P170 / Who Shapes Public Policy? Social Identity, Political Representation, and the Informal Exercise of Power

Topic : Equity, Gender, Inclusion and the Diversity in Public Policy

Chair : Vijaya Mishra (Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur)

Second Chair : Manmeet Kaur Narula (Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Public policies are not produced by institutions alone; they are also shaped by the preferences, identities, incentives, and power relations of the individuals who occupy positions of authority. Although theories of democratic representation emphasize the relationship between citizens' preferences and policy choices (Osborne & Slivinski, 1996; Besley & Coate, 1997), foundational scholarship on political representation distinguishes between descriptive and substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967) and highlights the importance of the presence of historically underrepresented groups in decision-making institutions (Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999). An important question therefore remains: how, and under what institutional conditions, do policymakers' social identities influence public policy priorities and outcomes?

This panel examines the relationship between policymakers' social identities, political representation, and policy outcomes across different institutional and geographical contexts. It invites contributions examining identities such as gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, class, educational background, and political lineage, alongside the institutional arrangements that mediate their influence. The panel also considers how formal representation interacts with informal power structures, including elite capture, proxy leadership, party hierarchies, and unequal access to decision-making.

Existing research offers important insights into the effects of political representation on public goods provision, education, health, welfare, and other developmental outcomes. Studies of gender quotas and reserved political positions, for example, demonstrate that changes in representation can influence policy priorities and citizens' aspirations (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Beaman et al., 2012; Clots-Figueras, 2012). Research on caste and minority representation also suggests that policymakers' social backgrounds may affect resource allocation and developmental outcomes (Pande, 2003; Bhalotra et al., 2014; Chin & Prakash, 2011). Similarly, research on political leadership has examined the influence of educational qualifications, professional backgrounds, and political dynasties on governance and economic performance (Besley et al., 2011; Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Daniele et al., 2021). However, the relationship between descriptive representation and substantive policy change is neither automatic nor uniform. Institutional constraints, party discipline, electoral incentives, administrative capacity, and entrenched social hierarchies may strengthen, mediate, or limit these effects.

The panel seeks to advance this debate by addressing three interconnected questions:

1. Identity and policy preferences: How do policymakers' social identities and educational backgrounds shape legislative agendas, resource allocation, public spending, and developmental outcomes?

2. Representation and institutional power: Under what conditions does descriptive representation translate into substantive representation, and how do informal power relations constrain or enable policymakers' autonomy?

3. Institutions and policy effectiveness: How do electoral systems, quotas, party structures, administrative institutions, and accountability mechanisms influence the relationship between representation and policy outcomes?

The panel welcomes theoretical, quantitative, qualitative, comparative, and mixed-methods contributions. Relevant approaches include legislative text analysis, parliamentary questions and debates, administrative and electoral data, field interviews, ethnographic research, and comparative case studies.

By bringing together scholarship on political representation, institutional behavior, and public policy, the panel aims to move beyond the assumption that greater diversity necessarily produces more inclusive governance. It seeks to identify the mechanisms through which representation matters, the institutional conditions under which it produces substantive change, and the circumstances in which formal inclusion

fails to redistribute decision-making power. The broader objective is to develop a comparative understanding of how political institutions can translate diverse social experiences into more responsive, equitable, and accountable public policies.

CALL FOR PAPERS

How do the identities of political leaders influence the policies they formulate, the issues they prioritise, and the outcomes they deliver? When does greater representation produce substantive policy change, and when do institutional constraints and informal power structures limit its effects? This panel invites paper proposals addressing these questions from theoretical, empirical, and comparative perspectives.

We welcome contributions examining the relationship between policymakers' identities and public policy across national, subnational, and local levels of governance. Relevant topics include, but are not limited to:

1. Gender, caste, ethnicity, religion, and class in political representation and policymaking (Pitkin, 1967; Phillips, 1995; Mansbridge, 1999; Pande, 2003; Clots-Figueras, 2012).

2. Educational qualifications, professional backgrounds, and political dynasties as determinants of policy preferences and governance performance (Besley et al., 2011; Carnes & Lupu, 2016; Daniele et al., 2021).

3. Gender quotas, reserved seats, and their effects on public spending, education, health, welfare, and social inclusion (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Beaman et al., 2012; Chin & Prakash, 2011).

4. Women's legislative participation and the representation of gender equality, social justice, and marginalized communities in parliamentary questions, debates, and legislative agendas (Clots-Figueras, 2012; Iyer et al., 2012).

5. Informal power structures, including proxy representation, elite capture, and the influence of family members or political networks on elected representatives (Duflo et al., 2005; Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004).

6. Intersectionality and the combined effects of social identities on policy priorities and developmental outcomes (Clots-Figueras, 2012; Mansbridge, 1999).

7. Institutional mechanisms that enable or constrain the translation of descriptive representation into substantive representation (Pitkin, 1967; Osborne & Slivinski, 1996; Besley & Coate, 1997).

8. Comparative evidence on representation, accountability, administrative capacity, and policy effectiveness across political systems (Jones & Olken, 2005; Raffler, 2022).

9. Methodological innovations in measuring representation and evaluating its effects, including computational text analysis, causal inference, qualitative fieldwork, and mixed-methods research.

We particularly encourage papers that identify causal mechanisms, examine variation across institutional settings, or challenge established assumptions about the relationship between political identity and governance. Both established findings and exploratory research are welcome, provided that submissions make a clear contribution to public policy scholarship.

The panel aims to foster dialogue across political science, public administration, development studies, gender studies, and public policy. By bringing together diverse theoretical approaches and empirical contexts, it will identify promising avenues for future comparative research and discuss the implications of these findings for more inclusive, responsive, and accountable policymaking.

Researchers at different career stages and scholars working on contexts beyond Europe and North America are especially encouraged to contribute.