Government 94rp

WHO GETS REPRESENTED?

Spring 2021 Syllabus

Professor Daniel M. Smith (he/him)
Day/Time: TBD
Location: Virtual (Zoom), see Canvas for information
Office hours: Mondays, 5:30-6:30 pm; or by appointment
Email: danielmsmith@fas.harvard.edu
Website: https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/85160

Overview:
Who serves in Congress and other legislatures, and do the backgrounds of politicians affect how policies are decided and which policies get adopted? This seminar explores the political representation of different groups in society, and the consequences of representation for policy outcomes. Topics include the representation of women, racial and ethnic minorities, geographic regions, class interests, LGBTQ+, religious groups, and other social divisions.

Format:
Each week, we will cover a different topic in the study of representation. For each topic, the reading list will distinguish between two types of readings: (1) required and (2) recommended. Type (1) readings will form the basis of the seminar discussions. All students should read them carefully and critically before class. Type (2) readings are additional readings of broad theoretical or empirical importance, which may prove useful to students planning to write a response paper related to a given topic.

Readings may be adjusted over the course of the semester at my discretion. All required readings will be available on the Canvas site.

Each participant will be assigned responsibility for summarizing a fixed number of readings over the course of the semester (the number depends on enrollment). Prior to each meeting, these brief summaries (bullet points of the main argument, method, findings, and implications) must be
posted to a Slack channel that will be created for the course. The summaries will aide preparation for discussion and review.

Everyone is expected to participate actively in discussion. Prior to each meeting, each participant will be required to post 3 to 5 questions or discussion points to the Slack channel (about any or all readings for the week). These discussion points should aim to draw out interesting connections, raise questions, or point out gaps in the arguments of the readings. What theoretical assumptions do the readings make about actors, institutions, incentives, etc.? Are these assumptions justified? What are the causal mechanisms explored? Do we believe the results? What do the authors leave out or fail to explain? How might the study be extended, or the argument re-tested, with new data, variables, or case settings? You are free to get creative with these points, and we will draw on them in group discussion.

Course objectives:
By the end of this semester, I hope you will be able to:

• Understand the basic theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of representation, and limitations to these approaches.
• Understand and critically assess common research approaches and designs used to study the effects of descriptive representation on substantive policy outcomes and political behavior.
• Generate original ideas for studying representation with new theories or empirics, which may form the basis for a senior thesis or other research goal.

Grades:
You are expected to keep up with assigned readings and to attend and actively participate in each meeting. In addition, your grade will be based on several writing assignments. The components of the grade will be weighted as follows:

• 70%: Discussion/participation (including summaries and discussion points)
• 30%: Response papers (3 during semester, each 10% of grade)

Response papers:
You must submit a minimum of three response papers over the course of the semester. These are short papers (3-5 pages max, double-spaced), which must be submitted to me by email by 8:00 am on the day of our class meeting. Your response papers must do at least one of the following: (1) offer a synthesis and critical review of the week’s readings; or (2) use the readings to raise thoughtful question(s) that would be valuable for discussion, and offer your ideas for how to answer them. In the weeks in which you write a response paper, you are especially encouraged to read the recommended readings.

One model (but not the only one) for these papers is to respond to recent events in the news that are related to the week’s topic, and offer some theoretical and/or empirical context for understanding them based on the readings. At least one response paper must be turned in on a date of your choosing by Week 5.
**Accommodations for students with disabilities:**
Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with me by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the inability to respond in a timely manner.

**Academic integrity policy:**
You are expected to maintain high standards of academic integrity in your work for this and all courses you take at Harvard. You are encouraged to discuss the material and exchange ideas with your classmates. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own original research and writing, and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc.), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

**SCHEDULE AND READINGS**

**Overview:**

1. January 25: The concept of representation and how to study it
2. February 1: Electoral rules and representation
3. February 8: Parties and candidate selection processes
4. February 15: NO MEETING (President’s Day)
5. February 22: Class and social background
6. March 1: NO MEETING (Wellness Day)
7. March 8: Geographic representation
8. March 15: Gender representation I: how women get elected
9. March 22: Gender representation II: substantive outcomes
10. March 29: Representation of racial and ethnic minorities
11. April 5: Quotas and reserved seats
12. April 12: Intersectionality and other considerations
13. April 19: Aristocracy, dynasties, and the entrenchment of elites
14. April 26: Climbing the ranks into executive offices

**Week 1 (January 25): The concept of representation and how to study it**

*What is descriptive representation? Why is it normatively desirable? What are the potential tradeoffs between achieving it and achieving other goals or values?*

*How have scholars gone about studying descriptive representation? What are some of the methodological challenges to understanding representation as an “outcome” (dependent variable) or a “treatment” (independent variable)?*
**Required:**

- Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. University of California Press. Ch. 1, pp. 1–13; Ch. 4, pp. 60–91; Ch. 6, pp. 112–143.

**Recommended:**


---

**Week 2 (February 1): Electoral rules and representation**

*Is there a relationship between electoral institutions and the share of women, ethnic minority groups, or other social identities represented in legislatures? What are the mechanisms underpinning this relationship?*

*What role do parties, candidates, and voters play in the process?*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 3 (February 8): Parties and candidate selection processes**

Within a given electoral system context, do party institutions for selecting candidates have any independent effect on patterns of descriptive representation?

Even given a set of candidate selection rules, does the composition of the “selectorate” within parties make a difference, and why?

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Week 4 (February 15): NO MEETING (President’s Day)**
**Week 5 (February 22): Class and social background**

*Why do politicians tend to be so much richer than their constituents? When are the poor mobilized to participate in elections? How do voters perceive working-class backgrounds in candidates?*

*Does the class or social background of a politician influence how he or she behaves in office, or do politicians simply act in the interests of their constituents?*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Week 6 (March 1): NO MEETING (Wellness Day)**

**Week 7 (March 8): Geographic representation**

*Do institutions have any influence on the representation of geographic interests? Do voters prefer candidates with strong local ties to their communities?*

*Are politicians with local connections more responsive to their hometowns, or favor them with redistributive benefits?*
**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 8 (March 15): Gender representation I: how women get elected**

*Are voters biased against female candidates? How do voters’ preferences condition which types of women enter politics and how they campaign?*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**


**Week 9 (March 22): Gender representation II: substantive outcomes**

*Do women behave differently from men once in office? If so, why and in what ways?*

*How does gender shape patterns in legislative behavior and debate?*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**

Week 10 (March 29): Representation of racial and ethnic minorities

How can representation be achieved for racial and ethnic minorities who, by definition, do not usually account for a majority of voters in districts? Does descriptive representation increase substantive representation in tangible ways?

How and when do immigrants gain representation?

Required:

Recommended:

Week 11 (April 5): Quotas and reserved seats

Quotas are an increasingly common institutional reform to bring about representation of previously excluded social groups—when and why are they adopted, and what effect do they have?

Required:


**Recommended:**


**Week 12 (April 12): Intersectionality and other considerations**

*The concept of intersectionality recognizes that individuals may belong to multiple social groups or categorizations—do these affect voters’ behavior, candidates’ behavior, or other political outcomes? Do other identities, such as religious beliefs, cross-pressure politicians?*

*How do voters view LGBTQ+ candidates for office?*

**Required:**


**Recommended:**


**Week 13 (April 19): Aristocracy, dynasties, and the entrenchment of elites**

*Are all citizens born with an equal opportunity for a political future? When and why do members of political dynasties dominate elections and power? What are the potential consequences of elite perpetuation?*

**Required:**

**Recommended:**

**Week 14 (April 26): Climbing the ranks into executive offices**

*The apex of power lies with party leaders and executive offices, yet descriptive representation is slow to reach these positions—how do institutions influence the selection of leaders, and what factors work against underrepresented groups in gaining promotion to higher offices?*
Required:


Recommended: