Representative Bureaucracy and Public Service Performance: Where, Why and How Does Representativeness Work?

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Abstract

As issues of social equity and inclusiveness have become increasingly salient to political discourses, they are also more strongly emphasized as dimensions of effective public service delivery. As a consequence, representative bureaucracy has become more significant to the study of public management. The theory of representative bureaucracy assumes that several positive effects of representation in public organizations, such as perceptions of accessibility to power for groups in society and reflection of group preferences in bureaucratic decision making, will boost organizational performance. While previous empirical studies have examined this performance claim of representative bureaucracy theory, this paper argues that to gain a full understanding of representative bureaucracy academic inquiry should be devoted to the role of context, both theoretically and empirically. To substantiate this the paper reviews the literature on contextual factors salient to representative bureaucracy and theorizes on how these factors condition the impact of bureaucratic representation on public policy and performance.

Introduction

Governments have long been concerned with improving the representativeness of government bureaucracies. As a model employer, considerations of equity and fairness were intrinsically valued and deemed important for government per se. They were not generally considered as an aspect of public service performance, particularly during the last three decades dominated by the business logic of New Public Management. Although efficiency remains a guiding principle of current public service delivery, equity and inclusiveness are increasingly emphasized as dimensions of effective public service delivery (Boyne 2002). In order to ensure that the needs and preferences of diverse social groups are reflected in administrative decision-making, governments are increasingly seeking a representative public administration (OECD 2015).

The assumption that representative bureaucracies are effective bureaucracies has been at the core of representative bureaucracy theory since the seventies. Representative bureaucracy theory asserts that because bureaucrats share social demographic identities with citizens, they also share values that can play a role in bureaucratic decisions and affect the distribution of outputs across a nation's social groups. The salient demographic identities have varied across time and contexts with most prominent attention paid to gender, ethnicity, and race. The theory of representative bureaucracy assumes that several positive effects of representation in public organizations, such as perceptions of accessibility to power for groups in society and reflection of group preferences in bureaucratic decision making, will affect a group's willingness to coproduce organizational outcomes and boost organizational performance.

Central to the representative bureaucracy performance claim has been the distinction between passive representation – whether the bureaucratic workforce looks like the population with regard to its social demographic characteristics - and active representation - public officials in their daily work actively advocate for (disadvantaged) segments of the population from which they emanate (Mosher 1968). Both passive and active representation may affect the commitment of groups to public policy and perceptions of the state as inclusive of all segments in society, thereby increasing not only the legitimacy of governments, but also the effectiveness of bureaucracies and, hence, their performance.

Previous empirical studies examined the relationships among passive representation, active representation and organizational performance in order to test the performance claim of representative bureaucracy theory. Most studies link passive and active representation and seek to establish the mediating factors and conditions that lead administrators to adopt a minority representative role (e.g. Selden, Brudney and Kellough 1998; Meier and Bohte 2001). In addition to studies on the 'micro foundations' of representation, other studies examined the relationship

between representativeness and organizational performance on a collective level based on statistical analyses of aggregated quantitative data (e.g. Andrews et al. 2005; Andrews et al. 2014). Only a few studies have examined the symbolic effects of representativeness on (citizen's perceptions of) organizational performance (e.g. the experimental study by Riccucci et al. (2014) and non-experimentally Andrews et al. (2005)). Although previous research has unequivocally showed that discretion is the key condition for translating passive into active representation, evidence on other mediating and moderating factors is scattered, if not diffuse and mixed.

Recent studies suggest that to gain a full understanding of representative bureaucracy more attention should be devoted to the role of context. One review of the literature shows that over time and across national contexts representative bureaucracy has been used as an answer to very different social, political and administrative problems (Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010). Similarly, Meier and Morton (2015) bring a cross-national perspective to the study of representative bureaucracy arguing that the identities that are salient and how representativeness unfolds institutionally varies significantly across countries. Because empirical studies have primarily – but not exclusively (see among others Smith and Fernandez 2010 for an exception)– focused on street level service organizations, such as education and police, Schröter and Von Maravic (2015) called for extension of both theory and empirical work to different kinds of organizational settings. Since different settings may imply different meanings of representation and different conceptualizations of performance, the relationship between representation and performance might also be affected. Comparative research, both across countries and organizational settings, is needed to bring representative bureaucracy theory to a next level.

This paper outlines such a research agenda by theorizing on how context conditions the impact of bureaucratic representation on public policy and performance. The paper integrates two strands of literature into the study of representative bureaucracy that so far have been largely disconnected. First, the rich literature on diversity management contributes to the understanding of representative bureaucracy with its focus on how diverse work groups affect attitudinal and behavioral work outcomes within the organization (Groeneveld 2015; Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010; Selden and Selden 2001; Milliken and Martins 1996; Ely and Thomas 2001; Van Knippenberg, et al. 2004; Pitts 2005). Second, the public management and performance literature needs to be explicitly linked to issues of representativeness in the wake of the 'new public management' movement (Andrews et al. 2005; Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010). These two literatures are integrated with an explicitly comparative management perspective on representative bureaucracy (see Von Maravic et al. 2013; Peters et al. 2015).

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section briefly summarizes the theory of representative bureaucracy and its assumption that representativeness will boost public service

performance. Then we will briefly explain what it implies to 'contextualize' research on representative bureaucracy. The paper then proceeds with an overview of internal and external contextual factors that would affect the meaning and impact of representativeness. After having explained the salience of these factors and their direct effects, we delve deeper into possible cross level indirect and interactive effects. We conclude by outlining avenues for future research,

Theory of Representative Bureaucracy: Key Concepts

Kingsley (1944), in his book on the British civil service, coined the term representative bureaucracy. Contrary to the current common conception of representative bureaucracy as a bureaucracy which is broadly representative of society, however, he used the concept for an administration which reflects the dominant classes in society. While Kingsley's conception of representation essentially referred to a reflection of the power structures in society, it was soon followed by a definition of representative bureaucracy that can actually be considered its opposite. Since the seventies representative bureaucracy has commonly been understood as a bureaucracy representative of the population as a whole, including disadvantaged or minority groups (Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010). Studies started to focus on social demographic characteristics with most attention being given to gender, ethnicity, and race, rather than to social economic characteristics such as class and education.

Representative bureaucracy theory contends that bureaucrats' social demographic background is important, since it affects their values which in turn influence administrative decision making. Two assumptions are underlying the theory. The first assumption is that through socialization processes individuals with the same social demographic background will share certain values (Long 1952; Meier 1975; Mosher 1968). The second assumption is that bureaucrats will act consistent with their values and 'seek to maximize the values that are salient to [them] at the time of the decision' (Meier and Morton 2015: 99). If a bureaucracy is representative of the public it serves, the logic continues, then its decisions will more strongly reflect the values of that public. By being more responsive to the preferences and needs of the public, representativeness is assumed to contribute to the performance and legitimacy of a bureaucracy (Long 1952; Selden, Brudney and Kellough 1998).

Central to this line of reasoning is Mosher's (1968) distinction between passive and active representation. Passive representation refers to the composition of a bureaucracy's workforce with regard to social demographic characteristics. This passive representation may affect organizational outcomes directly because of symbolic effects of descriptive representativeness. A bureaucracy which mirrors the composition of the population it serves increases the likelihood that citizens will identify with bureaucrats and in turn may boost

citizen-clients' trust in bureaucracy and their inclination to cooperate with bureaucratic initiatives (Riccucci, Van Ryzin and Lavena 2014; Thomas 1998; Wilkins and Williams 2008). Representativeness may also serve more generally as a signal of the accessibility of public sector jobs and careers which is deemed important as it implies accessibility to power for social groups (Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010).

Although some studies provide evidence for the symbolic effects of representativeness (e.g. Riccucci et al. 2014), most studies of representative bureaucracy outcomes focus on the translation of passive into active representation. Passive representation turns into active representation if bureaucrats adopt a minority representative role and make decisions that reflect their own values (Selden, Brudney and Kellough 1998). The assumption is that bureaucrats' behavior rather than their background characteristics per se will affect citizens' responses. A closer look at the literature on active representation reveals that several mechanisms can be distinguished that would account for different substantive effects of active representation: bureaucrats (1) *directly* affect outcomes that benefit the minority group being represented, (2) *indirectly* affect outcomes that benefit this group because they influence minority clients to change their behavior, for instance by inducing their actual demand for a service or their willingness to coproduce, (3) *indirectly* affect outcomes that benefit this group because they influence nonminority colleagues to change their behavior, or (4) *indirectly* affect outcomes by influencing organizational policy. These substantive effects on their turn will affect overall public service performance (Meier and Morton 2015; Schröter and Von Maravic 2015).

Since the nineties a managerial approach to representative bureaucracy has received increasing attention, both in scholarship and in practice, and added a stronger focus on organizational performance to the studies of representative bureaucracy (Groeneveld and Van de Walle 2010). Because representative bureaucracies are generally more diverse, insights from diversity management literature could contribute to the representative bureaucracy literature; and they increasingly are incorporated in studies on representative bureaucracy (Selden and Selden 2001; Andrews and Ashworth 2015). Diversity management literature centers on the business case of diversity based on an economic logic for representation rather than a normative one. Diverse social groups within bureaucracy can contribute to organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Diversity management literature also adds the group as a level of analysis centering on social-psychological processes within work groups affecting collective decision making (Milliken and Martins 1996; Van Knippenberg, et al. 2004).

In sum, representative bureaucracy theory contends that representativeness improves public service performance through several mechanisms, both at the individual and at the

collective level.[1] Active representation may improve client relations and client satisfaction with services directly or indirectly through effects on the behavior of co-workers or clients. Symbolic representation may boost trust in government bureaucracy and clients' intentions to cooperate. Employees' work motivation and productive behavior as well as the quality of organizational output may be enhanced by effective management of diverse work groups. These different mechanisms and well as the different dimensions of performance indicate that the meaning and salience of representative bureaucracy will vary across organizational settings (Schröter and Von Maravic 2015).

To improve our understanding of how representativeness may work out for organizational performance we should approach it as a multilevel problem, as depicted in figure 1.
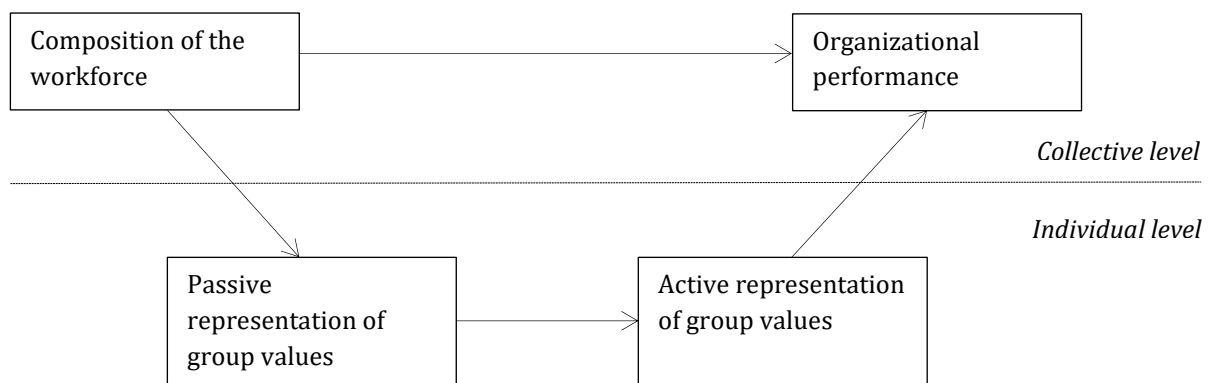

Figure 1: Representative Bureaucracy and Performance: a Multilevel Research Problem

The Role of Context

Whether the presence of minority groups in a bureaucracy affects administrative decision making and public service performance is dependent on the institutional context. So far, only a handful of representative bureaucracy studies have explicitly paid attention to how the institutional context conditions the link between representativeness and public service performance (e.g. Keiser et al. 2002). Research on representative bureaucracy has included several conditions for the translation of passive into active representation though. The need for bureaucratic discretion as a precondition for representative behavior has been confirmed in many studies. Other studies have pointed at other conditions, such as the salience of a minority

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[1]Also the stronger focus on the street level compared to the attention for the impact of representativeness at the supervisor level should be addressed.

group identity to a policy issue (e.g. Dolan 2000), pre-entry versus organizational socialization (e.g. Wilkins and Williams 2008) and proximity to client groups (Andrews, et al. 2014), that influence whether and to what extent representativeness fuels work processes and their outcomes. What these conditions have in common is that they can be considered situational or contextual factors that shape individual bureaucrats' values and behavior. Both empirical evidence and theoretical reasoning on how context affects representative bureaucracy and its outcomes, however, are scarce and scattered. Similarly, the role of context in the diversity management literature is also understudied (Groeneveld 2015; Guillaume, Dawson, Otaye-Ebede, Woods and West 2015).

We believe that representative bureaucracy theory can be moved forward by systematically account for contextual effects. Incorporating context would imply a specification of the situational conditions that affect the various processes that transform representation into bureaucratic outcomes. This paper presents a first start of such a contextualized theory of representative bureaucracy. With Johns (2006: 386) we define context as the 'situational *opportunities* and *constraints* that affect the *occurrence* and *meaning* of organizational behavior as well as functional *relationships* between variables' [emphasis added]. Organizational behavior refers to diverse levels of analysis, both at the level of individual bureaucrats and at the collective level of organizations or units within the organization.

The impact of context on representativeness, performance and the relationship between the two concepts may manifest itself in different ways (based on Johns 2006: 387-388). First, context shapes *meaning*. This aspect of context is especially relevant for the study of representative bureaucracy, since identity which shapes the meaning underlying organizational behavior is at the core of the theory. Which identities are salient will depend on the context, both on the internal organizational context and on the political context external to the organization. Hence, what (whose values?) is being represented will be context dependent and so will be the meaning representativeness takes on in administrative decision making. For instance, in France race and ethnicity are not accepted as concepts to be represented in bureaucracy (Meier and Hawes 2009).

Second, contextual factors may be *directly linked* to the opportunities and constraints for active representation as well as to its potential impact on performance. We should note that opportunities and constraints are equally important and, dependent on their respective *strength*, together they may yield tensions for organizational behavior. In the United States, for example, the external political environment can either be supportive of representative bureaucracy or hostile to it and in the process influences the efficacy of that representation (Grissom et al. 2009; Meier and Rutherford 2016).

Third, indirect effects and interactive effects, both on a single level and across levels, can be at work. Contextual factors may interact with representation which in turn impacts on performance. Representation may also indirectly impact on performance through characteristics of the context. Furthermore, some contextual factors condition the linkage between representativeness and public service performance relationship through other moderators.

With an increase of the number of factors at various levels, though, it will become difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle the effects of particular variables. Although for the purpose of theory building it is necessary to examine direct and indirect effects of specific contextual variables separately, as we do in this paper, it must be acknowledged that the influence of individual contextual variables may well be dependent on occurring with another specific set of contextual factors. In research practice we will have to deal with this manifestation of context effects, and empirically compare 'settings' or 'configurations' comprised of a combination of contextual factors.

External Context

Bureaucracies are open systems; they are influenced by their environments and in turn structure those environments by their actions (Thompson 1967). Issues of representative bureaucracy, both in terms of the determinants of representation and the ramifications of that representation, are no exception to the open systems' phenomenon. Two aspects of the external context of bureaucracy are especially relevant to representative bureaucracy and the ability of bureaucracies to re-present – the national context and the more proximal organizational context. National context includes both the political context and the administrative context; and the organizational context encompasses the organization's environment, the organization's setting, and the policy sector context.

National Context

Political system
Representation is an essential function of political systems; political systems both establish the institutional process for representation and define what issues and interests are to be represented. The diversity of political interests and the inability of a political system to include all political interests is a precondition for creating a demand for representative bureaucracy. The diversity of political interests might originate from social demographics such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or economic status among others. Whether such social demographics become politically salient and thus generate political interests that demand to be represented will vary

from country to country and depend on the nature of politics within a country.

All political systems by definition reduce the range of political interests that are considered by elected officials; some political conflict is suppressed by the simple process of representational aggregation. A majoritarian electoral system that uses winner-take-all single member districts, for example, will reduce the range of political interests in a legislature more than proportional representation system for a legislature (Peters, Schröter and Von Maravic 2015). This inability of the political system to represent all interests in society are what generates the demand for representative bureaucracy; after all if the electoral system adequately represented the interests of all citizens, there would be little need for bureaucracies to undertake this role. Because proportional representation systems filter out fewer political interests, we would expect that representative bureaucracy would be less evident and less effective in a proportional representation system.

If the limits of political representation create the demand for representative bureaucracy, then the degree of centralization versus fragmentation generates the potential supply. The institutional processes of representation – the basic rules of the political game – allocate power and authority to various institutions and in the process enhance or circumscribe representation in its various forms. In simple terms viewing the national political context in terms of centralization versus fragmentation is a useful place to start in describing the political context of bureaucracy (see O'Toole and Meier 2015; Peters, Schröter and Von Maravic 2015: 31). A pure centralized system would vest ultimate political authority in a single national institution (say a legislature) with full decision authority and design other political institutions to be subordinate to this institution. Although there are no actual current political systems with a pure centralization of power, it provides a useful theoretical pole of a continuum that serves to anchor the various structures that fragment or decentralize political authority.

Decentralization can take place along two dimensions; the separation of powers at the national level and the devolution of authority via federalism to autonomous or semi-autonomous local governments. Decentralization whether by separation of powers or federalism creates additional venues for possible representation, and bureaucracies have the potential (other things being equal) to step into a representation void. Federalism is especially likely to increase representation possibilities particularly if the interests to be represented are regionally concentrated (e.g., Canada, Switzerland). The use of local labor markets in decentralized systems further enhances bureaucratic representation (Peters, Schröter and Von Maravic 2015: 36).

Using the U.S. as a case example, Norton Long (1952) argues that institutional fragmentation results in political fragmentation generating a lack of political support for policy action. This absence of political support forces bureaucracies to build their own political support by cultivating and then representing clientele. Separation of powers systems with their checks

and balances create incentives for bureaucracies to develop as political actors working to respond to the conflicting demands of the legislative, executive or judicial branches (Rourke 1976). The policy advocacy in such systems naturally translates into a representation of clientele who may or may not have political representation.

Within a federal system, the impact of political fragmentation will follow directly from any diversity in subunits. National political forces will interact with local political forces that might be in opposition in either policy goals or implementation actions. Bureaucracies needing to deliver services will quite logically adapt to local conditions to generate greater effectiveness. Local conditions require a recognition of local interests and thus a demand for local bureaucratic representation (or political efforts to limit that representation (Lieberman 1998)).

The structural aspects of national context create incentives for bureaucratic representation, but these incentives take place within the accepted political and policy processes of a country. Structures are influential but not determinative; they can be shaped or reshaped by political and policy processes. One especially important process distinction is between adversarial or liberal political systems and corporatist political systems (Esping-Andersen 1990). The latter rely on the formal organization of all relevant interests and the creation of a consensual decision process that is binding on all parties. Adversarial political systems, in contrast, do not seek to be inclusive and have multiple decision points none of which are consider final. Corporatist political systems, because they formally seek inclusive representation, would be less fertile ground for representative bureaucracies simply because the representation function is institutionalized and located elsewhere while adversarial systems consider bureaucracy just another contestable decision point.

Administrative traditions and reforms

We are also on relatively safe ground to believe that administrative traditions and cultures have left their imprints on the ways how representative bureaucracy is being perceived in specific national systems (see Painter and Peters 2010 and Peters, Schröter and Von Maravic 2015 for an in-depth treatment). Whether representative bureaucracy falls on more or less fertile ground seems to be contingent on established administrative traditions as well as on the different roles the civil service plays in different societies. This notion is based on the distinction between 'public interest states' (generally associated with Westminster political systems) and states that rely in their administrative systems on the *Rechtsstaat* model (as in continental European nations such as France, Germany or Austria). This distinction rests on different beliefs of the role of the state in society, the importance of administrative law (or the lack thereof), as well as the education and recruitment of civil servants. In ideal-typical 'public interest models', government institutions are primarily society-driven so that 'representation' is particularly important as a

means to direct administrative actions and to hold public sector organizations accountable. By contrast, the legal conception and organic notion of the state in a pure *Rechtsstaat* type place a premium on administrative hierarchy and expertise and give bureaucrats a more autonomous role in shaping society.

Reform efforts such as those advocated by the New Public Management can also affect the potential for representative bureaucracy (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2000). European welfare reforms that focused on reduction of bureaucratic rules and decentralized administration to encourage coproduction by clients create a clear bottom-up process of representation through the bureaucracy. Such processes, however, only create the potential for representative bureaucracy as demonstrated by the U.S. welfare reform case where decentralization was coupled with deprofessionalization of the bureaucracy and the establishment of performance systems that limited bureaucratic discretion (Watkins-Hayes 2011) but left the process open to political interference and abuse (Soss, Fording and Schram 2011). Bureaucratic representation in this case withered.

Environmental Context

Three aspects of a bureaucracy's environmental context are linked to the development of representative bureaucracies and their effectiveness – target population diversity, the organizational setting, and policy area-identity linkages. The diversity of an organization's target population increases the task difficulty of program operations. Diverse clientele tend to have diverse needs and, equally important, diverse perspectives on the bureaucracy and its program delivery (Roch and Edwards 2015; King et al. 2011; Peters, Schröter and Von Maravic 2015). The diversity of clientele limit the ability of the bureaucracy to create routinized processes that can effectively meet the needs of all citizens. As clientele become more diverse, we would expect that both the demand for bureaucratic representation would increase and as would the potential effectiveness from a more representative bureaucracy.[2]

The organizational setting encompasses the characteristics of the organization and how those characteristics shape the relationship between the clientele and the bureaucracy (Schröter and Von Maravic 2015). Professional service organizations have high levels of expertise and vest discretion in street-level bureaucrats. The numerous cases of effective bureaucratic representation indicate such organizations can accrue substantial gains from representative bureaucracy with little risk (Schröter and Von Maravic 2015: 55). Top level policy-making organizations in contrast face a set of political and organizational constraints that limit the

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[2]Representative bureaucracy could lead to greater effectiveness even in cases with homogeneous clientele if the lack of representation results from discriminatory labor practices that generated underperforming bureaucrats (Becker 1993) or if diversity generated greater innovation in the organization (Pitts 2005; Van Knippenberg et al. 2004).

impact of representative bureaucracies to symbolic assurance of the population rather than actual program performance (Schröter and Von Maravic 2015: 58). High reliability and high risk organizations rely on strong professional and organizational socialization and create environments where representative bureaucracy is unlikely to flourish and could well be a high risk strategy (Schröter and von Maravic 2015: 60). Bureaucratic mass service provider organizations dispense benefits to clientele often using highly specific criteria as in social insurance and retirement systems. Organizations that pursue representation face few risks in this area but are unlikely to generate any performance benefits (Schröter and Von Maravic 2015: 62).

Policy area-identity linkages can be considered the catalyst for representative bureaucracy. For the values of a bureaucrat that are linked to an identity (race, ethnicity, religion, language, sexual orientation, etc.) to matter in the course of bureaucratic actions, the bureaucrat's policy area has to also be linked to that identity and the bureaucrat has to have discretion (Keiser et al. 2002; Meier and Morton 2015; Sowa and Selden 2003; Wilkins 2007). In many cases either bureaucrats will have little discretion (e.g., mass service provider organizations) or the discretion that they do have (e.g, agricultural research in the U.S.) will have little relevance to identity issues arising out of race or ethnicity. Both discretion and a convergence of policy with identity-linked values are required for bureaucrats to engage in representation.

Internal context

Issues of representative bureaucracy are addressed not only at the macro-level of nation-states and the meso-level of organizational populations, but also at the micro-level within organizations. Here, the roles played by identity and discretion in determining the likelihood of active representation occurring are again critical. In particular, besides the wider salience of an organization's setting and its policy sector, the structures of decision-making, distribution of power and the diversity climate within individual organizations are each contextual factors likely to shape bureaucrats' identities and the opportunities available to them to actively represent constituent groups.

Organizational Structure

The structure of organizations comprises two key sets of characteristics. The first are broad 'structural' features that 'define the physical milieu' in which organization members work, such as the size of an organization and managerial spans of control. And, the second are 'structuring' activities that managers carry out to deliberately shape the attitudes and behavior of

organization members, such as the relative decentralization of decision-making and the formalization of job roles and responsibilities (Dalton et al. 1980). Both 'structural' features and 'structuring' activities are likely to influence the identity of bureaucrats and the level of discretion that they experience. As such, the potential for active representation to occur may only be realized where an organization's structure permits multiple identities to co-exist within the workplace and ensures that opportunities to influence policy formulation and implementation are able to thrive.

Structural characteristics

Dalton et al. (1980) identify three key 'structural' characteristics that can influence the attitudes and behavior of organization members: organization and subunit size; span of control (the number of subordinates reporting directly to a supervisor); and administrative intensity (the ratio of administrative staff to production operatives). In public bureaucracies, each of these physical aspects of an organization's structure may have important implications for the potential for active representation to occur.

Levels of passive representation are often lower in larger public organizations (Andrews and Ashworth 2013; Kellough 1990). The employment of additional women, people of minority ethnic origin and other under-represented social groups simply makes less of an impact on the overall rate of representation in large organizations than in smaller ones. For this reason, the 'critical mass' effects associated with the translation of passive to active representation may be weaker in large public bureaucracies. Moreover, female and minority ethnic bureaucrats may find that it is much more difficult to develop and establish values and attitudes that run counter to the dominant culture in big organizations (Moss Kanter 1977). The work environment in such organizations may be less inclusive of diverse identities (Andrews and Ashworth 2015) or individuals may simply feel more alienated due to the sheer number of colleagues and a more bureaucratic orientation (Kimberley 1976).

The relative width of managerial spans of control has long been thought to have an important influence on the potential for bureaucrats to exercise discretion. Due to the limitations on their time, the more individuals that a manager is required to supervise, the more that manager must accord those individuals the discretion to make decisions independently (Meier and Bohte 2001). For this reason, a wide span of control has long been anticipated to result in greater potential for active representation. Indeed, the little research that examines this specific hypothesis confirm that wide spans of control can promote the discretion necessary for bureaucrats to actively represent client groups, at least at the street-level (Keiser et al. 2002; Meier and Bohte 2001).

Finally, bureaucratic discretion of the kind required to improve outcomes for client groups also seems more likely to be present where the ratio of administrative employees to front-line workers is lower, especially in street-level bureaucracies. Where the administrative component of organizations is larger, employees may have to comply with more burdensome rules and regulations, devoting a greater proportion of their time to internal managerial tasks than the provision of public services. A recent study by Andrews and Miller (2013), for example, finds that the potential for female police officers to actively represent battered women by arresting their abusers was contingent on the amount of time they were able to devote to front-line police work.

Structuring activities: distribution of power

Organization theorists suggest that there are three key 'structuring' dimensions that are susceptible to managerial control, each of which may have important implications for bureaucratic identity and discretion: centralization, formalization and specialization (see especially Hage and Aiken 1967). The relative degree of centralization within an organization is signified by the 'hierarchy of authority' and the 'degree of participation in decision-making'; aspects of structure that reflect the distribution of power within organization (Carter and Cullen 1984). If the power to make decisions is exercised only at the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy and senior managers rarely consult with subordinates, then bureaucrats seeking to actively represent client groups may only be able to do so if they attain high ranking positions – something that presents many challenges for under-represented social groups (Naff 2001; Sabharwal 2015; Smith and Monaghan 2013). By contrast, the devolution of decision-making authority and an acceptance of staff involvement in the determination of organizational policies and practices may conceivably empower female and minority ethnic bureaucrats at all levels of the organization to promote initiatives that are beneficial to their respective client groups. Evidence suggests that being in a senior position can increase the likelihood that bureaucrats will actively represent client groups (e.g. Andrews and Miller 2013; Dolan 2000; 2002; Smith and Fernandez 2010; Theobald 2007) and that it may also encourage active representation by street-level bureaucrats (e.g. Keiser et al. 2002). To date, however, despite earlier calls for paying attention to the distribution of representation across hierarchical levels (Riccucci and Saidel 1997; Greene et al. 2001; Naff 2001), little is known about decision participation and active representation.

Bureaucratic representation is frequently found at the street level of an organization (Andrews, Ashworth and Meier 2014; Selden, Brudney and Kellough 1998; Riccucci, Van Ryzin and Laven 2014), but it can also occur at the supervisory level (Wilkins 2007; Wilkins and Keiser 2004; Meier 1993) and even at the top level of the organization (Smith and Fernandez 2010;

Theobald 2007). This variation in locus of representation is attributed to where discretion is located in the bureaucracy, and sometimes different decisions are located at different levels (school budgets at top levels, see Theobald 2007; student performance at the street level Meier and O'Toole 2006). There is only modest research on how representation at various levels interacts with each other; two studies of schools and race indicate that representation at one level appears to be associated with a lack of representation at another level (see Meier and O'Toole 2006; Meier 1993), but a study of schools and gender finds a positive interaction effect of street level and supervisory level representation (Keiser et al. 2002). These findings suggest that representation might well be a strategy where top level managers generally let street level personnel act as representatives while top managers attend to other concerns but are willing to selectively intervene when needed.

The relationship among levels of representation in bureaucratic organizations raises the issues of hierarchy and the critical mass hypothesis. Organizational hierarchy is designed to create uniformity and on its face would likely bring organizational pressures to eliminate bureaucratic representation in many agencies. Consistent with this logic, decentralized agencies appear to foster greater bureaucratic representation at the street level (Keiser et al. 2002; Meier and Bohte 2001; Sowa and Selden 2003). Hierarchy and the pressures to conform is also the supporting logic for the notion that bureaucratic representation requires a critical mass of similar individuals to exist. Empirical work on critical mass focused primarily on schools, shows that no critical mass is needed at the street level but that at management levels representational impacts do not occur until the represented group reaches approximately 25% of the managerial level of the organization (Keiser et al. 2002; Meier 1993).

Hage and Aiken (1967) distinguish between two key aspects of formalization: job codification (the degree of work standardization) and rule observation (the latitude of role behavior tolerated). Highly formalized organizations tend to have detailed descriptions of the social positions occupied within the organization and many rules prescribing operational procedures. Members of such organization generally experience lower levels of job autonomy and greater levels of performance monitoring and supervision. As a result, active representation seems much more likely to occur in organizations with lower levels of formalization. Although job codification may often be standardized across organizational populations in the public sector, rule observation can vary considerably; and it is in organizations where bureaucrats have greater autonomy over how their role is interpreted that active representation may be most likely happen. For example, Riccucci and Meyer (2004) show that women and minority ethnic street-level welfare employees who rely more on professional judgment than agency rules are more likely to have pro-welfare attitudes.

The relative degree of specialization within an organization relates to the division of labor amongst organizational members. In this regard, Hage and Aiken (1967) distinguish between the occupational complexity (number of occupational specialities) and the professionalization (professional activity and training) within the specialities found within an organization. Public organizations often have a large number of diverse professional groupings, which engage in extensive professional activity and have comprehensive training programs (Mintzberg 1979). Although employees occupying a specialist role may not have wide-ranging freedom over how their role is defined, they are likely to have a great deal of autonomy over how they exercise their professional expertise. For these reasons, the potential for specialization to influence the translation seems likely to be dependent upon the types of roles that bureaucrats occupy and whether there is a more or less opportunity to exercise discretion in their relationships with different client groups.

Diversity Climate

Diversity management literature highlights two types of processes simultaneously at play in diverse work groups. Firstly, cognitive processes related to diversity that positively influence information elaboration among group members, and, secondly, affective processes that reduces the degree of social integration (Van Knippenberg et al. 2004). Recent studies suggest that organizational climates that are inclusive of all employees are a necessary condition for realizing the potential benefits of work group diversity and counter its negative consequences (Shore et al. 2011; Ashikali and Groeneveld 2015). The emerging literature on inclusiveness builds on an integration-and-learning perspective on workforce diversity, which 'links diversity to work processes—the way people do and experience the work—in a manner that makes diversity a resource for learning and adaptive change' (Ely and Thomas 2001: 240). Shore et al. (2011: 1265) argue that 'diverse work groups that adopt an integration-and-learning perspective incorporate both uniqueness (through viewing diversity as a resource) and belongingness (through members feeling valued and respected)'. Hence, whether diverse role-identities are accepted within an organizational setting, and actually seen as a resource beneficial to the organization, is not only dependent on structural characteristics and power relations, but also on the diversity climate within the organization. Nishii (2013) finds evidence for a moderating role of a diversity climate within the relationships between gender diversity, conflict, and satisfaction. Other research articles in this strand of research adopt organizational and managerial characteristics, such as leadership and HR policies, as moderators in their models (e.g. Kearney and Gebert 2009). Both leadership and HR policies may affect the relationship between diversity and positive organizational outcomes, such as employee well-being, social

integration and performance, through creating inclusive work climates in organizations (Guillaume et al. 2015).

To date only a few studies have incorporated these insights from diversity management literature into the study of representativeness and diversity management in public organizations (e.g. Andrews and Ashworth 2015; Selden and Selden 2001; Pitts 2009; Choi and Rainey 2010). Choi and Rainey (2010), for example, find that diversity management is particularly effective in managing racially diverse work groups. However, ethnic minority employees have lower levels of job satisfaction in the presence of a combination of diversity management and fair organizational procedures (Choi and Rainey 2014), which may be due to the 'identity blindness' that fair organizational procedures tend to imply.

Indirect and Interactive Effects of Contextual Factors

A contextual theory of representative bureaucracy would suggest that not only does context condition the relationship between representation and performance, but that such relationships might be subject to interaction effects. This section will examine three possible contextual-representation interactions: representation as it interacts with political support, representation as it is influenced by social capital, and indirect representation as it interacts with the diversity of the clientele.

Political representation is likely to interact with bureaucratic representation. Political representation is a resource and one would think that having a supportive political environment would embolden bureaucrats to be more aggressive in their representational functions. Meier and Morton (2015), however, argue that the hypothesized relationship is ambiguous. Legislators might carefully guard their position as the primary representatives in a political system and seek to limit representation by their bureaucratic cohorts. Although how political representation and bureaucratic representation interact on policy activities remains to be fully studied, their influence in the personnel process appear to very strong. Levels of political representation are strongly correlated with levels of bureaucratic representation, and systematic analysis over time shows that they are reciprocally related (Meier and O'Toole 2006; Meier and Smith 1994), that is political representation leads to increases in bureaucratic representation and vice versa.

Political representation can be considered a specialized form of political support for the values pressed by a representative bureaucracy. Logic suggests that bureaucrats who perceive positive public support for representative actions will be encouraged by this support and increase efforts at of active representation. A recent US national study of African-American education finds that the influence of African-American teachers on the performance of African-American students is significantly greater in school districts with a Democratic Party voting

majority (the party more supportive of African-American interests) than in school districts with a Republican voting majority (Meier and Rutherford 2016).

One characteristic of the community that should influence the development of representation in a bureaucracy and also translate into positive performance is the level of social capital in the community. The degree of social connectedness and the corresponding levels of interpersonal trust it creates should engender opportunities for bureaucrats to enhance performance with greater levels of coproduction. Social capital reduces the costs of securing compliance with the policies public organizations seek to implement because people in communities exhibiting higher levels of trust tend to have been more involved in the political process in one way or another and to feel greater solidarity with their fellow citizens (Boix and Posner 1998; Sullivan and Transue 1999). As a result, they are more likely to have faith in the outcomes of that process and to feel positively inclined to participate in the production of services or to supplement them through voluntary efforts of their own (Montgomery 2000; Spillane and Thompson 1997). In areas high in social capital, policies that have distributional benefits for less-advantaged groups therefore seem likely to have greater buy-in from citizens both because they better represent the political will of the community and because there is likely to be less resistance to any perceived injustices that they may entail for dominant social groups. That said, social capital is not equally distributed among racial, ethnic, and income groups and in the process can actually create greater inequities in service outcomes (Meier, Favero and Compton 2016). How representative bureaucracies deal with contextual factors such as social capital, income inequality, or existing levels of societal discrimination is essentially an unexplored research area.

In addition to representative bureaucracy interacting with various contextual factors, there can also be indirect effects of representative bureaucracy that do not accrue from active representation. Schröter and von Maravic (2015) note that representative bureaucracies might improve bureaucrats' levels of job satisfaction and reduce turnover (Pitts 2009); both could be linked to greater performance. They also contend that citizens perceiving bureaucrats who look like themselves might be more satisfied with government services (Bradbury and Kellough 2011; Riccucci, Van Ryzin and Lavena 2014; but see Andrews et al. 2005). Greater citizen satisfaction is likely to make interactions of bureaucrats and citizens less conflictual and could well have an indirect impact on overall performance.

Representative bureaucracy could also affect performance by changing the relationship between the bureaucrat and client in such a way that the client alters his or her behavior. Research on the interactions of police with citizens demonstrate that minority citizens are less likely to be confrontational and more likely to perceive fairness when stopped by a police officer of their own race (Epp, Maynard-Moody and Haider-Markel 2014). Similarly women in the US

are more likely to report sexual assaults when there are more women on police forces (Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006). The extensive work on bureaucratic representation in education notes that what is viewed as active representation might well be a role model effect whereby the student changes behavior and the teacher actually takes no action (Atkins and Wilkins 2014; Dee 2004).

Table 1: Representative Bureaucracy in Context

External context		
National context	Political systems	
	Administrative traditions and reforms	
Organizational environment	Target population diversity	
	Organizational setting and the relationship between the clientele and the bureaucracy	
	Policy area-identity linkages	
Internal context		
Structure	Structural characteristics	*organization and subunit size*
		span of control
		administrative intensity
	Structuring activities and distribution of power	*centralization*
		formalization
		specialization
Diversity climate	Inclusiveness and recognition of diverse identities	
	Diversity management and leadership	

Conclusion: Toward a 'Contextualized' Research Agenda on Representative Bureaucracy

The concern for public administration's role in society is making a strong comeback. While the quest for managerial efficiency in the public sector has been a very successful rival in attracting political and academic attention in the recent past, there appears to be growing recognition of the salient nature of the nexus between society and public sector organizations for students of public administration and management. The study of representative bureaucracy is a prime example of how the interplay between societal and administrative changes has moved towards center stage: research in performance management has established the extent to which the social composition of the public sector workforce influences the quality and effectiveness of

services rendered; increased competition for new talent has prompted public organizations to present themselves as more attractive or 'model' employers by way of broadening their recruitment channels and hiring more diverse workforces; value changes in societies also helped to push questions of 'fairness', 'equity', and 'anti-discrimination' higher up on the political agenda; by the same token, growing concerns about the segregation and fragmentation of culturally, ethnically, and also socio-economically increasingly diverse societies have led to more calls to make the public sector more 'inclusive'. All in all, the role of public bureaucracies as representative institutions in society and politics has received wider currency – and is likely to continue to do so.

The rationale of this paper is that, as students of public administration and policy, we are less than optimally prepared to understand and even investigate the inner-workings and outcomes of representativeness in public sector organizations. Generally speaking, the public administration community, particularly on the European continent, has either stuck to models of rational-legal ideal-types of bureaucratic organizations in the guise of Weberian thinking or primarily rely on managerial perspectives on the behavior of public sector organizations in the mold of 'rational choice' models or 'new institutional economics'. Those schools of thought, however, have very little inclination to consider the values of social groups (that need to be represented) or personal identities (other than that of professional expertise) as dimensions of organizational analysis and do not discuss where those values come from. Whereas these approaches assume that preferences of organizational actors are fixed, representative bureaucracy theory assumes that preferences are dependent on socialization processes and their salience contingent on the situation.[3] It flows from this that we also need to advance our theoretical reasoning about representative public bureaucracies so as to include societal and political considerations.

This advancement of theoretical knowledge can build on earlier work of key authors and their core concepts of representativeness, but further refinement is also needed to ask more systematic and specific research questions to help us navigate through the thicket of empirical phenomena and problems. How can we theoretically link representativeness in public organizations with different dimensions of the proposed effects: for example, on the quality of outcome, the work conditions and climate inside the organizations, on the relations with specific client groups, on power-sharing in politics or on the levels of trust and legitimacy of the public sector in society? How can we theorize about the various – direct or indirect – mechanisms and dynamics that are at play when passive representation translates into active representation (or not)? How can we accommodate the 'micro-macro' problem in representativeness research as

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[3] This approach fits very well with sociological rational choice theory, see e.g. Coleman (1986).

we deal with mechanisms and effects at the levels of both individual and collective actors? What exactly are theoretically grounded factors and conditions that will work in favor or against those effects that we associate with representative bureaucracies? Finally, the effects of representativeness cannot be conceptualized as uni-directional. Rather than being a panacea to all ills of public organizations, the pursuit of representative bureaucracy as a reform strategy also carries distinct risks and potentially negative side-effects. Again, we need to capture this potentially darker side of representativeness in a more substantiated theory of representative bureaucracy.

In essence, this paper takes recourse to the study of context as an avenue to arrive at answers to most of the above theoretical questions as well as to generate more systematic and in-depth empirical knowledge. Representativeness will work differently in different contexts. Consequently, we suggest designing a frame of country-specific and organization-specific contextual factors that are conditioning the opportunities and constraints of individual and collective actors in the pursuit of effective representative bureaucracies. At both levels of context, nationally and organizationally, we include structural as well as cultural factors in our definition of context so as to allow for a comprehensive understanding of enabling and disabling conditions of representative bureaucracy.

As a consequence of this 'contextualized' research approach, we propose a comparative perspective in researching representativeness, both across national boundaries, levels of government, and types of organizations in different fields of public policy. This also necessitates the utilization of different research methods, in particular with an eye on more qualitative methods of investigation. While the benefits of quantitative data analysis in establishing patterns of statistical associations between specific factors of representativeness and, for example, performance indicators are widely recognized, the broad range of qualitative methods appear to be unduly neglected in the mainstream of representative bureaucracy research (for exceptions see for instance Atkins and Wilkins 2013; Kennedy, 2013; Van Gool 2008; Watkins-Hayes 2011). This omission seems to be particularly regrettable as case studies, in-depth interviews, or the use of participant observations could help to shed light on exactly those questions that address our set of contextual factors: How officials perceive of issues of representativeness in different countries or different organizations settings? What exactly brings administrators to adopt roles of a trustee or an advocate of minority groups? How do inter- and intra-group dynamics play out in the context of representativeness?

As different methodologies enable to incorporate context into the study of representative bureaucracy in different ways, we propose two avenues for future research. A first road to develop regards comparative research designs in which representative bureaucracy is being studied in different contexts. Some studies can be targeted at the examination of direct and

indirect effects of specific contextual variables, which asks for either rigorous designs (e.g. experiments) or statistical analyses that allow for the isolation of these effects. Other studies may empirically compare 'settings' or 'configurations' comprised of a combination or 'set' of contextual factors. A second way to incorporate context into the empirical examination of representative bureaucracy is to take a case-oriented approach rather than a variable-oriented approach. In-depth qualitative designs and methods can be used in order to understand the meaning of representativeness and representation within specific contexts.

In conclusion, we think the relevance of representative bureaucracy in context of recent societal and political developments merits further scholarly investment in a contextualized theory of representativeness. By identifying several contextual factors and explaining how each might affect representativeness and organizational performance, this paper is a first step toward such a contextualized understanding of representative bureaucracy. For developing these insights into a contextualized theory of representative bureaucracy we call for a more systematic and – across national and disciplinary boundaries – better orchestrated research endeavor in this field.

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