actually make little sense (e.g. Spencer 1999; Spickard 1992). I contend that the actual nonsense of race is often flattened in the study of descriptive representation—from theorizing the meaning of descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967), to conceptions of descriptive representatives as unidimensional (Griffin 2014), to the coding of who counts as a descriptive representative (Shah and Davis 2017).

In what follows, I review my interventions in this area by focusing on multiracial legislators, Black women candidates, and Black members of Congress. I show that critically examining intragroup diversity raises questions about...
just what is a descriptive representative, and I invite more research in this area.

Like many scholars of legislative politics, my methodological choices in this area have been influenced by Fenno (1978). I use qualitative and quantitative methods to explore this question among different racial groups. A few years ago, I conducted one-on-one interviews with state legislators in a highly diverse state (Lemi 2018). Using a most-similar-cases design, I sought to compare legislators who were similar in gender, partisan affiliation, and district composition but who differed in racial background—assigned to one race through parentage, or ascribed to at least two races through parentage. My goals were to allow potential choice of racial identity between legislators to vary and to discern whether multiracial legislators were distinct from their monoracial counterparts. I found that multiracial legislators may leverage their racial backgrounds by joining multiple racial caucuses—potentially amassing individual power within the legislature by drawing on their heritage. However, questions surrounding belongingness and loyalty were apparent for multiracial-Black legislators. For example, one lighter-skinned legislator was asked to clarify his race, while people in the Capitol could not comprehend that a legislator with darker skin could be in the Latino Caucus. These questions did not emerge acutely for non-Black multiracial legislators. Although issues of securing support for policy did not occur, this finding suggests that multiracial legislators may at once leverage multiple racial backgrounds to create coalitions, but their relationships within those identity-based caucuses may be tenuous. This research illustrated that despite the popular expectation that the United States will be post-racial as the multiracial population grows, the legacy of the American system of racial stratification via classification remains rigid for Black people, and in this case, Black legislators. Incorporating multiracial legislators into sampling procedures and studies of representation thus reveals consequential intragroup dynamics that would otherwise be missed. What is a descriptive representative if others question one’s group membership based on one’s descriptive characteristics? What is a descriptive representative if some multiracial legislators, particularly those belonging to two non-White categories, can strategically leverage multiple racial caucuses?

While the traditional one-on-one interview yields deep insights into legislators’ thoughts and feelings about representation, such interviews do not allow the researcher to observe the interpersonal conflicts that occur in legislative settings (e.g. Brown 2014; Tyson 2016). Focus groups, by gathering individuals into a small group setting to discuss a topic intensively, permit this observation (Krueger and Casey 2014; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2009). Recently, Nadia E. Brown and I worked with the Texas-based Black Women’s Political Action Committee to conduct a focus group with current, former, and potential candidates for political office—or current and future lawmakers. Our intent was to gather information on the styling choices Black women make on the campaign trail, but we observed organic conversations unfold between Millennial and Boomer participants on how newcomers should best package their candidacies to gain access to political networks (Brown and Lemi, Forthcoming). By using the focus group and exploring heterogeneity among Black women, we observed another layer of intragroup nuance in the study of race and legislative politics that is less considered—inter-generational differences (but see Fenno 2003). What is a descriptive representative if the representatives themselves do not agree upon a single standard for feminized self-presentation standards of descriptive characteristics that communicate identity and racial group membership, such as hairstyles (e.g. Lemi and Brown 2019; Sims, Pirtle, and Johnson-Arnold 2019)?

Despite the emphasis on descriptive characteristics in theories of representation (Mansbridge 1999), few studies have considered how descriptive representatives substantively represent their group differently based on actual descriptive characteristics like skin tone (but see Orey and Zhang 2019; Lemi and Brown 2019; Burge, Wamble, and Cuomo, Forthcoming). In a working paper, Jennifer R. Garcia, Christopher T. Stout, and I examine the relationship between the skin tone of Black members of the 114th Congress and their substantive representation of Black interests through bill introductions and press releases. To measure skin tone, we collected pictures of all members of the 114th Congress and coded their skin tone using a software application based on the Massey and Martin (2003) skin shade scale, and we matched members’ skin tones to face makeup foundation shades by a major cosmetic company. What is a descriptive representative if representatives within descriptive groups look differently and may behave differently based on how they look?

My research shows the complexity of descriptive representation that has been previously masked by a monolithic understanding of racial group membership. Taking this diversity into account encourages us to shift from asking if members of marginalized groups should represent their own along a single dimension (Mansbridge 1999) and who is most preferred to represent their own among multiple dimensions (Dovi 2002) and toward asking what a descriptive representative is when we seriously interrogate the nonsense of racial logics. Future scholarship may move beyond phenotype, multiracial/ethnic status, or gender to examine how other markers of intragroup ethnic-racial membership may matter for the effects of descriptive representation on substantive representation.

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The 2020 U.S. Census is unfolding against a contentious national political backdrop marked by protests seeking racial justice, unstable immigration policies, partisan rancor, and growing distrust in government institutions. Under these conditions, the power and potential long-term effects of upcoming battles over redistricting loom large.

At the same time, within the halls of nearly every American state legislature where these debates will occur, there is scant descriptive evidence that large scale population changes have occurred since the late 1990s. The stagnant character of the race and gender composition of most state legislatures runs counter to widely espoused ideals of political access, and undermines the legitimacy of these bodies as democratic institutions.

Many researchers have asserted that the main shortfalls producing underrepresentation is at the candidacy stage—women and people of color are competitive candidates, but too few throw their hats into the ring (Lawless 2015). However, studies of female and racial minority candidates are often animated by two assumptions that tend to speak past each other. On the one hand, the literature on women in politics often focuses on individual-level reasons why women want to run for office less often than men, including a lack of ambition (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu 2013; Lawless and Fox 2005). On the other hand, race and politics scholars have emphasized the importance of district racial composition, including majority-minority districts, in facilitating minority candidacy and success (Branton 2009; Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004; Juenke 2014). Scholars of Black women and Latinas in politics have long asserted that these types of approaches fail to account for the ways in which race and gender simultaneously shape candidacy (Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016; Smooth 2006; Takash 1993), and
tend to treat women and racial minorities as parallel social groups.

My forthcoming book, *Nowhere to Run: Race, Gender and Immigration in American Elections* (Oxford University Press), advances an intersectional account for why descriptive representation in state legislatures has not kept up with changes in the American population and focuses on members of the two fastest growing racial groups in the United States: Latinas, Latinos, and Asian American women and men. Using an original dataset encompassing every state legislative general election for nearly two decades, as well as new interview and survey data from 42 states, I demonstrate that factors in candidate emergence that political scientists have long treated as exclusively “racial” or “gendered” are, in fact, shaped by race and gender simultaneously. To illustrate, I find that increases in a minority group’s proportion of a district population are much more robustly related to the election of men from that group than women. This has direct bearing on debates over majority minority districts’ (MMDs) utility as a tool for expanding descriptive representation. Prior scholarship and discussions by elites have often hinged on the (often unstated) assumption that the mechanisms driving the increased likelihood of racial descriptive representation are the same for minority women and men (Juenke 2014; Shah 2014). My research suggests that debates around expanding representation must move from reliance on MMDs as a stand-alone measure to discussions of how these types of districts fit into a portfolio of possible mechanisms and institutions that bring the race and gender composition of legislatures closer to that of the women and men that they serve.

By understanding state legislative districts as different types of electoral opportunities, I am able to investigate how these group-level dynamics are integrated with personal decision-making processes for potential candidates. Survey and interview data with Asian American women and men, Latinas, and Latinos reveal that individual-level concerns such as lack of ambition and the impact of public service on close relationships do not fully explain the underrepresentation of women across racial groups on the ballot. Women do not necessarily have lower levels of ambition on average than men, and intimate relationships are highly salient in candidacy decisions among both genders. Among Asian Americans and Latina/os, these issues are a narrow slice of a larger set of social and institutional constraints that push women away from the candidate pipeline, including recognition among political elites of color; a sense of obligation to represent racial, gender, and immigrant communities; and group-level costs of trading in professional success for public life.

*Nowhere to Run* advances a new model for making sense of the political processes driving these results: the intersectional model of electoral opportunity. I argue that state legislative elections are opportunities for descriptive representation that are shaped by two simultaneous processes. At the national level, the distribution of majority white populations across most districts sharply constrains the number of competitive opportunities for non-white women and men to get on the ballot. In majority-white districts, white men and white women thinking about running for office are unfettered by a consideration potential candidates of color must grapple with—appealing to a majority of constituents who do not share their racial backgrounds. There are currently 41 states where more than two-thirds of state legislative districts are majority white. Included among them are 19 states where more than 90 percent of state legislative districts are majority white; this subset alone encompasses close to 40 percent of all state legislative seats in the United States.

At the local level, the scarcity of “minority” seats is a constraint that women and men of color share, but that condition also exacerbates race-gendered processes of “secondary marginalization” (Cohen 1999; Strolovitch 2006) among political elites, as men of color tend to dominate the informal groups and networks that plan and negotiate to maintain or win the one or two “Latino” or “Asian” or “Black” seats in a state or metropolitan area. Secondary marginalization describes processes within communities that are excluded from mainstream politics, whereby the political activities and leadership of members of a dominant subgroup render multiply disadvantaged subgroups politically invisible (Cohen 1999). I show that Latinas and Asian American women often struggle to be recognized as viable candidates by political elites in these networks. As a consequence, their ability to leverage electoral resources that are concomitant with a sizable minority population, and often necessary to make an opportunity realistic, tends to be less robust than that of co-racial men.

These national and local constraints are overlapping and interactive, and result in systemic absences of opportunities for descriptive representation for certain groups, most acutely Latinas and Asian American women. Importantly, the book emphasizes that this dearth of representation opportunities is not occurring in a vacuum; it is driven in part by the abundance of electoral opportunities facing white men in particular, since they make up most of the incumbents and are relatively unrestricted by race in their access to realistic district opportunities.

In a separate project with Paru Shah, we are applying a similarly intersectional approach to a series of analyses of the substantive representation of immigrant communities, by legislators who are members of those groups. As such, we are studying the representation practices of these legislators as processes of immigrant incorporation. While immigrant incorporation has typically been a topic for scholars of mass publics, we contend that using this framework to understand the behavior of elites in legislatures allows a more accurate picture of the race-gendered (Hawkesworth 2003) dynamics and power relationships across and within groups to emerge.

Over the course of 2019, we conducted 44 in-depth interviews with Asian American women and men and Latina and

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Latino state legislators at national gatherings, and assembled a new database of nearly 4 million observations of state legislative bill sponsorship. Our preliminary analyses of these data are that similarities between women and men in these racial groups on topics contained in sponsored bills may be obscuring as much as they reveal. The qualitative data we gathered points to distinctions in legislators’ understandings of the underlying issues driving policy choices, and “race-gendered” (Hawkesworth 2003; Brown 2014; Smooth 2006) inequalities in access to legislative processes.

I mention this second project because across both parts of my scholarship on representation in state legislatures, I find that the women and men who carry out this work are constantly facing a complex mix of questions about their opportunities and limitations. Is there a real chance I can win where I live? Is the legislature a place where a person like me can actually get important, and urgent, things done? Particularly for the Latinas and Asian American women I interviewed, the last question is daunting. Many view themselves as representatives who are embedded in their communities, and who must make the most of the rare opportunity to have someone “in the room” who looks like them and has lived like they have lived.

Against the backdrop of powerful mass political movements over the past few years—immigrant rights actions, Black Lives Matter protests, #MeToo activism, and others—a salient question for scholars of representation is whether women of color who are passionate about these issues will see less reason to try to advance their work through legislative officeholding. As one Latina legislator I interviewed put it, state legislatures “were built for other people,” and have been slow to change.

Perhaps the largest regular opportunity to enact change in legislatures is close at hand—Census-based redistricting. My scholarship makes the case that our understanding of the consequences of these district drawing processes on representation must move beyond single-dimensional identity categories. I propose that we study representation with frameworks centered on simple concepts that are complex in their ramifications for democratic processes—individuals are simultaneously members of more than one social group, and their opportunities for political leadership are shaped by processes and institutions large and small.

References


An Intersectional Approach to Legislative Representation

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Over the past three decades, political science research has uncovered substantial evidence that race and gender influence representation in the United States. Historically, a variety of institutionalized race and gender biases have worked
to not only limit the number of women and minorities running for office, but also channel and confine their opportunities to certain majority-minority or “women-friendly” jurisdictions (Arceneaux 2001; Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1994; Davidson and Grofman 1994; Lublin 1997; Lublin et al. 2009; Palmer and Simon 2012; Preuhs and Juene 2011; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Once in public office, African Americans are more likely than others to focus on interests or issues particularly relevant to African Americans, and Latinx legislators are more likely to do the same on behalf of Latinx interests; similarly, women are generally more likely than men to focus their representational activity on women’s interests or issues (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Canon 1999; Casellas 2011; Griffin and Newman 2008; Grose 2011; Haynie 2001; Minta 2011; Reingold 2000; Osborn 2012; Rouse 2013; Swers 2002, 2013; Thomas 1994; Wilson 2017). Yet, it is still the case that little research has examined whether and how race and gender together, simultaneously influence who our elected officials are (“descriptive representation”) and what they do in office (“substantive representation”) (Pitkin 1967).

When studying race, gender, and representation, political scientists have often assumed that there are no gender differences among minority representatives, and no racial differences among female representatives. More often than not, attention has been paid only to what factors influence the descriptive and substantive representation of women or to what factors influence the descriptive and substantive representation of African Americans and/or Latinxs. Such one-at-a-time, “single-axis” approaches (Crenshaw 1989) to the study of representation are clearly overly simplistic; as Hawksworth (2003) and others implore, we need to think about and study representation as not only raced, and not only gendered, but “raced-gendered” (Brown 2014; Fraga et al. 2008; Hardy-Fanta et al. 2016; Reingold 2008; Smooth 2006, 2011).

In Race, Gender, and Political Representation (forthcoming, Oxford University Press), Kerry Haynie, Kirsten Widner, and I take up that call and examine how and to what extent political representation is simultaneously raced and gendered—in the context of late 20th and early 21st century U.S. state legislatures. Instead of investigating what conditions are ripe for “minority” representation or for “women’s” representation or pondering whether “women” and “minorities” in office are more likely to advocate on behalf of other women and minorities, respectively, we ask: how do gender and race interact to affect the election, behavior, and impact of all individuals—raced women and gendered minorities alike? Addressing this question, we argue, requires a more intersectional approach to the study of legislative representation. Indeed, our analysis demonstrates the power of intersectionality—as a critical research paradigm—for understanding the many complex ways race and gender together shape democratic institutions and the representational opportunities and challenges they present.

What exactly does an intersectional approach like ours entail? Much of the work of intersectionality is accomplished by simply classifying legislators in terms of their race and gender identities, and comparing their election, behavior, and impact in office. Most of our data analysis, for example, examines the presence, behavior, and impact of Black women, Latinas, White women, Black men, Latinos, and White men in state legislatures. But an intersectional approach is much more than that.

First and foremost, our intersectional approach puts women of color at the center of the analysis—precisely because they (and others who stand at the intersections of multiple systems of disadvantage) are the ones whose experiences and accomplishments are most likely neglected and obscured by dominant single-axis approaches. In this way, our analysis often questions whether what we know about “minority” representation or “women’s” representation is reflective only of the dominant categories within—namely men of color and White women. Centering women of color means privileging and building upon what little existing research there is about women of color in politics, especially as candidates and public officials. But an intersectional approach also requires us to critically re-read the single-axis literature in both Race and Ethnic Politics (REP) and Women and Politics (W&P). As we re-read, we look for not only the similarities and differences revealed, but also the intersectional, race-gender implications we can infer. This re-reading provides a wealth of both single-axis and intersectional theories about descriptive and substantive representation to test, but it also prompts us to critically re-examine how we test those theories. Most notably, our intersectional approach to the study of representation looks very closely at issues of measurement, particularly how we define and operationalize key theoretical concepts like group interests. Throughout the design and implementation of our research, intersectionality also compels us to critically evaluate our own analytic categories, checking to see whether the generalizations we make about women/men of color, for example, are valid.

By employing such an intersectional approach, we are able to learn much more about the complexities of race, gender, and representation in state legislatures. Our extensive analysis of bill sponsorship as a form of policy leadership and substantive representation (in Chapters 3 and 4) illustrates our approach to intersectionality and its empirical utility especially well. We begin by re-examining foundational, single-axis conceptions of marginalized group interests and issues that lie at the heart of any analysis of legislative activity on behalf of women and/or minorities. To gauge the links between descriptive and substantive representation, political scientists have employed a variety of definitions of group interests, often distinguishing between more narrowly defined “racial” or “women-specific” issues and broader issues, such as health and education, that are also salient but less explicitly or directly tied to gender, race, or ethnicity alone. To what extent, then, do our definitions of group interests affect who is or appears to be more or less willing to act for African Americans, Latinxs, or women?

Intersectionality cautions against generalizing about rep-
representation across differences in race and gender and suggests that any single-axis conception of marginalized group interests risks concealing or distorting the representational advocacy provided by women of color, while privileging that provided by white women and men of color. The more narrow and single-group specific definitions of women’s/Black/Latinx issues may be particularly problematic, especially compared to broader issue areas like health and education, which are salient to women, African Americans, and Latinxs alike (Smooth 2011).

To test this proposition, we examine the agenda-setting policy leadership (i.e., bill sponsorship) of Democratic (and, to a lesser extent, Republican) state legislators in fifteen state houses, in 1997 and 2005, across a variety of definitions of group issues/interests. We find that, no matter what definition of group interests is at hand, Democratic women of color never appear any less committed to providing substantive representation than anyone else. They sponsor just as many women-specific bills as their white female colleagues, just as many Black- and/or Latinx-specific bills as their minority male colleagues, and more health and education bills than anyone else. Among Democrats and Republicans, women of color are the leading sponsors of health and education bills targeted to address the interests of women or racial/ethnic minorities in particular. Thus, we conclude that relying only on narrowly-defined, group-specific conceptions of policy interests will overlook and underestimate the truly distinct representational leadership of women of color in shaping healthcare and education policy to address the interests of women and people of color.

Next, we look beyond single-axis conceptions of group interests and substantive representation to explore what we call, “race-gender policy leadership.” To what extent and how do representatives address both race and gender in their policymaking initiatives? Who is more or less likely to do so? Recognizing that various group interests (Black, Latinx, women’s) can be (or at least appear to be) distinct, overlapping, or intersecting (Brown and Banks 2014; Minta and Brown 2014), we distinguish and measure multiple approaches to race-gender policy leadership among the same set of Democratic (and Republican) lawmakers serving in 15 U.S. state houses in 1997 and 2005. Specifically, we test hypotheses that legislative women of color are more likely than others (including white women and men of color) to sponsor: (a) both narrowly-targeted, group-specific women interest bills and minority interest bills, one-at-a-time; (b) bills that address multiple group-specific interests simultaneously (e.g., standard anti-discrimination and affirmative action measures); and (c) bills that address the particular interests of disadvantaged subgroups of women and/or minorities, such as poor women of color (Strovlovlitch 2007).

Although our conceptions of race-gender policymaking are fairly inclusive, our data show that relatively few legislators engage in this sort of leadership, even among Democrats. Nonetheless, women of color (in both parties) do play important, leading roles in addressing the policy needs of multiple and multiply disadvantaged groups. Depending on the measure of race-gender policy leadership, either Black women or Latinas stand out from their peers, sponsoring more race-gender legislation than their minority male or white female counterparts. Among Democrats, Latinas stand out as the most likely to sponsor at least one women-specific bill and one Latinx- and/or Black-specific bill. Black women are more likely than any other group of Democrats to sponsor at least one welfare/poverty bill addressing the interests of intersectionally disadvantaged subgroups of women and people of color. Among Republicans, Latinas are the most likely to do the same. The only type of race-gender policy leadership where women of color do not stand out is the sponsorship of bills that address multiple forms of discrimination and inequality simultaneously. Black men are the leading sponsors of such measures (though not by wide margins), almost all of which offer traditional civil rights approaches to remediying discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, race/color, and national origin/ethnicity.

These are but a few of the race-gender similarities and differences evident in the experiences, activities, and accomplishments of the state legislators we study. Yet throughout our analysis of legislative representation, one thing is clear: the continued shortage of elected women of color undermines the effective substantive representation of multiple and multiply disadvantaged groups. Few, if any of these conclusions about race, gender, and representation would have been revealed had we not taken a more intersectional approach to examine a multitude of race-gender similarities and differences among minorities and women, as well as among women and men of color. Without intersectionality we would be bereft of the critical race-gender questions that prompted our research and the race-gender analytic tools with which to address them.

Nonetheless, ours is only one of many “first steps” toward a more intersectional approach to the study of race, gender, and political representation. To claim otherwise, that our work should stand alone or be considered the final word, would undermine the integrity and power of intersectionality as a critical and productive research paradigm (Davis 2008). As scholars and citizens, we must continue to ask and pursue difficult, “messy,” and “unsettling” questions about complex intersections of multiple axes of identity and power as they relate to political representation and our ability to understand it (Smooth 2006; May 2015). Intersectional research must always be (considered) provisional, tentative, and partial—for we can always move toward a more—or different—intersectional approach (Carbado et al. 2013; May 2015, 251; McCall 2005). Race and gender, the central foci of our inquiry, are important, especially given the history of American politics and the study thereof. They are a good starting point. Yet there are undoubtedly multiple layers of intersectional complexity that warrant further investigation.

References

The vast majority of legislators of color in our sample are Democrats.


It’s All About the Money: Understanding How Black Women Fund Their Campaigns

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It is no secret that the cost of elections has continued to increase each election cycle. While we often think about the implications of the cost to run at the congressional level, these effects have also been seen in state level elections. According to the National Institute on Money in Politics, in 2018, state legislative candidates for lower and upper chambers collectively raised over one billion dollars.19 As state legislatures are the pipeline to congressional office (Palmer and Simon 2003), it is important to understand how and to whom the money flows for candidates to fund their campaigns.

While it is important to understand how all state legislative candidates fund their campaigns, I pay particular attention to Black women in my research. Previous work on Black women’s propensity for political engagement would suggest that they are more engaged than we might expect (Farris and Holman 2014; Brown 2014; Smooth 2006) given the ways in which this group has historically been economically and politically disadvantaged. Yet, it is because of these historical economic and political disadvantages that rising campaign costs and the increasing percentage of seats held by Black women make up an interesting puzzle. This is especially the case because there is evidence that campaign finance is a cause for concern among women of color candidates (Sanbonmatsu 2015) and there can be gender disparities in campaign fundraising (Barber et. al 2016).

I address two questions here: where do Black women receive funds and are they advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to other women in total campaign fundraising? Evidence at the congressional level suggests that the presence of non-white candidates in an election can impact who is likely to contribute (Grumbach and Sahn 2020). That is, non-white candidates attract non-white donors. While I do not have the fine-grained detail to account for who is contributing, I can consider how different types of donors contribute to Black women’s campaigns. Using 2012 and 2014 state legislative candidate data and the DIME (Database on Ideology, Money in Politics, and Elections) dataset (Bonica 2016), I match state legislative candidates to their campaign contribution amounts. I also account for state-level factors using the Correlates of State Policy dataset (Jordan and Grossman 2020) in modeling money raised by women candidates across racial groups.

How do Black women’s campaign funding sources compare to other women candidates? The average total contributions to Black women candidates lag behind White, Latina, and Asian American women. However, Black women do surpass Native American women candidates. When it comes

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to receipt of PAC contributions, Black women are only surpassed by Latinas. For both Black women and Latina candidates, PAC contributions account for about 2 times the average individual contribution. Of all women candidates, Asian American women receive the highest average amount from individual donors, while Black women receive the least.

In modeling campaign contributions received by women across racial groups in 2012 and 2014, I focus on the total logged contribution amounts as the dependent variable. The main independent variable in the model is an interaction term that includes the race and incumbency status of the women candidates. I control for a number of factors including candidate ideology, as measured by their campaign finance scores (see Bonica 2014); state legislative chamber; percent female state legislators; state culture; median policy liberalism (Caughey and Warshaw 2016); and a dichotomous indicator for whether the governor is a woman. I also account for the candidate’s party as well as party control of state government. Because my main interest here is how Black women fare in electoral fundraising in comparison to other women, I use Black women as the baseline for the model.

Incumbency has its advantages for women’s total fundraising. Black women incumbents are no different from White women, Latinas, Asian American women, and Native American women incumbents in total contributions. As might be expected, women across most racial groups in open seat elections fare significantly better than challengers in total contributions. However, there are racial differences among women challengers and among women in open seat elections. For instance, Latinas in open seat elections do significantly better in fundraising than Black and White women. Moreover, Black women and Asian American women raise significantly less money than their White female counterparts.

Altogether, when we consider what this means for Black women’s ability to fundraise and their overall campaign viability, they are not at a loss when they already have a seat at the “table.” Incumbency matters for their campaign fundraising prospects. However, they do face an uphill battle in fundraising as challengers and even fundraising for open seat elections. While only descriptive in nature, it is telling that Black women lag behind other groups in average contributions, and it is important to note just how much PAC money appears to matter for Black women’s political prospects. As Black women’s numbers in state legislative seats continue to grow, PACs like Higher Heights that focus on Black women and tried and true groups that fund all women, like Emily’s List, will continue to play a strong role in Black women’s electoral story. But even these groups make choices about who is in a winnable race, and thus can have an impact on who is able to run a competitive campaign.

It is certainly the case that women of color are still predominantly running in majority-minority districts at the state level (see Shah et al. 2019), but we might imagine what the possibilities are for Black women when they are able to think beyond majority-minority districts and state legislative seats more generally. At a time when a Black and South-Asian woman is the Vice Presidential nominee for the Democratic party, we have still never had a Black woman serve in a governor seat and very few Black women serve in leadership of their state legislatures and governments. It is not only clear that money matters, but also that it dictates which women are able to take up the mantle of political leadership.

References


Here Comes Everybody: Using a Data Cooperative to Understand the New Dynamics of Representation

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While women and racial/ethnic minorities remain under-represented in legislatures throughout the United States, the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of candidates in state and federal elections has never been greater. Fifteen years ago, prior to the election of the country’s first Black President, many social scientists and most pundits would have thought today’s more diverse political reality was unlikely. As evidence, they could point to the stunning amount of racial sentiment held by white voters, including Democrats (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Krupnikov and Piston 2015). They could point to the historical rarity of non-white and women officeholders at the local, state, and federal levels (Clark 2019; Lublin 1997). In particular, they would note that even when racial and ethnic minority individuals held office, it was usually in heavily gerrymandered and geographically segregated majority-minority districts (Lublin 1997), resulting in few opportunities for candidates of color to win in majority-white districts. Given all of this evidence, in addition to the Shelby County vs. Holder (2013) decision gutting the 1965 Voting Rights Act, scholars and pundits had every reason to think of Obama’s 2008 victory as an outlier (Kinder and Dale-Riddle 2012), a lucky break (Lewis-Beck, Tien, and Nadeau 2010), and a precursor to an even greater white voter backlash against minority candidates (Hajnal 2006).

Around that same time, researchers realized that much of the work on elections was hampered by a difficult data problem. While scholars of race, ethnicity, and gender representation in the U.S. had some demographic information about officeholders, we knew very little about candidates who lost. Prior to the social media revolution of the late 2000s, collecting biographical information about candidates required either surveys (Broockman et al. 2013; Maestas et al. 2006), interest group publications (National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officeholders and Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies), or limiting one’s focus to smaller numbers of congressional races, each of which involved tradeoffs of coverage or bias.

Due largely to these difficulties, a large-scale, over time state legislative dataset of candidate race/ethnicity and gender characteristics does not exist. In an age when many details of candidates (including “major in college” and “current car”) are available on websites like Project Vote Smart and Ballotpedia, none of these sites provide variables about candidate race, ethnicity, or gender. While Ballotpedia provides some candidate pictures from their candidate surveys, coding every candidate, every cycle, and matching it with district information is resource-consuming. We wanted to have consistent, valid, and publicly available data of the thousands of candidates who run for state government so we could answer questions about elections and representation in the United States, but the data did not exist. In 2012, we embarked on a project that brought together Klarner’s (2018) state legislative candidate lists, interest group publications, and online sources like Ballotpedia and Facebook to code the race, ethnicity and gender of state legislative candidates for office. The evolution of social media, online campaigns, and journalism in the last 15 years has made finding biographical information about election also-rans easier to collect systematically. As a team, we were able to code the candidates from fifteen states between 2012 and 2016, but the task remained cumbersome and limited.

To expand these efforts, we created the Candidate Characteristics Cooperative (C3), a hand-coded database of primary and general election candidates for state legislative elections held in 2018. We identified nineteen methodologically diverse contributors across the country, and in return for coding a single state, contributors were offered access to the complete dataset during an embargo period of twelve months. We provided a list of the primary election candidates and relevant electoral data, and asked contributors to code the race, ethnicity and gender of the candidates using a rubric we developed. Contributors submitted their completed state files to the PIs, and we compiled these data into a single, uniform file.

The result of this pilot project is a hand-coded database of all state legislative primary and general election candidates

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21 We benefitted from financial support from the Women Donors Network in 2015 (womensdonors.org) and invaluable help from Janail Scott between 2012 and 2015.

22 Contributors to the data (in alphabetical order) include Daniel Butler, Washington University; Jason Casellas, University of Houston; Kennia Coronado, University of Wisconsin; Kescia Dickinson, Michigan State University; Christian Dyogi Phillips, U. of Southern Cal.; Matthew Hayes, Rice University; Robert Hogan, Louisiana State University; Michelangelo Landgrave, Cal. State Univ. Long Beach; Danielle Lemi, Southern Methodist University; Raymundo Lopez, Sonoma State University; Zoe Nemerever, UC San Diego; Shayla Olson, Michigan State University; Spencer Piston, Boston University; Jessica Preece, Brigham Young University; Robert Preuhs, Metro State Univ., Denver; Sara Sadhwani, Cal. Lutheran University; Jamil Scott, Georgetown University; Sonoh Shah, Pew Research Center; Christopher Stout, Oregon State; Danielle Thomsen, UC Irvine; Erika Vallojo, Michigan State University; Emily West, University of Pittsburgh.
from 2018. Covering approximately 14,000 unique major-party and minor-party candidates, contributors were able to identify the race/ethnicity of 94% of the candidates when using the techniques described above. Coding was highly consistent across contributors; 26% of candidates were coded by more than one contributor, and 96% of the time contributors produced the same race/ethnicity coding despite not coordinating efforts beyond receiving the provided rubric. Given that 22 different researchers hand-coded candidates (including PIs, team leaders, graduate students, and undergraduates), this degree of correspondence indicates that the hand-coding method produces consistent, replicable results. The Candidate Characteristics Cooperative dataset also has similarly complete coding of candidate gender and supplemental information on the ancestry/national origin, occupation, and religion of many candidates.

Over the last eight years, we have learned a lot about elections involving racial and ethnic minority and women candidates. First, contrary to the reasonable expectations of many race scholars, we found that Black and Latina/o candidates did quite well when they were on state legislative ballots (Juenke 2014; Shah 2014; Shah and Juenke 2016). But we also discovered that candidates of color were rarely found in elections in majority-white districts. By adding new data—election losers—to descriptive representation models, we discovered that the empirical focus of descriptive representation models needed to change, from voters choosing officeholders to candidates structuring voter choices. The results of this shift mirrored the contemporaneous findings in the gender literature, generally demonstrating that when women run, they can win, despite facing high levels of hostile sexism from many voters and donors (Barnes, Branton, and Cassese 2017; Cassese and Holman 2017; Crowder-Meyer and Cooperman 2018; Sanbonmatsu 2006). Second, we discovered that one of the main reasons minority officeholders were underrepresented across the U.S. is that minority candidates were not showing up on ballots. What had for decades been understood as a voter “demand” problem had turned into a candidate “supply” problem. We demonstrated that white people, even in racially conservative white districts, vote for non-white candidates if the candidates belong to their political party and signal they will represent their political team. Ted Cruz, Mia Love, Marco Rubio, and Tim Scott are just a few recent examples in very conservative states.

Most recently, we have answered two interesting and important questions with the data. Building on our “supply-side” theory, we asked, “Have the number of candidates of color and women who win elections increased over time?” As noted above, racial and ethnic minorities and women are underrepresented in virtually all levels of government. However, 2018 saw an increase in women candidates (Dittmar 2018), candidates of color (Schneider 2018), and women candidates of color (Bejarano and Smooth 2018). Most ran as Democrats. This coincided with the expected Democratic “wave” in 2018 (Klarner 2018), demonstrating that disparities in candidate partisanship help drive aggregate increases and decreases in gender and minority representation. Consequently, we hypothesized that “supply-side” factors would drive aggregate increases in office holding for women and candidates of color, instead of gender and racial/ethnic “demand-side” voter factors that would indicate changing preferences for minority and women’s representation. We tested this by comparing the emergence and success of women and candidates of color in states in 2018 to the same states we coded in previous years (2012, 2014, and 2016), to examine changes in candidacy and officeholding over time (Fraga, Shah, and Juenke 2020). We find that 2018 may very well have marked a turning point in women and minority representation in the U.S., not because women and candidates of color were more likely to win their elections, but because more of them ran for office. About 30% more women won state legislative office in 2018 than in previous years, while the number of women who lost compared to previous years nearly doubled. These numbers are roughly similar for candidates of color and women of color in 2018, providing early indications of a historic change in who will hold elected office in the future (Fraga, Shah, and Juenke 2020).

The second question we asked using these data was, “Are the effects of representation transitive?” The shift in focus to racial/ethnic minority candidate emergence and supply produces new opportunities for research addressing minority representation. Chief among these is the possibility that minority candidates may be discouraged from seeking office due to a perceived inability to win, or that their likelihood of winning might be affected by up-ballot or down-ballot representation, an insight drawn from the literature on gender and politics. Parties exert substantial control over who seeks office in legislative elections (Brown 2014; Hassell 2016), and scholars have determined that gender underrepresentation may be a function of partisan recruitment and gatekeeping (Fox and Lawless 2005; Lawless 2011; Crowder-Meyer 2013; Karpowitz et al. 2017). Party elites appear to discourage women from running due to a perception that they are less likely to win and less qualified as candidates (Niven 2006; Sanbonmatsu 2002), a perception that may change with the success of women candidates (Doherty et al. 2019; MacManus 1981; Sanbonmatsu 2006). If elites believe that minority candidates are less likely to win in heavily white districts, minority candidates may similarly be discouraged from seeking office in such places. Using our data from 2012 and 2014, we find evidence that the presence of minority higher-level officeholders positively affects the chances of minority-down ballot success (Fraga, Juenke, and Shah 2020). Leveraging information about the overlap between congressional and state legislative districts, we demonstrate that the victories of candidates of color for Congress reduce the coethnic/racial demographic thresholds associated with state legislative candidacy, and suggests that perceptions of minority candidate viability play a key role in structuring contemporary disparities in who runs for office.

In summary, scholars have considered the different ways in which women and minority candidates’ paths to office,
campaign strategies, and representational styles may differ from their white and/or male counterparts but have only infrequently been able to engage in large-scale systematic study of these phenomena using data from real-world elections. The Candidate Characteristics Cooperative database allows scholars to answer vital questions about diversity, inclusion and representation at a time when more women and candidates of color are running for office than ever before. In August 2020, the 2018 data will be publicly available to all scholars and the public. In creating a multi-year database, we wish to provide a valuable resource to scholars interested in taking a deeper look at the characteristics of thousands of state legislative candidates and officeholders—who are the forerunners of change in American politics—and build a foundation upon which individual researchers can add their own data. In doing so, we hope to promote collaborative data collection and support research in race, ethnic, and gender politics more broadly.

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Of the many reckonings brought about by recent social and political upheavals, two that should concern political scientists include a need to recognize the extent to which our normative motivations may misdirect our assumptions, and a need to effectively grapple with macro-level changes that are rewriting the rules by which actors play politics.
believe the consequence of these reckonings will be a recalibration of our expectations for representation and policy making.

Probably the most important political development of my lifetime has been the gradual capture of both political parties by a small group of fantastically wealthy business interests. One need only observe the current disconnect between economic freefall and near record bullishness on Wall Street to appreciate the power and privilege of big business in contemporary America. Political scientists like Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson have been sounding the alarm about growing concentrations of wealth and power for at least a decade. But much political science research still approaches analysis from a perspective they term “politics as electoral spectacle” (Hacker and Pierson 2010). The approach implies a popular set of assumptions that parties and politicians operate according to the median voter model, that American parties (and two-party systems in general) yield “big tent” platforms, and that all politics is local in the sense that legislators represent constituency preferences. These assumptions are resilient because they reflect our normative understandings of democratic principles. But as our democracy drifts from its foundations, and toward what Pierson, Hacker, and others identify as plutocratic populism, asymmetric partisan polarization, and special interest localism, such assumptions may lead research astray, or at least to incomplete conclusions.

My recent book, From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation, was in press about the time of the 2016 election. It provides a useful example for reflecting on these concerns. The underlying normative thrust of the book relates to the need for our democracy to effectively represent and incorporate its rapidly growing and largest ethnic group. Like many works of political science with grand ambitions to answer big questions and solve major problems, my book nevertheless operates primarily at one level of analysis and focuses mostly on individual-level behaviors. It also is relatively bounded in terms of its focus on the representative-constituency relationship.

In Part I of the book, I develop a framework for understanding political incorporation as a process that plays out in three stages—political participation, representation, and policy outcomes—and across two dimensions—inclusion and influence—at each of those stages. I then focus more specifically upon the representation component of this framework as a subprocess that links Latino constituents to government, sets policy agendas that prioritize Latino issues, articulates Latino interests and perspectives, and enables Latinos to influence policy decisions. My approach contrasts in important ways with earlier work on the subject, and I demonstrate how conceptualizing representation as a process and analyzing it as such allows me to construct a fuller picture of Latinos’ impact in Congress. I conclude part one with a thorough overview of Latino descriptive representation in Congress with attention to patterns by which Latinos have been elected to Congress and served on committees and in leadership positions.

The empirical thrust of my book illustrates the essential role Latino representatives play in translating Latino political participation into enhanced inclusion and influence in the representative process. Part II of the book begins with an examination of how Latino ethnicity shapes a legislator’s connections with Latino constituents and illustrates through observational and interview-based analysis critical differences in the ways Latino and non-Latino representatives perceive their relationships with Latino constituencies and their roles as representatives of Latinos. I then triangulate those findings with a battery of quantitative indicators that reveal the significant effect of representatives’ Latino ethnicity on patterns of outreach through the press and on their websites, as well as on patterns of staffing.

The balance of the book examines the impact of Latino representatives throughout the representative process with analyses of agenda-setting, debate, and decision-making. I explore multiple indicators of individual-level legislative behavior and offer interpretive accounts of collective action by members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Through analyses of bill sponsorship and agenda-setting by committee chairs, I show how Latino representatives amplify the inclusion of Latino priorities on the congressional policy agenda. Analyses of floor speeches and “dear colleague” letters highlight differences in the ways Latino representatives amplify Latino interests and Latino perspectives in policy debates, furthering the cause of inclusion and perhaps influencing how other policymakers think about issues that impact Latinos. Finally, I contextualize the role played by Latino representatives in influencing legislative decisions through an examination of their collective successes and failures during the 110th and 111th Congresses, and illustrate how majority and minority party status, unified and divided government, and the position of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus within the larger Democratic Caucus shape the abilities of Latino representatives to make change. My study points to underappreciated variations in the extent to which Latino legislators can be expected to substantively impact the legislative process, and by refining this picture, contributes to broader theories about why, how, and when diversity in institutions matters.

A major conclusion that I draw from my research is that the future of Latino political incorporation hinges substantially on factors that are beyond the control of Latinos and their representatives. The book identifies Latinos’ positions within political parties and in relation to the presidency, for example, as critical factors that shape their congressional influence. It also draws connections between congressional representation and institutional efforts to constrain Latino political influence through gerrymandering, voter ID laws, and other strategies aimed at stifling participation. Despite these challenges, the book expresses optimism for Latino political incorporation. What has become clearer to me more recently is that this optimism was predicated in part on the anticipated impact demographic change will have on the representative-constituency relationship, and also on blink-
The ability of Latinos (as well as African Americans and women) to exercise congressional influence occurs almost entirely within a Democratic caucus. As of this writing, all the pieces are falling in to place for a historic rebuke of President Donald Trump, and with it, probable unified Democratic government. Insurgent progressives like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez appear to be pulling Democratic priorities left. The Democratic caucus in Congress, which is now approximately 37 percent female and 39 percent non-white, may be even more diverse and representative of the population come January.

Under such a scenario, we might expect Latinos to exercise enhanced influence in the coming Congress, particularly if states like Florida, Arizona, or even Texas, contribute to a Democratic victory. However, there are several factors to consider before declaring premature victory on Latino priorities like immigration reform. First, fierce opposition can be anticipated from a Republican Party that has signed a Faustian bargain with a xenophobic political constituency of its own making. Second, the policy agenda under a Democratic government will follow the lead of the president and party leaders. The Obama administration’s focus on health care and Speaker Pelosi’s focus on climate legislation during the 111th Congress left many Democrats vulnerable and made immigration reform a non-starter. It is questionable whether a Democratic government would expend its political capital on immigration reform with so many other pressing concerns facing the country. A final factor, which may work in the favor of Latino priorities, is that members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus are likely to be able to collectively exercise veto power over the House agenda. Several forecasts for Democratic gains anticipate a small enough Democratic majority that 35 or so Latino representatives could collectively demand concessions to advance their priorities. Such efforts are not unprecedented, but they are rare, risky, and vulnerable to defections. In sum, prospects for immigration reform are uncertain at best.

So far, this speculation all falls within the parameters considered by my book. If the aperture is expanded to consider macro-level trends toward extreme concentrations of wealth and political influence, and the apparent responses of the political parties to those trends, prospects for Latino representatives could collectively demand concessions to advance their priorities. Such efforts are not unprecedented, but they are rare, risky, and vulnerable to defections. In sum, prospects for immigration reform are uncertain at best.

For example, Rachel Bitecofer identified 241 Democratic leaning races in the House and 12 toss-ups on April 28, 2020 (see niskanencenter.org); Charlie Cook identified 221 Democratic leaning House races and 25 toss-ups on July 16, 2020.

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Latino activists and representatives when it comes to immigration reform, education spending, Latino health care priorities, and a raft of other initiatives that shape substantive policy responsiveness to Latinos. They may also supply far more potent targets for political activists interested in bringing change through more representative policymaking.

These are modest suggestions, but I think important ones if we are to develop more clear-eyed explanations and more realistic expectations about the future of Latino representation—and democratic representation more generally. The future is not entirely bleak, but elections alone will not likely lead to the kind of political empowerment required to fully incorporate Latinos and other under-represented groups. To avoid over-simplifying a more complicated reality, we must reach beyond the connections that bond representatives to constituents and explore the forces which sever those bonds.

References


All the Feelings: Doing Research as a Black Woman on Black Women Political Elites

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A flood of emotions washed over me. I drew shallow breaths at first that later quickened. I fought the urge to cry. Instead, I took deep and intentional breaths in attempts to center myself. “I’m a researcher, this is my job” was the calming refrain I repeated to my inner self. “Nadia, please get yourself together” was my last internal dialogue before I welcomed a group of fifteen Black women candidates and elected officials to participate in a focus group. My co-author, Danielle Lemi, and I had the fortunate opportunity to partner with the Black Women’s Political Action Committee, a group whose mission is to increase Black women’s political representation in Texas. To our knowledge, this is the first ever focus group of its kind. The scholarly significance of this study led me to have an unexpected visceral reaction.

I was overcome with emotions for several reasons. First, I was overjoyed by the larger than anticipated group of participants for our study. Danielle and I have worked with the Black Women’s PAC before, but we had yet to conduct research with group members. We honestly did not know what to expect. We estimated and prepared for around six to eight participants. When more and more women entered the room, and we struggled to make room around the table and gather additional chairs to squeeze women in the room, Danielle and I quickly realized that our focus group would be as effective. Focus groups that have ten or more participants are not ideal for robust conversations. Yet, we welcomed the women in the room because they wanted to be there. They desired to participate in our research study because they felt that their experiences are ignored. These political elites needed an opportunity to talk to and with their peers about the challenges, opportunities, hopes, and pitfalls associated with seeking elected office and governing as Black women. Danielle and I were the conduit for this cathartic exchange.

Next, I was painfully aware that Black women’s narratives are not centered in political science research (Brown 2014). In the subfield of legislative studies, we most often rely on sophisticated statistical analysis to examine the political behavior of political elites. Rarely are our research participants given the opportunity to narrate their experiences to researchers. As a qualitative researcher and an interpretivist scholar, my scholarship prioritizes the voices of Black women political elites and takes their experiences as the starting point for my studies. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to talk with so many Black women and to include their narrative in academic scholarship. For me, this focus group signaled an opportunity to radically transform how Black women political elites are studied in political science.

For the most part, I was moved by the willingness of the participants to share their experiences with us. These women noted that they wanted scholarship to reflect their understanding of the historical and current political landscape. They, too, were painfully aware of how their political calculations were often misunderstood and that they were stereotyped by both voters and other political elites. I was in awe of their bravery to openly discuss political challenges that often did not paint flattering portrayals of their political party, other Black elites, their opponents, and their constituents and/or voters. The women also shared unique
political opportunities and displayed a sense of sisterhood that was refreshingly unexpected.

My heart was full at the onset of the focus group. While I anticipated the collection of rich and dynamic data, I was pleasantly surprised at the conversations that we facilitated. The focus group caused me to experience a series of unforeseen emotions; however, as a Black woman researching other Black women, I was prepared to do this research.

Researcher reflexivity is undertheorized in the legislative studies. The gold-standard of qualitative methods in our subfield is perhaps Fenno’s canonical *Home Style* (1978). Fenno’s “soak and poke” method is an exemplar in how to learn about legislative behavior outside of formalized structures. His *Going Home* (2003) fully centers identity politics as he follows four Black congressmembers to explore the relational aspects of political representation. Fenno notes that his findings or understanding of Black lawmakers’ behavior are filtered through the lens of his identity as a White (cis)male researcher. Yet, Fenno makes mention of this and quickly proceeds on with the book without systematically acknowledging how this racial-outsider status informs his data collection and analysis and, ultimately, the final conclusions that he draws. Fenno’s work was my model, however problematic: they were the studies that I attempted to replicate. I’ve written elsewhere that it took me some time to grapple with my identity as a researcher who shares the same raced/gendered group status of my participants (Brown 2012). This in large part was due to my positivist training and limited exposure to both qualitative research (of any sort) and interpretivist methods early in my career.

When I finally realized that I could best present the narratives of Black women through qualitative research (due primarily to their small numbers within state legislatures), I was drawn to texts outside of political science that examined how one’s identity informs the research process. I looked to work by Barbara Smith (1976), Beth Ritchie (1996), Patricia Hill Collins (1986), Josephine Beoku-Betts (1994), and Maxine Baca Zinn (1979). More recent scholarship by Few et al. (2003), Harris-Perry (2011), and Jordan-Zachery (2007) helped to orient my positionality as a Black woman researching Black women. So, too, was Wendy Smooth’s sage advice (given in passing, albeit in a sisterly tone) that “you know you can’t publish these women’s names in your dissertation, right?” This alerted me to the kind of privilege status I had in interviewing Black women political elites who most likely told me things that they would not have shared with a raced/gendered outsider. And as such, I needed to practice a Black feminist ethos of care and only refer to them by pseudonyms in published work.

My past experiences interviewing Black women state legislators coupled with Black feminist scholarship and conducting focus groups with Black women citizens prepared me for our November 2019 data collection with members of the Black Women’s PAC. As such, Danielle (a Mexican American and Filipina) and I agreed that I would ask the questions and serve as the facilitator for the focus group. She would take notes. We were prepared, I was ready. Yet, I did not anticipate that moment. As a scholar of gender and politics and racial and ethnic politics within legislative studies, I was aware of the scholarly underrepresentation of marginalized groups in research. As a Black woman I focused my career on opening up the discipline to perspective by groups at the margins—most notably, Black women political elites. However, I was not then, and probably will not be, fully disentangled from how my own identity translates into the emotive research experience.

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Writing for My Life

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In many ways, I do not see myself as a legislative studies scholar. While I have done research in the area, and my next project is largely about legislation, I still do not see myself as part of the field. This, in part, is due to the fact that I entered this area through Racial and Ethnic Politics (REP). In fact, because I am a “race-first” scholar in many ways, I see REP as my research touchstone and conduit to other fields, including legislative studies. It is difficult to say why, but I’ve always felt like a poser or visitor in this field. Maybe because the issues, legislators, and legislation I care about have always featured race. I could never rattle off members of Congress or congressional bills and their sponsors and co-sponsors with the near encyclopedic precision as some of our colleagues. As a result, I often felt off-kilter and deeply insecure about my knowledge and ability to contribute to the area.

This was not the result of any individual actors but because of the way I always thought of the field. Because I know I am a minoritized person in this discipline, I did not always see myself reflected in the field. As a result of what I was taught, the canonical works of white men became the primary yardsticks for how I measured my suitability for the field. I thought because I did not fully understand Poole-Rosenthal scores, I was perpetrating a fraud somehow by being in this field. Often times I did not see the questions in which I was interested in the syllabi for my core course. In the words of the late scholar and mentor Ronald Walters, “What does this have to do with the liberation of Black people?” was neither asked nor answered in any of the texts I encountered. In order to do this work, then, I surmised I would need to find myself elsewhere and in a different intellectual kinship group.

Fast forward a decade, and my next work focuses on the legislative efforts of the Congressional Black Caucus. This body of legislators has been the “conscience of the Congress” since its formation in 1971. Under the leadership of Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-NY), the Congressional Black Caucus became a robust force in the international arena, particularly on issues relevant to the broader African Diaspora (Tillery 2011). I did not, however, learn much about the Congressional Black Caucus while I was in graduate school, and my only classroom encounter with the Congressional Black Caucus and their efforts was in a course on Race and Ethnic Politics in America. That research focusing on the Congressional Black Caucus, or BIPOC legislators, is not regularly offered in classes that focus on Congress and congressional policy making tells us how far we have to go in the field. A cursory examination of the comprehensive reading lists in American politics or political institutions yield no discussion of the Congressional Black Caucus and almost never include any of the work produced by BIPOC scholars, despite the many contributions they have made to enriching my understanding of Congress and the function of this institution. Recent works by Nadia Brown, Megan Ming Francis, Michael Minta, and Katherine Tate, to name a few, should be a regular part of our vocabulary in legislative studies.

As our discipline clings to canonical texts, most of them penned by majority-race scholars, let us interrogate why these works remain the benchmark. This is not to say these works should be replaced, but it does mean that we show what and who we value when we continue to replicate and disseminate scholarship that does not show the depth and breadth of the field. Consequently, fields like legislative studies that do not situate race as part of their curriculum and syllabi, through their cumulative actions, create an ethnic iceberg, of sorts, that is demarcated as much by what they feel is worthy of study as much as what they do not study.

I am unsure the field has changed much, but what is true is that I have changed. I no longer care about where my work fits or who in what field may like said work. I do not write with them in mind. I write for those who cannot. I write about things that others may feel are inconsequential, unimportant. Writing on the margins about decentered populations is important for me because it is where I can be free and totally autonomous. At the margins, there is always room to take up space. Perhaps that is why I do not engage many folks in the field of legislative studies formally. Racial and ethnic politics is my intellectual home not because of rejection, but because it is where I find acceptance. I also find intellectual challenge and stimulation from a group of scholars that I respect immensely. Therefore, where I situate myself intellectually is not because of scholars of legislative studies, but because of how I want to move through this discipline. I am trying to write the world I live in and the world I want to live in as a Black woman. I write the scholarship I want to read for a field that does not view much of the work I, and other political scientists like me, do as valuable. I recognize the irony in this, yet I persist because the discipline needs this work, but I also am compelled to do this research.

Asking questions I care about and about communities I care about is a singular experience. Of course, I often have the joy of collaborating with others, but no one gets to police what I think. I no longer give permission to those who would tell me an idea is unworthy before it has had a chance to be fully formed. Being frustrated is often the cost of this labor. Nonetheless, doing the work itself is a challenge in the best possible ways. The work of completing that complex multi-piece puzzle is its own kind of gratification. And digitization has made the tasks less onerous than they once were. But the mechanics of the project are a lot easier than the work of conceptualizing the project.

For the next generation of scholars, I would encourage you to do the work that makes your heart sing. Many of your colleagues will not “get it,” so you have to find the peo-
people who do understand. More importantly, go to the people who will encourage you to get the work done who can see its importance when you cannot any longer. While people may not do exactly what you do, that they help you do the work you want to do is what is most significant. Do not try to anticipate criticisms from your colleagues; that is a useless exercise. Do the work and let the chips fall where they may. This, I promise, will not be the hardest thing you have done. Once you let all the negative self-talk go, you will become much more productive. Likewise, go where your work is accepted. This does not mean where your work is not critiqued. Constructive criticism is absolutely necessary to improve your work. What I am saying is go to the places where a prima facie case for your work’s importance exists, not where you have to prove the worthiness of the work before you even get to establishing your argument. I recognize this is how many of our conference, graduate programs, and journals work, but this is an unhealthy practice. The “so what?” question is important for all of us to ask, but once you have answered that question, it’s time to move on to the next phase of your project.

Community Engagement and State Legislative Research

Anna Mitchell Mahoney
Tulane University

Scholars’ engagement with the community can enhance their own research and teaching while expanding the influence of their scholarship for the public good. My own experience has demonstrated the positive effects of this model of scholarship and the institutional support needed to practice it. Universities under pressure to demonstrate their public value are encouraging more and more public scholarship “that addresses important civic issues while simultaneously producing knowledge that meets high academic standards” (Bridger and Alter 2011) or scholarship of application in which researchers’ engagement with society inspires and produces knowledge for the public good (Boyer 1990).

Community engagement is the “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Carnegie 2015). While this collaboration often occurs at the institutional level, it can also occur at the individual level by researchers and their partners in the community. Community engagement activities by faculty might include such things as service-learning courses, public forums, civic education programming, or community-engaged research.

My own community engagement as a state legislative scholar has taken many forms including service-learning teaching, community-engaged research, and public scholarship. This engagement has many benefits but comes with challenges and requires substantial institutional support to be successful. This kind of scholarship is both incredibly rewarding and labor intensive. I explore all these facets here so that faculty interested in pursuing this path or under pressure from their institution to do so are aware of the costs and benefits. Further, I share recommendations from experts about how institutions can reform incentive structures to recognize and value this work by faculty.

When successful, researchers and community members both benefit from an academic project that centers real world problems analyzed using methodically sound techniques and employing high ethical standards. My own research agenda has been invigorated by my civic participation. For example, I serve on the Women’s Policy and Research Commission for the state of Louisiana. This commission advises the governor on potential policy solutions to problems which disproportionately affect women. Members of the commission include university researchers, community leaders, state employees, and public officeholders. In 2018, this commission formed a sexual harassment subcommittee to inform the state’s response to high-profile accusations. One of the prominent actions being debated was mandatory training for public employees. Having observed this same debate in higher education and knowing the inadequacy of this response without additional interventions, I was inspired to learn how other states were dealing with this issue. Subsequently, I co-authored, with two undergraduate students, a 50-state analysis of state legislative sexual harassment policies. My experience as an insider in Louisiana’s response led to an important policy study I had not previously considered. Being able to involve undergraduates in this project was particularly valuable as they were able to connect their own study of political science to a real-world challenge in their community. States can learn from this project where they are in relation to each other and how their own policies measure up to national standards.

Community engagement has enhanced my own research agenda and pointed me in directions of community need. In addition to my commission work, I am also a member of Women United, an auxiliary group of the United Way of Southeast Louisiana. This non-profit organization has a robust legislative advocacy agenda. One of its primary concerns is equal pay. Having attended with this group many legislative committee hearings and seeing how little progress was made, I was motivated to determine which measures adopted by legislatures had the most significant impact on closing the gender wage gap. Seeing tireless advocates with few resources spin their wheels made me want to know how they should spend their precious time and effort. As such, I am currently working with co-authors on a 50-state analysis of equal pay legislation to answer this difficult question. As a political scientist, I am aware of how difficult the policymaking process is and that systems were designed for slow deliberation. Seeing these effects on an organization’s advocacy efforts in real time inspired a re-
search question that answers an important policy concern while also providing valuable information to practitioners.

Both of these studies are rigorous and worthy of academic attention. Policy studies are valuable to the discipline and in my case immediately valuable to the practitioners trying to improve the quality of life for those in Louisiana. Without my community engagement, I would not have identified these as research priorities for myself and would not have been aware of how needed they were by the community.

In doing this work, I am able to practice feminist research methods which value community contributions to knowledge production and requires researchers “to develop special relationships with the people studied” (Reinhartz 1992). My community-engaged work is richer for the trust established with subjects and the advantage of participant observation granted to me as a consequence of my involvement.

Community engagement also has benefits for my students and my institution. Service-learning courses are one kind of scholarly community engagement, and my partnership with Women United has meant 50 students have been able to work with this organization as they advocated for their policy agenda. One student was even able to testify before a committee about her experience with the minimum wage. This opportunity for her to develop her political voice was possible because of my facilitation of the course and Tulane University’s commitment to public service.

Following Hurricane Katrina, Tulane University President Scott Cowen created the Center for Public Service. This commitment included a curricular requirement for students and a large infrastructure to enable faculty to create and sustain service learning courses. My student’s experience is the desired outcome of this endeavor. She performed 20 hours of service to Women United by researching minimum wage laws across the country, considered how Louisiana law was affecting certain populations, and ultimately was able to share her own experience as a citizen before a legislative committee. It was both an academic exercise as well as civic participation—the culmination of what a political science education should be.

President Cowen and his successor, President Mike Fitts, have expressed repeatedly the importance of Tulane’s engagement with the city of New Orleans. Because of our history, that commitment, while sometimes fraught and certainly not perfect, has established Tulane’s reputation as a leader in public service in higher education. That reputation is dependent upon faculty members’ support of this project. As such, significant financial resources have been allocated to support faculty.

Community engagement, however, also has potential challenges and should always be conducted with critical analysis. Even with substantial institutional support, this kind of work is extremely labor intensive. It requires skills not formally taught in graduate school, like relationship building and logistical execution. It requires that researchers be able to communicate in a variety of ways beyond jargon and outside of peer reviewed publications. Community groups do not work on the academic calendar, and that can lead to fraught expectations and disappointments. Managing the expectations of academic peers and community partners is very challenging.

This kind of work is not always valued by the discipline and is often perceived as subjective or biased. Likewise, this work is often done by marginalized scholars who have a deep commitment to community but are often not supported within their academic communities (Strum et al. 2011). When this work is attributed to the larger institution, it can whitewash an institution’s reputation and obscure racist, sexist, ableist, homophobic, and/or transphobic histories. Faculty who engage in this work must do so balancing these concerns while working for more just allocation of labor in higher education and the recognition and repair of past injustices not only on campus but in the community. Consequently, engaged scholarship carries with it huge responsibility and emotional labor.

Because this work is so valuable to universities, it is worthy of their investment. While some academic disciplines may incorporate training to do community-engaged research or public scholarship, most faculty do not have experience doing it. As such, additional training to learn different writing styles and the ethics of responsible engagement across racial, class, ability, sexuality, and gender boundaries will be necessary. Some organizations are already providing this training including the Scholars Strategy Network and The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. Sections or working groups in professional organizations may also be a source for peer-to-peer education. But universities need to invest in and support collaborations between their faculty and these organizations because community engagement should not come at a cost for local communities.

Another way institutions can support community engaged scholarship is by revising their tenure standards (Ellison and Eatman 2008; Strum et al. 2011). Recommendations include defining community-engaged research, including a statement acknowledging its value to the institution, developing criteria to evaluate work and to reward faculty who engage in it, allowing for recognition of alternative publication venues, and considering community members as potential peer reviewers for appropriate projects. Likewise, institutional evaluation of community engaged scholarship should include its impact on the local community. Community-engaged research must recognize the community as an equal partner and not just a part of the process. In so doing, universities’ own structures will need to be reformed. This reformation must include an examination of who produces knowledge, how, and for what purposes. These kinds of reflections may point toward a reconsideration of who is hired under what conditions and who is rewarded for what kinds of contributions.

Community engaged scholarship is not for everyone, but I realize that my early feminist educational experiences made it inevitable for me. I received my Masters in Women’s Studies from the University of Alabama in 2004, where I was mentored by women faculty who themselves had studied and participated in the Civil Rights Movement. This
education predisposed me to question academic norms and expectations around legitimate research methodologies and the relationship of universities to the communities in which they reside. I obtained my Ph.D. in political science at Rutgers University-New Brunswick because it was the home of the Center for American Women and Politics at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. CAWP’s mission, “to promote greater knowledge and understanding about the role of women in American politics, enhance women’s influence in public life, and expand the diversity of women in politics and government,” has inspired all of my subsequent scholarly work (CAWP). At CAWP, pollsters, candidates, and elected officials were all a part of the intellectual community. They were not merely subjects to be analyzed. All of this training prepared me for my first full-time academic position at the Newcomb Institute at Tulane University, where Sally Kenny, Executive Director, Newcomb Institute and Newcomb College Endowed Chair Professor, created a position for me that enabled me to do the kind of academic work that met high academic standards while respecting the community as partners in the production of knowledge.

Because of my educational background and non-traditional appointment in an academic center where this work is valued, I am able to shape a research agenda that does not have to adhere to traditional tenure expectations. I can choose to do work that has both academic value and local impact. For example, my book on women’s caucuses in state legislatures is both a rigorous academic examination of state-level factors associated with women’s collective action within state legislatures and a useful guide for legislators and their staff about how to create women’s caucuses and pitfalls to avoid. Likewise, my work with Clare Daniel and Mirya Holman on characteristics of legislators engaging in the sex education debate is useful not only for policy studies but potentially for advocates on either side of that debate to identify potential allies. While I am extremely grateful for this opportunity, I am also keenly aware of the limitations of my contingent status.

All kinds of community engagement can enhance state legislative research. I have discussed here the activities that have shaped my own research and my students’ experiences, but there are endless possibilities. I hope by identifying the challenges, we can all be more vigilant practitioners constantly assessing the risks and rewards of such engagement. Finally, because I do see the value to the community as well as universities, I hope to encourage further institutional support for this intellectual practice that enhances higher education, the student experience, and the communities in which we live and work.

References


An Administrator’s Perspective: Coloring Outside the Tenure Track Line

Renita Miller
Princeton University

My path in academia has been atypical in that it has not followed the standard tenure track path but one where I have the opportunity to fully use much of my legislative studies training in racial and ethnic politics on a daily basis in a position that I absolutely love. More specifically, my deep understanding of racial and ethnic representation and its impact on substantive representation (Hero and Tolbert 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Pitkin 1967; Bratton and Haynie 1999; Whitney 1997; Karnig and Welch 1980; Stewart, England, and Meier 1989; Meier and Stewart 1991; Tate 2003), the inherent impact that institutional policies have on inequitable outputs and outcomes, and the influence of diverse deliberative bodies on policy outcomes (Gamble 2011; Mansbridge 1999; Mintz 2011) have all translated well in a higher education administration context. This is particularly true in the area of diversity and inclusion.

Notably, the questions that I studied in the REP field around representation and how it impacts outcomes were directly tied to my graduate school experience. This was especially true of the common question in the REP field, “Does descriptive representation have a positive impact on substantive representation?” The idea is that when minority (i.e. descriptive) representation exists or increases in an environment, attention to and advocacy for minority interests also increase, which ultimately lead to positive outcomes for those minority groups. Conversely, there is a decreased likelihood of advocacy and therefore positive outcomes for minority interests in the absence of descriptive representation.
In this instance and very hypothetical example, representation would be operationalized as faculty and students from historically underrepresented groups and substantive representation would be operationalized as positive outcomes for these groups. Those substantive outcomes could include increases in those populations over time, Ph.D. matriculation, tenure, positive advising and mentorship experiences, funding and research opportunities, and increased job opportunities, just to name a few. If I were to connect those variables to my graduate school experience at my Ph.D. granting institution, unfortunately there was little to no descriptive representation. More specifically, there were no other black students in my cohort or black faculty in the department, nor was there a faculty member doing research in the content area I was most interested in at the time. While these limitations did not hinder the incredible support I received from a few select faculty in the department, it did present many challenges being a first generation African American female in a predominantly white male department. Though I did find faculty whose research areas closely aligned with my interest, I sought out additional REP course opportunities through the inter-institutional program between Rice and Texas A&M University. It was through this experience that I found a warm welcoming community of black graduate students and supportive faculty. I participated in symposium, workshops, and conferences with other students and faculty of color as well. It was truly formative because I was able to present my work in an environment where students and faculty seemed genuinely excited about my ideas and offered constructive feedback, in a way that was not demoralizing but affirming. It was in this community, one outside my home institution, where my ideas were validated and I felt a great sense of belonging. In part, this community and the mentorship I received from Ken Meier was pivotal to my graduate school success. Therefore, I would posit that the descriptive representation present in my graduate school experience did in fact lead to substantive representation.

Due to this support and the unwavering support of my dissertation chair, Keith Hamm, my passion developed further and I felt strongly that my voice mattered in the field. My advice to the next generation of scholars, particularly black scholars who are seeking validation and not receiving it, is to pursue it outside of your current environment. Please understand that there are scholarly communities that want to support and encourage you on your journey. This community may be outside your department or even your institution, but it does exist.

As a graduate student at Rice, I had this amazing opportunity to teach my own course, Race and Public Policy. This experience single-handedly shifted my career focus, because it confirmed my love for teaching, advising, and mentoring. However, I grappled with this idea that these passions were contradictory to the prescribed path for a student getting a Ph.D. from an R1 institution, where my time and energy should be squarely focused on research. Furthermore, the prescription was to get a tenure-track job at a research-focused institution and progress accordingly. But my instincts and passion for teaching nudged me toward a postdoc lecturer position at Princeton rather than taking the tenure track offer at a mid-sized state institution. This was a pivotal moment in my career because my plan was to spend a couple of years teaching and conducting research at Princeton, with the eventual goal of getting a tenure-track job at a small liberal arts college. It was important to me to pursue an academic career at an institution where teaching was rewarded with moving into administration after tenure, and so I felt a small liberal arts college would be the perfect fit. Those plans quickly changed when I was offered an administrative position after my first-year teaching position at Princeton, which has subsequently led to my current role as a dean in the graduate school with the option to teach. In this position, I find that my REP training and research are extremely beneficial because as a “descriptive representative” from an underrepresented group, I am able to create programs as well as inform policies, processes, and procedures that substantively impact underrepresented students. I recognize often that my training is not limited to the LSS field but is transferable and meaningful in various contexts. With that in mind, my final piece of advice is to make decisions about your career path that feels purposeful to you, even if that means you may disappoint your advisor, your committee, your colleagues, and others. I know it sounds cliché, but follow your passions, because they may just lead you to wonderful and unexpected places.

In sum, I have no regrets about the administrative path that I have taken and feel incredibly fortunate to have received the insights and training in the REP LSS field. This training has shaped my view of the theoretical concepts I learned during my graduate school career to a clear roadmap for how I analytically approach my day-to-day work. Importantly, the field has shaped my passions about the tangible and quantifiable impact of diversity and inclusion at all levels in the academy, work that continues to need improvement.

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Princeton University Press.


Valeria Sinclair-Chapman (VSC): I kind of fell into the study of legislative politics. I loved the study of institutions and rules—how knowing how the rules works helps protect people already in power, but could also present opportunities to transform political spaces. I dipped my toe into studying public policy under Randall Ripley or parties under Paul Beck, but it seems that I always came back to legislative studies. My first legislative politics courses were with Samuel Patterson. He was well known for the study of comparative legislatures. In a course that I took with him, I floated the argument in a paper that there might be some democratic tenets in single party legislatures with an examination of Ghana and Japan. I did fine on the paper, but the feedback that I got was mostly dismissive. Now, years later, I can see that there were major flaws and lots of naiveté in my argument, but at the time, I mostly just felt dismissed and out of place.

The papers that were applauded were those that addressed fairly simple questions using existing data and showcasing simple quantitative models (we were first years, after all). I did not find them to be especially interesting or inspiring. What they did well was demonstrate that the students, almost all uniformly male, knew the currency of the subfield and could deliver it. One thing that I remember vividly was being told that there were no “real” political scientists in Africa. Now, I had studied African politics as an undergraduate. My undergraduate advisor, Dr. Dwight Mullen, had been a Ford Fellow right after the Ghanaian independence movement. There was real politics in Ghana and individuals who were studying Ghanaian politics beyond the perspectives of Europeans and colonialism. After that class, I felt that maybe political science wasn’t really for me.

As a black woman from a small North Carolina town, I had been on the fence about attending graduate school in the first place. I won a Women’s Research and Education Institute fellowship to work on Capitol Hill for a year and was placed in the office of Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA). That experience changed my entire trajectory. When I returned to graduate school, I had a kernel of an idea for a new and novel research project. I was clearer about the questions that mattered to me. In addition to continuing to learn from Dr. Patterson, I worked with amazing scholars including William E. Nelson Jr.; Katherine Tate; Herb Weisberg; and my advisor, Janet Box-Steffensmeier. Also, by the time I returned, the number of students of color in the graduate program had more than tripled. Black women were studying international relations, comparative politics, and political behavior; several of us worked in the survey research lab under Dr. Weisberg. Becoming a scholar is not a solitary effort. Having a strong, diverse, and talented intellectual community helped me to find the confidence to wade into uncharted, and not especially friendly, territory in legislative politics.

Navigating the maleness, and more explicitly, the white maleness of the subfield has not been easy, but I had plenty of support and encouragement along the way. I remember in one of my graduate courses in legislative politics, a par-
ticular male student who was reviewing my research proposal told me that my project really did not have much to offer. Unfortunately for me, I believed him. Fortunately, my advisor and my committee had confidence in me. Jan told me then to trust my own ideas. She encouraged me to value them. I tell students now, “Take your own ideas seriously”—not so seriously that you cannot hear criticism, but seriously enough that not just anyone can dissuade you.

The subfield has changed considerably since then, and many more scholars have done work on bill sponsorship. These women have gained influence in the field and left meaningful marks on the discipline.

KS: Mentoring students and being an advisor are important aspects of being a professor. How do your experiences influence how you mentor your students? What is a small piece of advice for graduate students studying legislative politics?

VSC: This is a really interesting question. Mentoring is huge part of what we do as scholars. In some ways, we are literally lifting as we climb. It has been important for me to work with all kinds of students, and especially with women and women of color. I am drawn to the students with big ideas and some uncertainty about how to proceed. I am less inspired by students who do what my former colleague and legislative politics scholar Dick Fenno once described to me as “pothole political science.” He said that some scholars answer relatively small questions using existing data, adding a variable here or a new modeling technique there. This was, in essence, “pothole” research, the filling in of gaps, making small, incremental advancements in the literature. There is clearly a place for that kind of work.

Other scholars charted new terrain, carved paths, thought big thoughts. That often takes longer, takes more creativity, more, well, bravery in some ways. Thinking big can be a lonely enterprise. Mentors can encourage us to do both—to think big and to fill in the gaps. I have had a zigzag pattern into and out of the academy. I have had amazing opportunities, mentors, colleagues, friends, and students. Building an intellectual community is indispensable to scholarship.

In legislative politics, the inner networks, those who perform the gatekeeping, are pretty insular and very, very white. There are more women now, but the nature of inquiry and the kinds of questions remain mostly the same. This means that a great many of us who study people in legislatures, e.g., representation, are not considered legislative studies scholars. It also means that the kinds of questions being asked and being valued are often devoid of the insights that could happen if scholars took a minute to see the actual world around them. For instance, in the study of landmark legislation, many of the most important policies that changed the lives of women, Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Indigenous people are overlooked. Not all of course: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 always make the cut. But I have wondered what a compilation of the landmark legislation for previously marginalized groups would look like. What are the characteristics of the individuals who are credited with sponsoring those bills? Why did these people ultimately sponsor the bills, rather than someone else? What outside organizations helped shape these landmark bills? Why were they supported, and have the same kinds of legislators supported these kinds of policies over time? When have coalitions expanded or contracted, and why? In other words, whose experiences are left in the shadows of so-called landmark legislation? What can we learn about politics by looking in the corners that are often taken for granted and not seen?

KS: You have published on a variety of topics throughout your career. What is next? Are there any topics that you are particularly interested in currently?

VSC: I have found that over time my interest keeps returning to the effects of diversity on institutions. I am still interested in how changing who is in the legislature changes what the legislature does. When I think about a smallish institutional space like a department, it is easy to see many of the influences that a more diverse faculty has on the kinds of things that a department does. A department’s core functions remain regardless of who sits in the seats, but some of what it does with its discretionary time and resources shifts as the people do. So, for instance, a department with more than one woman (some would say a critical mass is necessary) might devote more resources to recruiting female graduate students. Likewise, a department with one or more tenured Black or Latino faculty member might make different hiring decisions or institute new policies to diversify the curriculum such as offering more race and ethnic politics courses or doing an audit of course syllabi to ensure the inclusion of work from scholars of color. It could also be the case—and has been my own experience—that in a more diverse department, white faculty take up more diversity work.

The same process that underlies the exchange of ideas, interests, and skillsets in a department could translate to much larger institutions such as Congress. It may well be the case that white, male members of Congress (MCs) hear about or engage in conversations about gender or racial and ethnic issues and then use their own experience in the legislature to move issues along that otherwise might have stalled. The DREAM Act is one key example. It began as bills going nowhere from introduced by junior MCs and then was taken up by Senators Orrin Hatch and Dick Durbin, renamed, and moved forward. The DREAM Act failed by five votes in the Senate in 2010, after years of advocacy, and having already passed the House of Representatives. Diversity—and inclusion—may lead to both innovative opportunities and innovative solutions.

In my own scholarship, I am working with a fabulous interdisciplinary team of scholars on the effects of diversity in social movements. I am also still very interested in symbolic politics and bill sponsorship. I take every chance I get to remind researchers that the simplest way that people understand politics is through symbols; therefore, understand-
ing the ownership, defining, and manipulation of symbols is crucial to understanding the political enterprise. Dismissing symbols or symbolic gestures because they are difficult to consistently measure is a mistake. Our current politics is replete with symbols, and not only the obviously symbolic ones like naming schools (or military bases), but also less obvious examples like introducing bills in one chamber that have zero chance of passing the other or voting twenty times to repeal bills such as the Affordable Care Act.

Minority representation is an area that is ripe for innovation and new inquiry as the Congressional Black Caucus and the Hispanic Caucus mature and their members age. We are now at an interesting juncture where retirements or credible primary challenges will arise. It reminds me of the 1990s, when Black legislators began vying for the seats of white Democrats. What’s on the horizon now? How will representation change generationally, racially and ethnically to reflect new issues and demographic shifts in districts? So many questions remain. It is really a rewarding time to study legislatures, legislators, and legislative institutions and behavior.

The Continuing Significance of Studying the Congressional Black Caucus

Artemesia Stanberry
North Carolina Central University

What were your initial motivations to study African American lawmakers?

My motivation for studying Black lawmakers was actually the result of my dissertation advisor, Dr. Lorenzo Morris. I initially wanted to focus my dissertation on the state of school desegregation on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the Brown v. Board of Education ruling. I thought my research would be very relevant. My dissertation advisor essentially told me that since I was working as a congressional staffer, I should consider doing something on the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). It had not occurred to me to write about the CBC. So I ended up focusing my dissertation on the response of the CBC to the War on Drugs, with a specific focus on mandatory minimum laws for crack and powder cocaine. My career in Congress spanned from 1996 to 2004; I took time away in 2003 to focus on completing my dissertation, but returned in 2004 before leaving later that year to take my first tenure track position at a university, PVAMU. Focusing on the CBC was a very good decision as it allowed me to explore more deeply the complexities of Blacks in Congress. Further, it had been relatively recently (at the time of my doctoral studies) that the CBC had increased its numbers as a result of the creation of majority-minority districts following the 1990 U.S. census. As a result of the 1992 congressional elections, the 103rd Congress (1993-1994) saw the largest number of new Black members in history (Wasniewski 2008). The number of African Americans in Congress reached 50 by the 115th Congress and 57 in the current 116th, the highest number in history (Brudnick and Manning 2020).

The CBC was founded in 1971 during the 103rd Congress. It featured experienced members such as Charles Rangel (D-NY) and John Conyers (D-MI), who were joined by members from states that had not sent a Black member to Congress since the Reconstruction era. CBC members are tied together by the motto, “Black people have no permanent friends, no permanent enemies, just permanent interests.” At the same time, though, members each have their own constituencies that they are charged with representing. By studying these dynamics, I was able to make an important contribution to the literature.

Has the field changed since you started as an assistant professor? If so, how?

I read a portion of the Winter 2019 edition of The Legislative Scholar that featured Dr. Nadia Brown. The interviewer mentioned that out of the 101 authors published in Legislative Studies Quarterly over two issues, there were zero Black scholars. That is a very disappointing number, given that there is a rich body of literature about Black lawmakers. This work looks at how these lawmakers have addressed specific issues (Rivers 2012) and the types of campaign strategies African American candidates have used in an effort to get to Congress (Gillespie 2010). The literature on symbolic and substantive representation continues to be important as well (e.g., Tate 2003). Given the wide breadth of research on Black legislators, it is surprising that of the 101 articles, none were from Black scholars. If the case can be made that there were not enough submissions, then, perhaps, more of a presence should be made at conferences such as the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS).

I think it is imperative for LSQ to consider more articles on racial politics, as there is likely going to be a new generation of scholars picking up the themes of “the new Black politics” and “the end of Black politics,” in addition to racial gerrymandering and the ongoing impact of the Shelby v. Holder ruling. Research that explores an electoral strategy versus a protest strategy and whether or not Black lawmakers can be effective in achieving the goals of a broad African American constituency will be more important than ever. What does it mean to be a successful Black lawmaker and the balancing act between institutional challenges that bring about incremental change versus the need of activists to see immediate action and results? How will Black lawmakers address the demands of the Black Lives Matter Movement?

24 It is encouraging to see former APSA President Rogers M. Smith’s contribution to a recent publication of the National Review of Black Politics, entitled “NCOBPS and APSA: Building Partnerships in the 21st Century.”
protestors? As I write, there is no doubt in my mind that many Black scholars are thinking about this, but it will be discouraging if publications do not deem the work to be important. So the question of how has the field changed can be answered with the aforementioned LSQ data point, along with an acknowledgment of the work, some of which I cited above, that has been instrumental in understanding racial and legislative politics. Given this current era, the growth of the CBC, and the higher number of scholars studying these issues, the question has to be what needs to be done to reflect the growth in the number of Black contributors and the focus on Black politics. Just as I relied on a diverse group of scholars such as Tate (2003), Lublin (1997), Canon (1999), Swain (1993), and others for insight into the CBC and the creation of majority-minority districts in the early 2000s while working on my dissertation, there will be graduate students yearning for the type of research that will come out of this moment, coupled with race and redistricting matters given that this is a census year.

How was your experience trying to become a part of a field dominated by White male scholars?

I did my doctorate work at Howard University, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). So I was surrounded by Black professors for the first time in my entire years of education and exposed to conferences such as NCOBPS where I saw scholars doing incredible work. I saw people who wrote some of the books I was reading or had read prior to my graduate-level education and graduate students presenting work with very interesting and profound research questions. Given this background, I wondered who would not want read about the work these scholars are doing. It didn’t occur to me that there would be a limit to getting published given the level of work I saw, read, and was taught by outstanding faculty members. I also had the benefit of understanding the CBC as I worked for two CBC members during my time as a congressional staff member, and I interviewed a sizable portion of CBC members in 2003 as part of my dissertation research. During this time I interviewed the late Stephanie Tubbs Jones (D-OH). At the beginning of the interview she informed me that Richard Fenno had spent time interviewing her for his new book, Going Home: Black Representatives and Their Constituents. I’d read Fenno’s Home Style: House Members in Their Districts, which included 2 Black members, as I recall, and was an admirer of his work. He is another giant in our field who will be missed. So my mindset was that if Richard Fenno sees the importance of studying the roles and representational styles of Black members of Congress, than others would. (Writing this has brought back fond memories of that interview with Stephanie Tubbs Jones.)

My publication experiences have not been as broad as others. My teaching positions were at HBCUs, and it was (and is) important for me to include on my syllabi specific literature on Black members of Congress that includes a wide range of research dealing with the final vote on a bill, committee voting, symbolic and substantive representation, and historical backgrounds of those who made it to Congress—including Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.; Shirley Chisholm; and Barack Obama, the only sitting member of the CBC to become President of the United States. I taught at universities with a heavier teaching and service load, so I did not continue to publish as much as I would have liked in the field, but I continue to include the scholarship with a specific focus on the CBC alongside scholarship on Congress as a whole in my teaching and research. I have presented at conferences on the variation that exists among Black lawmakers, and I found these venues to have supportive environments. Nevertheless, I have heard from colleagues across the political science field about the difficulties of getting their research valued and published. Scholarship on race does not seem to be taken as seriously, based on many off-the-record conversations I have had about the challenges of getting published and tenure. I hope that as we are in a time where Black Lives Matter is being recognized across corporations and institutions, more people will see a need for research on Black lawmakers in the context of how democratic institutions can be used as a means to address systemic inequality facing Black and marginalized communities.

What advice do you have for up-and-coming scholars?

I would recommend that scholars interested in studying Black lawmakers attend conferences such as NCOBPS. This will provide opportunities to learn from the experiences of others, while also seeing the types of research being presented. This is also an excellent opportunity to network and to find potential co-authors. NCOBP has a publication, the National Review of Black Politics. Further, the American Political Science Association recently announced a diverse group of editors for the American Political Science Review. This is a positive direction in the field and provides the modeling needed for other publications to follow. It is also a positive direction for young scholars who may have found resistance to their work on racial politics. Networking is very important, and this includes maintaining contact with one’s graduate school cohorts. I would advise scholars to seek out co-authorship and edited books while working on peer-reviewed journal articles as a means to focus on at least getting something out there as the years go by. The service remains, the teaching remains, but ultimately it is the publications, even at universities with a 4-4 teaching load, that will bring about tenure.

In conclusion, Civil Rights giants John R. Lewis and C.T. Vivian died during the month of July 2020. Due to barriers to voting, Black political behavior has been by means other than voting for a significant portion of this country’s history. The Honorable John Lewis had served in the United States Congress since 1986. His life as a member of Congress...

25See here for more information: politicalsciencenow.com/apsa-announces-the-new-editorial-team-for-the-american-political-science-review/
should continue to be explored more deeply in both books and in journal articles. Hopefully in this era of awakening, studying racial politics will yield significant and real opportunities for Black scholars to make a substantial contribution to the field.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share my thoughts on this subject.

References


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BOOK REVIEWS

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*Losing Power: African Americans and Racial Polarization in Tennessee Politics* by Sekou Franklin and Ray Block

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It is no secret among political scientists that contemporary American political parties are deeply polarized. While America focuses on the issues of racial disparities in policing and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is intense pressure on the American government to act. However, many experts understand that in today’s polarized political environment, it is unlikely we will see drastic efforts to ameliorate these issues. Has polarization reduced our ability to solve racialized issues in America and thus achieve a racially equitable state?

In an effort to shed light on this question, authors Sekou Franklin and Ray Block Jr. undertake a thorough case study of the complex nature of racial polarization in Tennessee throughout most of the last century. In their book, *Losing Power: African Americans and Racial Polarization in Tennessee Politics*, they trace the origins of racial polarization and its effects on the nature of racial relations and policymaking. The first part of their theory focuses on the factors that contributed to racial polarization: partisan realignment, devolution of power from federal to state governments, and a failure of the party elites to resolve racial issues. The rest of their argument is about the detrimental effects this polarization has on creating a more racially equitable state. Their theory is useful to any scholar looking for a deeper understanding of the racial impacts and determinants of modern polarization trends.

The authors convincingly explore their theoretical expectations with a nice blend of qualitative and quantitative methods embedded in their case study. They begin with a deep history, using a series of primary and secondary sources, of the intersection of race and politics in Tennessee, which focuses on governmental actors, but also on the role of racial minorities and like-minded advocacy groups. Quantitatively, they examine public opinion data demonstrating the expanding gulf between voters of different racial identities. They also use bill sponsorships and network analysis to illustrate how polarization has led to a fragmentation of the bipartisan networks that unigrated racially progressive legislation in Tennessee. The final part of their book focuses on several different specific policy areas in Tennessee. It directly traces the impact polarization has had on the prevention of racially progressive policies, and in some cases, regression to less equitable solutions. Their
mixture of methods provides convincing results, demonstrating both the detrimental effect that racial polarization has on black political power and the determinants of polarization in Tennessee.

Losing Power moves our understanding of the relationship between polarization and race politics forward. The authors provide a clear theoretical framework to understand the racial underpinnings of polarization trends that will serve race and state politics scholars well. Future studies may want to reference this work as they seek to disentangle the causal pathways between race and polarization, as well as explore the exportability of their findings to a broader scale.

References


From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation in America by Walter C. Wilson

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From Inclusion to Influence seeks to answer the research question, “How and why does the ethnicity of Latino Members of Congress enhance or improve the quality of substantive representation Latinos receive?” This query is of growing importance, as Latinos are on pace to become the largest ethnic minority population in the United States. It is also an unsettled interrogatory within the representation literature. Previous scholarship indicates that Latino lawmakers do behave differently than non-Latinos, but the efficacy of those actions in creating influence for the larger population is unclear.

Author Walter Clark Wilson concludes that ethnicity does matter. Wilson provides evidence that Latino congresspersons are more likely than Blacks and Whites to empathize with Latinos, advocate for their interests and policy preferences, and represent Latino viewpoints in public discourse. Additionally, Wilson proposes that Latino lawmakers provide a different type of substantive representation—one not solely demonstrated by achieving policy outcomes. Wilson conceptualizes substantive representation in terms of “small victories,” which incrementally change policy, broaden the deliberative discourse, and raise the salience of Latino issues. These small victories, though often latent, are seen by Wilson as substantive outcomes. This view is given credence through legislator interview quotes, which indicate that policy passage (while ideal) is not always the primary goal of a Latino lawmaker during the legislative process. In some cases, articulating Latino perspectives, blocking bad policy, or introducing good policy for future passage may be the best-case scenario.

The work addresses the previous literature which found mixed results in determining if Latino members of Congress provide better substantive representation to their consanguineous constituents than non-Latino congresspersons. The author proposes that previous mixed results were of a twofold cause. The first cause was an overreliance on roll-call votes in measuring responsiveness. The second cause relates to the narrow way in which previous literature conceptualized substantive representation. Wilson’s work incorporates a variety of responsiveness measures, including public and internal communications, speeches, website language, press releases, congressional committee activity, bill sponsorships, and diversity in congressional staff employment.

Despite being hampered in achieving policy outcomes, the author finds that Latino lawmakers more consistently advocate for Latino interests and perspectives than their White or Black counterparts. Wilson claims Latino lawmakers have an essential connection, and more empathetic perception of their co-ethnic constituents. In a variety of methodological tests, across various political venues, this study found Latino lawmaker ethnicity to be the most reliable explanatory variable for predicting support for Latino interests.

Readers should consider Wilson’s findings in full context. Despite the observed differences in Latino lawmaker behavior, Black and White politicians are also found to provide similar responsiveness as the size of their Latino constituency increases. The work’s analysis of congressional press releases and websites found that growth in the size of Latino populations correlates with enhanced Black and White lawmaker advocacy of Latino interests. The author suggests that political expediency and re-election concerns are the primary motivators in these instances, rather than a desire to provide ethno-specific substantive representation. Wilson claims that what sets Latino lawmaker behavior apart is the motivating perception they hold of Latino Americans as compatriots in search of greater influence in society.

Wilson leveraged a 2007 APSA Congressional Fellowship in Congress to complete a significant portion of his field research. The book is replete with accounts of political activity and legislator perspectives. From the outset, Wilson seeks to be culturally competent in his qualitative analysis, by recognizing his status as a White man observing the behavior and interactions of Latinos and persons of Hispanic heritage. He takes care to gather data from diverse sources and draw conclusions by incorporating the nuanced and culturally-specific viewpoints of his research subjects. Another strength of this work can be found in the clear illustrations and figures, which make the book accessible to non-academic readers. Though data rich, the book keeps a steady pace, by intertwining relevant narrative accounts with
the methodological information.

*From Inclusion to Influence* would be useful for scholars seeking to better understand ethnic marginalization, barriers to the policymaking process, and nuances in political behavior among Latino and non-Latino co-partisans. It provides clearly discernible ways in which Latino members of Congress work to provide symbolic, descriptive, and substantive representation to American Latinos. Wilson paints a narrative which describes these forms of inclusion as steppingstones to influence and ultimately political incorporation, defined as a state at which members of an identity group see themselves as a legitimate and effective part of the polity. Wilson venerates incorporation as the zenith of citizenship in U.S. society, while enumerating the difficulties Latinos face to reach that apex. Finally, the book challenges the discipline to consider the way in which we view Latino political success, encouraging scholars to broaden the scope of substantive gains beyond policy outcomes and incorporating other measures. Wilson leads us to question if “policy passage” is too narrow a definition of success, especially for marginalized populations for whom symbolic successes may be just as valuable.

**References**


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**Gaining Voice: The Causes and Consequences of Black Representation in the American States** by Christopher J. Clark

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In *Gaining Voice*, Christopher J. Clark extensively documents and explains the causes and consequences of the election of Black state legislators in the United States. Whereas accounts of representation often focus on either descriptive or substantive representation, with a remit at either the elite or citizen level, Clark charts an impressive multifaceted approach that does all of the above, elucidating how demographics and institutions affect the collective presence of Black state legislators and the implications for “the implementation of black interest policies” (p. 7) and Black political involvement. *Gaining Voice* is an award-winning book with important theoretical and empirical contributions that will interest scholars of representation, racial and ethnic politics, and state politics, while offering an accessible primer on Black representation in the United States.

The central argument of *Gaining Voice* is that Black descriptive and substantive representation are not merely products of the presence of African Americans in society at large or in legislatures. Black presence does not linearly parlay into Black representation, but rather, is mediated by institutional characteristics (as well as demographic factors). In 1971, just 198 African Americans served as state legislators; by 2011, that figure had risen to 622 Black state legislators. Although there has been a generally upward trend across the states, four states (Maine, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota) did not elect a single Black state legislator during the years under observation (1971-2011). And in most states, the number of Black state legislators serving remained in the single digits as late as 2011. *Gaining Voice* explains the causes of such variation across state legislatures and over time, and the consequences for representative democracy.

Clark has compiled a treasure trove of insightful data on Black representation, including elite- and citizen-level data spanning population, election, Black caucuses, education and welfare policy, turnout, political interest, voting laws, and more, from 1966-2011. Clark advances two state-level measures that stand to enrich state politics research—Black seat share and Black representation ratio, which measure the proportion of seats held by Black state legislators and how that share fares relative to each state’s Black population, respectively. Those two measures are dependent and then independent variables that assess the causes of collective Black descriptive representation, and its implications for the substantive representation, political involvement, and public opinion of African Americans. This collective approach deviates from a tendency in the literature to focus on the election of or governance by individual politicians; instead, Clark’s emphasis on collective representation at the state level speaks both to racial in-group dynamics and to the salience of state-level demographic and institutional characteristics. Throughout the book, Clark devotes close attention to the causal mechanisms underlying his theoretical claims and thoroughly explicates the literature, logic, and measurement of control variables derived largely from the state politics literature. He carefully discusses and situates his findings vis-à-vis the extant literature, with results accessibly relayed through tables, plots, and detailed references to illustrative states.

Each of the first six chapters stands alone quite well, with Chapter 1 offering a comprehensive overview of research on Black representation. In Chapter 2, Clark draws on literatures on representation and racial threat to reveal a curvilinear relationship between Black presence in the population and the Black representation ratio. The states with the highest Black seat share are indeed those with the largest populations of African Americans. Yet proportionality between presence in the population and the legislature (“parity”) drops off as the Black population approximates around 21% of the state population (p. 44). Clark suggests that at this point, the size of the Black population poses a perceived threat to the status quo, triggering efforts to suppress votes.
by and for African Americans. The analyses in Chapter 2 also demonstrate the need to go beyond the idea of “demographics as destiny,” with the percent of the population that identifies as Latino/a/x (+) and legislative professionalism (+) also influencing the Black seat share and Black representation ratio. Chapter 3 explains how gains in Black descriptive representation prompted state legislators in 32 states to create state legislative Black caucuses (1966-1986) to shore up and coordinate their growing influence and in turn enhance representation of Black interests. Clark demonstrates that in states with a critical mass of Black state legislators (at least 17), state legislative Black caucuses are more likely to exist than not, and that Democratic party seat share (+) and the number of standing committees (-) in a legislature influence the prospects of Black caucus formation, independent of the number of Black state legislators (+).

Chapters 4 through 6 shift to using Black descriptive representation as an independent variable, and evaluating its effect on education and social welfare policy, Black political involvement, and Black public opinion toward electoral reforms. Chapter 4 shows that the effect of Black descriptive representation on substantive representation is contingent upon the issue area. Although gains in Black seat share increase education spending, those gains are also associated with more restrictive eligibility for welfare benefits. Similar to the racial threat argument treated in Chapter 2, the negative effect of Black seat share on social welfare policies is indicative of backlash faced by Black state legislators. Chapter 5, co-authored with Ray Block, demonstrates that gains in Black descriptive representation can in turn augment the political involvement of African Americans, with Black seat share exercising a positive effect on Black political interest and turnout, and the Black representation ratio having a positive effect on political proselytizing by African Americans. In Chapter 6, Clark turns to electoral reforms, examining how Black descriptive representation influences support among African Americans for reforms governing voting rights. The argument builds on the findings of the preceding chapters to elucidate how Black state legislators engender support for electoral reforms that enable African Americans to exercise their right to vote. Clark finds that support for progressive electoral reforms and opposition to prohibitive electoral reforms is not driven by respondent race alone, but rather, is mediated by Black seat share. In states where more Black state legislators have won election, African Americans may have more to lose from prohibitive electoral reforms that suppress the vote in racially disparate ways. Together, the analyses presented in Gaining Voice methodically show why and how Black representation matters and the conditions under which it can be enhanced.

Although the breadth of data applied in and comprehensive scope of the book’s analyses leave little room for evidence gathered through interviews or field observations, the tradeoff pays off. Clark has accomplished a compelling, thorough exploration of the descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation of African Americans through state legislative politics.

References

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Tiffany D. Barnes is an Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Kentucky and affiliated faculty with the Gender and Women’s Studies Program and Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies Program. Her research is in the field of Comparative Politics with an emphasis on comparative political institutions–namely legislatures, Latin America, and gender and politics. She employs both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to examine how institutions shape the political behavior of citizens and elites. Her book, *Gendering Legislative Behavior: Institutional Constraints and Collaboration*, (Cambridge University Press 2016) won the Alan Rosenthal Prize from the Legislative Studies Section of the American Political Science Association in 2017. Her other peer-reviewed work appears in journals such as the *American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, Comparative Political Studies, Political Research Quarterly, Politics & Gender, Election Law Journal*, and *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. In 2018 she was awarded the Emerging Scholar Award from the Legislative Studies Section of the American Political Science Association and in 2017 she was honored with the Early Career Award from the Midwest Women’s Caucus for Political Science.

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Matthew Hayes is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Rice University. His research examines how American politics shapes, and is shaped by, racial identity. His work asks whether race affects what citizens want from the government and whether the presence of Black elected officials affects our beliefs about political institutions. He is also interested in Black politicians’ pathways to power and how Black and White legislators work to represent their constituents. He has published 11 articles and book chapters on these topics, including in the *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, and *Political Behavior*. 

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Renita Miller earned her Masters and Ph.D. from Rice University and her Bachelors in Business Administration from Baylor University. Currently she is the Associate Dean of Access, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Graduate School at Princeton University, where she oversees efforts to support and enhance the diversity and inclusion of the graduate student body. She has held former academic administrative positions as Director of Studies at Princeton and Dean of Berkeley College at Yale University. In addition, she has taught at Texas A&M, Rice, Princeton, and Yale University and was a research fellow for the Project of Equity, Representation, and Governance at Texas A&M and the Kinder Institute of Urban Research at Rice University. Her research focuses on understanding the influence of race and gender in political institutions, with a particular focus on political rhetoric, deliberation, and leadership within state legislatures.

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Kevin Roach
Kevin Roach is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. His research has broadly followed two paths. First, in his dissertation, he has explored the role of descriptive representation at the state and local levels in reducing racial disparities in a variety of policy outcomes. Second, he has focused on the intersection of race and policing, with a specific focus on low-level policing interactions, namely traffic stops. His work has focused on the use of big data, and conducting original data collection for descriptive representation at the local level. His work has been accepted in the Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics and the Policy Studies Journal, and he has multiple articles currently under review. His dissertation will be completed in May 2021.

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Jamil Scott is a scholar of gender and race and ethnicity politics, with an emphasis on understanding political behavior and representation. She was a McNair Scholar as an undergraduate student at the University of Maryland-College Park, and she studied at Michigan State University, where she received her Ph.D in 2018. Her research has been supported by the King-Chavez Parks Future Faculty Fellowship and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Scott is currently an Assistant Professor of Government at Georgetown University. Her work has been published in American Politics Research as well as Politics, Groups, and Identities.

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Valeria Sinclair-Chapman is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Purdue University. Her work focuses on American political institutions, legislative politics, minority representation in Congress, and minority political participation. Broadly construed, her research examines how previously marginalized groups gain inclusion in the American political system. She is author or co-author of several journal articles and book chapters, as well as an award-winning book, Countervailing Forces in African-American Political Activism, 1973-1994 (Cambridge University Press, 2006). Her legislative studies research projects examine how legislators represent the interests of racial and ethnic minorities in Congress at various stages of the legislative process. Sinclair-Chapman is a co-editor for the discipline’s premiere journal, the American Political Science Review.

Paru Shah

Paru Shah is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She received her Ph.D. from Rice University in 2006. Her research focuses most broadly on race, ethnicity, and politics; state and local politics; and public policy. Her most recent work focuses on candidate emergence, supply, and success, particularly for candidates of color and women candidates. With co-authors Eric Gonzalez Juenke (Michigan State University) and Bernard Fraga (Emory University), she has embarked on the Candidate Characteristics Cooperative, a database that provide the most complete and comprehensive demographic and electoral information of state legislative candidates. Her research has appeared in the American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics, and Political Research Quarterly, among other journals.

Kristen Smole

Kristen Smole is a Political Science graduate student at Purdue University. Her research focuses on symbolic politics and the policy implications of symbols. In summer 2020, she was awarded the Purdue University College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Masters Non-Thesis Award, recognizing her work analyzing the politics of Confederate monuments. She is also the recent recipient of the Clare De Cleene Scholarship supporting students working on political campaigns. Kristen is also currently serving as an editorial assistant for the American Political Science Review.

Liesel Spangler

Liesel Spangler is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political Science at University of California, San Diego, and the Meta-analysis Senior Analyst at the Analyst Institute. As a political scientist, her work relates to racial and ethnic politics, elite political behavior, representation, and immigration, specifically focusing on political responsiveness in an increasingly diverse electorate.
Artemesia Stanberry
Artemesia Stanberry received her doctorate in political science from Howard University and her bachelor’s degree from the University of South Alabama. She has several years of congressional experience. While obtaining her master’s degree from The George Washington University, she began her congressional experience, which spanned 1996 to 2004. She has had the opportunity to work for five members of congress, two of whom were members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). In addition, she served two terms as president of the Congressional Black Associates, a congressional staff organization dedicated to community service, education, and networking for congressional staff and organizations on and off Capitol Hill. She also served two terms as Second Vice President of the Congressional Legislative Staff Association, the largest Capitol Hill staff organization devoted to planning intellectual, social, and networking opportunities for congressional staff. She is currently an associate professor at North Carolina Central University, where she teaches American Government, Black Politics, the U.S. Congress, and special topics courses in the politics of race and crime. Her research areas include the politics of crime and punishment, particularly sentencing policies and how certain criminal justice related items get onto the agenda of the U.S. Congress, the War on Drugs and the collateral damage that results, intersectionality (race, gender and class), and southern racial politics.

Walter Wilson
Walter Clark Wilson is associate professor of political science at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he teaches courses on American politics and research design. He joined the faculty in 2008 after graduating with his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Oklahoma’s Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center. He was a 2006-2007 APSA Congressional Fellow in the office of Congressman Charles Gonzalez, where he conducted observational and interview-based research on Latino representation. His primary research agenda focuses on the congressional representation of Latinos and other under-represented groups. His other areas of interest include congressional elections and the impact of linguistic media ecosystems on political attitudes among Latinos. He is author of From Inclusion to Influence: Latino Representation in Congress and Latino Political Incorporation in America and co-editor of The Roads to Congress 2018: American Elections in the Trump Era.

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Catherine Wineinger is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Western Washington University and a 2019-2020 APSA Congressional Fellow in the office of Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib. She received her Ph.D. from Rutgers University, where she was also a graduate research assistant at the Center for American Women and Politics. Her research explores political representation at the intersection of gender, race, and partisanship. Her first book, Gendering the GOP: Intraparty Politics and Republican Women’s Representation in Congress, is under contract with Oxford University Press. Her work has been supported by the William A. Steiger Fund for Legislative Studies, the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, the APSA Fund for Latino Scholarship, and the Dirksen Congressional Center. She is also a recipient of the Carrie Chapman Catt Prize for Research on Women and Politics; the WPSA Betty Nesvold Women and Politics Best Paper Award; and the 2020 Best Dissertation Award from APSA’s Section on Women, Gender, and Politics.
Kristin N. Wylie

Kristin N. Wylie is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at James Madison University, and received her Ph.D. from the Department of Government at the University of Texas (2012). Her research examines how electoral rules, political parties, and constituencies interact to affect the representativeness and accountability of democracy. In her first book, *Party Institutionalization and Women’s Representation in Democratic Brazil* (Cambridge University Press 2018), Wylie explains how weakly institutionalized and male-dominant parties interact to undermine descriptive representation in Brazil. The book illustrates how women leaders in Brazil’s more institutionalized parties can enable white and Afro-descendant women aspirants to navigate the masculinized terrain of formal politics. It was awarded the 2019 Alan Rosenthal Prize. Wylie is currently developing a second research agenda exploring women’s political empowerment beyond the legislature, with an emphasis on popular movements for political reform, and connections between women’s participation in social movements, electoral politics, and gender equity policy initiatives. Her research has been published in *Politics & Gender, Politics, Groups, & Identities, International Feminist Journal of Politics,* and *European Journal of Politics & Gender.*