

Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress: Evidence from 80,000 Congressional Inquiries

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Abstract

A vast literature debates the efficacy of descriptive representation in legislatures. Though studies argue it influences how communities are represented through constituency service, they are limited since legislators' daily casework activities are unobserved. Using Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, we collect over 88,000 records of communication between members of the U.S. Congress and federal agencies during the 108th – 113th Congress. We find that women, racial/ethnic minorities, and veterans are more likely to work on behalf of constituents with whom they share identities. Including veterans offers critical leverage in understanding the role of shared experiences. Among legislators with military backgrounds, those with more military service are more likely to work on behalf of veterans. Our findings suggest that shared experiences operate as a critical mechanism for representation, and that causal relationships identified by experimental work have observable implications in the daily work of Congress.

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Well-intentioned laws may exacerbate political inequality if implemented in ways that fail to aid the citizens they are intended to protect. Yet, studies of representation have overwhelmingly focused on how constituents are represented through the creation of law, overlooking the execution of legislation. Accounts of federal agencies' stalled implementation of the Civil Rights Act, mismanagement of workplace rights violations, and falsification of veterans' health care records demonstrate how cracks in the ideals of democratic representation can spread through policy implementation—precariously beyond the public purview.

We know little about how descriptive representation impacts legislative interventions with agencies on behalf of protected groups. This overlooked venue of representation is particularly important given the extensive role of federal agencies in policymaking (Warren 2004) and a history of agencies neglecting groups of citizens they were entrusted to protect (Minta 2009, 2011). We shed light on this phenomenon by examining whether members of Congress advocate on behalf of protected classes of citizens by communicating directly with the federal bureaucracy.

This analysis is the first of its kind, possible only by obtaining and constructing a unique dataset of over 88,000 congressional contacts assembled from a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. These data allow us to consider whether descriptively representative members of Congress (i.e., racial and ethnic minorities, women, and veterans) advocate for underrepresented communities by intervening with federal agencies implementing law. Do representatives follow up on the policy interests of women, minorities, and veterans long after a bill's passage? Do they monitor agencies to ensure the rights of these communities are protected?

These data offer a unique approach to the study of representation. Unlike voting records, bill sponsorship, speeches, and committee hearings—which are influenced by both internal and external institutional pressures—representatives freely communicate with the federal bureaucracy (Grose 2011). Furthermore, though novel experimental work has established legislators' responsiveness to constituents based on shared race and gender (Butler 2014; Butler and Broockman 2011), the systematic impact and importance of these results outside of the experimental setting is less clear. Researcher interventions in state legislatures do not offer a complete understanding of the demands and limitations of constituent representation in observed political contexts like the overwhelmingly unrepresentative U.S. Congress. Additionally, studies focused on legislators' correspondence in response to constituent mail does not tell us about the quality of legislative

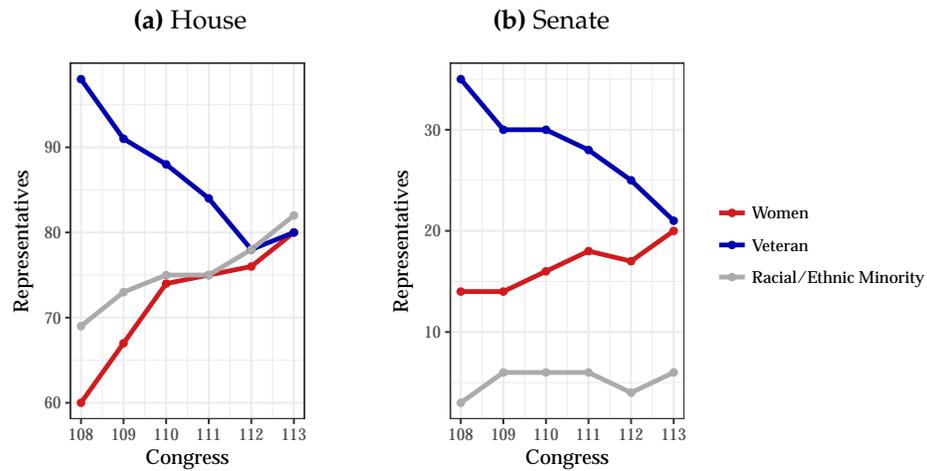
“follow-through” on behalf of these constituents. This study complements these field experiments by showing the impact of legislators’ identities on their efforts to advocate for protected communities at federal agencies.

We find significant differences in the service patterns of female, minority, and veteran legislators that suggest descriptive representation leads to substantive representation in Congress. In each case, we find that legislators are around 6-9 percentage points more likely to contact federal agencies on behalf of constituents with whom they share background characteristics, when compared to their civilian, male, or white colleagues. The differences are most striking for women and men in Congress, where being represented by a female legislator is associated with a 40% increase in the probability of relevant service. These differences are robust after accounting for factors influencing the selection of legislators, and consistent across multiple measures of representation.

This approach advances existing work on descriptive representation and has important implications for future research. First, existing observational work focusing on legislative activity is limited by cross-cutting influences on legislative behavior. For example, race or gender-related legislation can be censored (via committees and party agenda setting, for example) before minority and women legislators register their votes. In contrast, our data demonstrate “unilateral” action on the part of legislators—unrestricted by chamber rules, logrolling, and partisan forces. Second, our approach offers a unique opportunity to test observable implications of experimental work. These studies identify causal mechanisms for constituent representation through field experiments with legislators and suggest systematic, observable patterns in constituency service that we investigate.

Finally, this paper advances work on descriptive representation by including military veterans, providing important theoretical leverage. First, as Figure 1 indicates, the number of veterans in Congress has declined even while there is broad political consensus favoring veterans’ benefits—trends which are typically the reverse in studies of the representation of women and racial/ethnic minorities. Second, members vary in their degree of shared experience with veterans in ways that are observable. This allows us to empirically assess a critical mechanism of representation often referenced in past work. In keeping with this explanation, we find that substantive representation of veterans is particularly pronounced among legislators who have military service beyond being a “reservist” or member of the national guard.

Figure 1 – Descriptive Representation in Congress



Note: Plots number of legislators with each identity (CQ Member Profiles); legislators are classified as veterans if their occupational history includes either active duty or reserve positions.

Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress

While the extant literature typically focuses on representation through lawmaking, protected classes of citizens may be most vulnerable at the implementation stage of policymaking. Policy implementation is particularly critical for underrepresented communities because it is less visible and often decentralized, involving unelected bureaucrats in numerous agencies and at multiple levels of government. Consequently, even when Congress passes a law, it does not ensure that implementation will be swift or follow legislative intent. For example, research on the Civil Rights Act found that Title VI, meant to prohibit organizations that discriminate from receiving federal funding, was stalled by federal agencies (see Minta 2011: 41). Additionally, some sections of the Voting Rights Act, overseen by state level bureaucrats, were unevenly implemented, depending on the state and its history with civil rights (Marschall and Rutherford 2016). Even when an agency's primary purpose is to serve protected groups, oversight is still necessary.¹ Take, for instance,

¹While oversight does occur, publicly, in congressional committees, this formal oversight is constrained by party leadership. By contacting agencies directly, legislators can send signals of their priorities, but without waiting for a scheduled hearing. Additionally, members not on committees with jurisdiction can still have access when they contact an agency directly.

complaints during the 1980s that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was ineffective in managing cases of workplace civil rights violations (Minta 2011:54) or the more recent findings that medical records had been falsified at Veterans Affairs (VA), compromising the health care of thousands of citizens.²

Protected classes of citizens rely on their elected representatives to advocate on their behalf and are dependent on the alacrity of legislators' intervention with unelected bureaucrats. The dependence on legislator intervention is concerning given that modern legislators face an increasingly large set of demands for their attention but a limited set of resources to work with (Curry 2015; Fiorina 1974; Mayhew 1974), and participation in policy implementation and oversight is considered particularly costly with little to gain electorally (Aberbach 1990; Arnold 1990; Hall and Miler 2008; McCubbins and Schwartz 1984). Agency oversight, considered a characteristic of "work horses" (Mayhew 1974), occurs largely beyond the purview of the public (Arnold 1990). In this context, individual legislators must set priorities, elevating the importance of some issues and tasks at the expense of others- inevitably signaling who they are choosing to represent (Hall 1996).

Some previous literature would suggest that legislators who are themselves members of protected groups will prioritize the representation of these citizens and, consequently, be more tenacious advocates. Over the last several decades a large body of research has focused on whether female and minority legislators behave differently than their male and white counterparts. Usually grounded in theories of descriptive representation, many scholars expect that a legislators' personal characteristics and experiences will shape their legislative priorities and policy preferences. To the extent that these preferences are shared among the group at large (i.e. women) but are unique among elected officials (who are overwhelmingly male), the presence of descriptive representatives leads to greater substantive representation for that group (Mansbridge 1999). Interviews with legislators and their staff provide preliminary evidence in favor of this view (Burden 2007; Fenno 2003; Grose 2011; Hall 1996; Reingold 1992; Swers 2002, 2013).

However, quantitative research on descriptive representation has overwhelmingly focused on roll call votes with generally mixed results. One explanation for these varied results could be the

²<https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdga/pr/va-employee-sentenced-federal-prison-falsifying-medical-records-hundreds-veterans>

constraints (e.g., agenda setting) on legislators' voting behavior. Formal legislative activity, like voting, is shaped by cross-cutting influences on legislative behavior, including chamber rules or pressure from leadership, forcing members to be more strategic and limiting the extent to which they are free to vote their conscience (or their background). Instead, a legislator's partisan attachment and district preferences dominate their voting behavior (Hero and Tolbert 1995; Tate 2003; Welch and Hibbing 1984). Issues on which we would expect to observe different behavior from minority and women legislators are likely censored from the agenda. Party leaders do not want to schedule votes that will reveal divisions within the party, whether along racial or gender lines. Thus, observing voting behavior alone is likely to depress effects of descriptive representation and exaggerate party unity. Considering that issues on which we would expect to observe different behavior from minority and women legislators may never make it to the floor for a vote, studies that do find differences with regard to race and gender are noteworthy.³

Existing scholarship examining "proactive" expressions of representation, including bill introductions and committee participation (Burden 2007), provides a clearer consensus that descriptive representation influences responsiveness across gender (e.g. Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Dodson 1998, 2006; Swers 2001, 2002; Wolbrecht 2000, 2002) and race (e.g. Gamble 2007; Griffin and Newman 2008; Minta 2009, 2011; Preuhs 2005; Wilson 2010), but effect sizes are often small.⁴ Like roll call votes, however, these upstream formal legislative behaviors are still public and easily ob-

³Some work concludes that African American (e.g. Swain 1993; Canon 1999; Griffin and Newman 2008; Grose 2005) and Latino (e.g. Kerr and Miller 1997; Santos and Huerta 2001; Fraga et al. 2007) legislators vote differently than their white colleagues. Additionally, in general, women representatives have more liberal voting records, particularly when it comes to "feminist" issues such as abortion (Dolan 1997; Swers 1998; Norton 1999; Tatalovich and Schier 1993; Welch 1985).

⁴For example, black legislators, in comparison to their white colleagues, are more likely introduce bills (e.g. Bratton and Haynie 1999; Canon 1999; Haynie 2001; Tate 2003), participate in committee activities (e.g. Gamble 2007; Minta 2009, 2011), and make floor speeches (e.g. Canon 1999) on issues of importance to black Americans. Likewise, Latino legislators introduce more bills related to issues important to Latinos (Bratton 2006; Wilson 2010). Latinos in leadership positions try to use their positions to block legislation that could have negative consequences for Latinos (Preuhs 2005). Qualitative work confirms that minorities advocate for the interests of their groups (Fenno 2003). In terms of gender, women prioritize social welfare and issues important to women, reflected in their bill sponsorship, committee participation, and floor behavior (Gerrity, Osborn, and Mendez 2007; Dodson 1998, 2006; Swers 2001, 2002; Frederick 2010). Women in Congress bring women's rights to the agenda (Burrell 1994; Wolbrecht 2000, 2002).

servable making them susceptible to the same constraints and cross-pressures from constituents, the media, party leadership, and/or other members of Congress (e.g. Box-Steffensmeier, Arnold, and Zorn 1997; Crespin 2010; Ritchie 2018). Visibility can hinder the ability for congresswomen to advocate for the interests of women, for example, if they face pressure from co-partisans with more extreme ideological perspectives and wish to maintain choice committee assignments or move into leadership positions (Dodson 2006; Swers 2002, 2016). Additionally, external political forces, like an upcoming election, may constrain the behavior of members from protected groups as well. For example, African American members may have an electoral incentive to not appear to be catering to black voters rather than reaching out to their white constituency (Cannon 1999; and see *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630, 1993). Overall, the visibility of a legislators' behavior, at any point in the lawmaking process, can depress their ability and motivation to represent protected group interests (cf. Bishin 2009).

A growing body of research considers less visible legislator behaviors. Additional observational studies examining earmarks for protected groups and casework (e.g. Grose, Mangum, and Martin 2007; Grose 2011), find that descriptively representative legislators are more responsive to the groups they represent. Moreover, recent field experiments on state legislators consider responses to constituent emails, an important, but largely behind the scenes behavior. Broockman (2013) finds that black state legislators are more likely than white legislators to respond to contacts from black citizens who report living outside their district. Likewise, black state legislators are more likely than their white counterparts to respond to requests for help with registering to vote when sent from black aliases (Butler and Broockman 2011). With regard to gender, while women legislators show a balanced response across women's issues and other issues not related to gender, men tend to show less responsiveness to constituent contact related to women's issues (Butler 2014). These findings suggest that legislators from protected groups work on behalf of protected classes of citizens when their behavior is both public and private- suggesting that their efforts are sincere, as opposed to strategic. However, this work raises several additional questions. First, it is unclear whether the same mechanisms generalize beyond state legislatures to the U.S. Congress or beyond black and female legislators to other protected groups. Second, and more importantly, it is unclear whether the mechanisms identified have an observable impact on patterns of representation. These questions are critical since experimental results demonstrate striking differences

with implications for democratic representation.

We build on the existing literature by addressing some unanswered, and unexamined, questions using novel data. First, current knowledge about the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation focuses on public behavior with an emphasis on the lawmaking process in Congress. This narrow focus means that we do not know, if, or under what conditions, a legislator's personal characteristics and experiences affect other aspects of their behavior in Congress, including their decision to follow up on laws as they make their way through the implementation process. In order to overcome the limitations outlined in existing research, we exploit unique data that allow us to examine "unilateral" action on the part of legislators in a venue of representation unrestricted by the usual visibility concerns, namely correspondence logs between member offices in the U.S. Congress and fifteen federal agencies. Although the extant literature focuses largely on legislator behavior in the initial lawmaking stage, the growing body of research considering oversight (Minta 2009, 2011), constituency service (Grose, Mangum, and Martin 2007), and legislator correspondence (Broockman 2013; Butler and Broockman 2011; Butler 2014) suggests that we can expect a legislator's personal characteristics and experiences to impact a wider range of their behavior.

Second, by considering military service in addition to race and gender, we can contribute to discussions about the mechanism underlying legislators' motivations for advocating for citizens with shared identity and experiences. Although much of the existing literature on descriptive representation focuses on visible characteristics such as race or gender, there is no theoretical reason to limit our focus to physical features (Mansbridge 1999). The experience of being female or black shapes the way people see and experience the world in meaningful ways, but so does an individual's profession or having a loved one with health issues (Burden 2007). These other shared experiences can be just as meaningful, if not more important, for certain segments of the population or for certain issue areas (Bishin 2009). A smaller body of research that focuses on the impact of a legislator's sexual orientation, social class, or previous occupation, provides a more complete picture of the influence of personal characteristics and experiences.⁵ Surprisingly, the impact of

⁵Scholars have even found that the impact of being a father to daughters (Washington 2008) or having children in public versus private school (Burden 2007) can have a meaningful impact on legislator behavior.

military experience has been understudied as a form of descriptive representation. In the limited existing scholarship (e.g. Bianco 2005; Lupton 2017) on military experience and defense and foreign policy votes, results are mixed.⁶

We argue that legislators who are members of legally protected groups are important for ensuring political equality is preserved through bureaucratic policymaking and implementation for two main reasons. First, these representatives' backgrounds may give them information and insight into the potential for neglect and mistreatment of the protected communities with which they have shared experiences and a common history (Bratton and Haynie 1999; Burden 2007; Mansbridge 1999; Swers 2013). Second, a sense of shared group identification is likely to motivate members of Congress to be diligent advocates for those communities (Burden 2007; Hall 1996; Fenno 1978; Mansbridge 1999; Minta 2011). This motivation is important because participation is not universal but is highly selective. Members who have an interest in a certain outcome have to invest more than just votes. When highly motivated, legislators are willing to pay a greater cost (Hall 1996). These shared experiences drive legislators to reign in agency discretion, making them more vigilant watchmen for discriminatory practices and neglect. Thus, these members of protected groups in Congress serve as attentive advocates for citizens of their respected communities. Finally, we contend that this inter-branch communication between legislators and bureaucrats is important because it can have consequences for policy outcomes (Eulau and Karps 1977; Ritchie and You n.d.).⁷ Scholars find, for example, that direct contact from legislators can influence, even *reverse*, bureaucratic decision-making (Ritchie and You n.d.). This type of communication has the potential to impact how protected classes of citizens experience policies by shaping implementation.

Of course, we acknowledge there are other factors influencing these inter-branch interactions. Citizens of protected communities may be more likely to contact legislators with shared experi-

⁶While (Bianco 2005) does not find a difference between veterans and nonveterans in the U.S. House on defense and foreign policy votes, when narrowing the focus to votes that increase congressional oversight over war operations, Lupton (2017) finds that military experience does matter.

⁷Eulau and Karps (1977) make this point as well. They argue, "Providing constituent services and doing case work constitute for many representatives more significant aspects of their representational role than does legislative work like bill-drafting or attending committee hearings," (p. 243-244). They explicitly acknowledge that these "errand boy functions," like being an advocate for special interests in the district vis-à-vis bureaucracies and regulatory agencies, are increasingly important and crucial in our modern representational government.

ences (Broockman 2014), thus increasing the volume of “fire-alarms” (McCubbins and Schwartz 1984) for those legislators. On the other hand, the underrepresentation of protected groups in Congress could limit these legislators’ ability to advocate for citizens across a wide range of behaviors. If they allocate more resources toward oversight committee hearings and making floor speeches, they are less available to follow up with bureaucratic agencies. Additionally, during the Congresses addressed in this study, the number of members from underrepresented groups, especially women, steadily increased. Considering the learning curve associated with becoming a member of Congress, these new legislators, and their staffs, may be more focused on traditional lawmaking activities rather than making direct contact with bureaucratic agencies.

Our data also provides an opportunity to expand our study of descriptive and substantive representation to examine the impact of military experience on the behavior of legislators. Although supporting veterans is non-partisan and broadly supported, the foreign policy and defense votes used in previous studies (e.g. Bianco 2005; Lupton 2017) may be controversial—thus exaggerating other factors, such as party affiliation, and masking the impact of experience. Thus, although all members publicly support veterans, we argue that it is the personal characteristics and experiences that some legislators have that lead to greater substantive representation.⁸ If this expectation holds, veterans, especially those with active duty service in the Army, Navy, Marines or Air Force, should be more responsive than non-veteran legislators (Hall 1996; Mansbridge 1999).⁹

⁸Any non-controversial and pro-veteran legislation that comes to the floor should have wide bi-partisan support, masking the importance of military experience; this pattern should not hold for more proactive behaviors, like contacting the bureaucracy after the law has passed.

⁹The VA offers a wide variety of benefits to U.S. Armed Forces veterans, but who is considered a veteran, and thus becomes eligible for benefits, is narrowly defined (See <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/R42324.html>). Most reservist members fail to meet the eligibility requirements for VA benefits. Since even well-intentioned members from an outside group lack full understanding that leads to proactive behavior (Mansbridge 1999), reservist experience, while important, may not lead to the types of behavior we expect to see in this study if we assume shared experience is a mechanism that drives legislator behavior.

Measuring Representation with Constituent Inquiries

A key contribution of this study is to evaluate expectations associated with descriptive and substantive representation using previously unanalyzed records of congressional casework. Beyond the relative novelty of this approach, this data has several virtues. As Grose (2011) argues, constituency service is the ideal place to look for substantive representation because legislators “have complete control over decisions related to serving constituents with casework”(25). Unlike roll-call votes, our casework data are unhindered by strategic considerations associated with partisan influence.

Our data also improve upon one past measure of substantive representation: the allocation of “pork” projects. Though these projects provide clear, targeted benefits within a given district, they do not measure “unilateral” representation on the part of legislators. Prior to the earmark ban, these projects were still approved by majority coalitions. Since the ban, legislators have been forced to lobby bureaucratic agencies to achieve targeted benefits (Mills, Kalaf-Hughes, and MacDonald 2015). Thus, the outcome is mediated by the executive branch—which many have found allocates funds strategically (e.g. Berry, Burden, and Howell 2010; Kriner and Reeves 2015; Dynes and Huber 2015; Rogowski 2016). In contrast, we use records of direct contact from members of Congress to bureaucratic agencies on behalf of individual constituents. We argue this provides the most direct measurement of substantive representation available for observational research. Our contact data come from correspondence logs maintained by 15 agencies (Lowande N.d.; Mills, Kalaf-Hughes, and MacDonald 2015; Ritchie 2018). We collected these logs via multiple Freedom of Information Act requests. Overall, our data contain 88,519 usable contacts from legislators as logged by the agencies outlined in Table 1.¹⁰

Why does casework in agencies provide meaningful measures of substantive representation? Several of the agencies in question are the principal federal authorities responsible for policies targeted to the groups in question. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act outlines the EEOC’s mission—to enforce prohibitions against discrimination in the workplace. Though these laws

¹⁰By “usable” we mean cases that identify the contacting legislator, the contact date, and contain a description of the inquiry. Fewer than 200 cases had to be excluded because one or all of these were missing, or because the contact did not come from a federal elected official.

prohibit discrimination against *any* race, color or national origin and *any* sex, their intent and effect has been to protect women and racial or ethnic minorities.¹¹ The VA's primary mandate is to serve military veterans and their dependents, while operating the largest system of healthcare facilities in the United States. They are the federal government's arbiter of the disability compensation, retirement benefits, financial services, and medical care of veterans.

Other agencies in our data also have jurisdiction over statutes that offer opportunities for substantive representation. The Department of Education is charged with enforcing Title IX regulations at colleges and universities. The Department of Labor enforces the Uniformed Service Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), which assists service members with problems maintaining civilian employment. Even agencies without specifically targeted laws often run programs with group-specific relevance. The Department of Energy maintains an office dedicated to promoting research at minority-serving educational institutions. Moreover, since the early 1960s, presidents have used their authority to promote government-wide diversity in grant-writing and contracting (Gitterman 2017). All agencies that engage in either activity must adhere to these standards. This creates yet another opportunity for constituent service. Put simply, casework that serves the particular interests of women, racial/ethnic minorities, and veterans is likely to go through these agencies' offices.

Nonetheless, these data do have limitations that are important to present. Our sample of agencies is limited to those that respond to FOIA requests, and to the time series they provide. Often, agencies are reticent to release records for a long time series because of a labor-intensive review and redaction process. This is especially true in large agencies. As a result, coverage of particular congresses (our unit of analysis) varies by agency. As Table 1 indicates, our constituency service records are most highly concentrated in the 110th, 111th, and 112th Congresses.

This raises a few potential concerns. First, the volume of contact will vary by Congress because of arbitrary differences in our data coverage. Second, the presence or absence of particular agencies with high volumes of representation contact could bias a given Congress toward higher counts. For example, diversity in Congress is trending upward, so the introduction of the EEOC

¹¹Note, the EEOC also enforces laws against age and disability discrimination, but the vast majority of cases involve racial/ethnic or sex discrimination. In 2015, the latter made up 78% of the EEOC's caseload. See: <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/statistics/enforcement/index.cfm>

correspondence log in the 110th Congress could create a spurious association between our key independent and dependent variables. We take two steps to address these concerns. First, we dichotomize the key dependent variables, which are coded “1” for representation of a particular group, and “0” otherwise. This reduces the potential for error by collapsing variation in the count of contact that may be due to the coverage issues discussed above. Second, we provide multiple specifications of each dependent variable that exclude agencies for which we do not have complete coverage from the 110-112th Congresses. Reassuringly, we find that our results are generally not sensitive to arbitrary inclusion or exclusion of particular Congresses. Where this is not the case, we explicitly note it in our presentation of the results.

Table 1 – Data Coverage for Constituency Service

| Agency | 109 | 110 | 111 | 112 | 113 | N |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------|
| Armed Forces Retirement Home | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 19 |
| Corp. for National & Community Service | | | | ✓ | | 213 |
| Consumer Product Safety Commission | – | ✓ | ✓ | – | | 339 |
| Department of Education | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | – | | 2,892 |
| Department of Energy | | ✓ | ✓ | – | | 4,403 |
| Department of Homeland Security | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 24,305 |
| Department of Housing and Urban Development | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 8,846 |
| Department of the Interior | | | | ✓ | | 916 |
| Department of Labor | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 28,570 |
| Department of Veterans Affairs | | | | ✓ | | 1,109 |
| Equal Employment Opportunity Commission | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 3,499 |
| Environmental Protection Agency | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 11,951 |
| Federal Reserve | | | ✓ | | | 438 |
| National Science Foundation | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 872 |
| U.S. Agency for International Development | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | 895 |

Note: Checkmark indicates full coverage of Congress, dash indicates partial coverage.

Using agency correspondence logs, we constructed several dependent variables. Our aim was to identify cases of substantive representation of legally protected classes. All cases were read and hand-coded by the authors. The coding definitions, procedures, and inter-coder reliability diagnostics can be found in Appendix A. We coded cases as relevant if the correspondence description provided by the agency indicated that the legislator was working on behalf of, supporting, or advocating for an individual or group of individuals who are legally protected. To be coded

affirmatively, the description had to explicitly mention the group in question. For example, occasionally, the EEOC notes that a constituent “alleges discrimination” without referencing the type of discrimination (e.g. sex, age, race/ethnicity, disability, etc.). These cases were excluded. For this reason, if anything, our data may slightly *undercount* relevant casework.

The policy content of substantive representation varies dramatically by agency, and can address the concerns of a particular constituent or the group as a whole. For example, employment-related contacts may advocate on behalf of a constituent with a discrimination case, or ask the agency to provide detailed information about its plans for hiring a diverse workforce. Likewise, grant-related contacts may be letters of support for specific applicants, or inquiries about grants available for the benefit of veterans, women, or racial/ethnic minorities. We report additional examples in our the supplementary appendix.

Research Design

Our empirical strategy is to compare the group-specific casework of legislators who do and do not descriptively represent particular constituent groups. Since we test our expectations in the context of each group separately, the precise variables and functional form of each analysis will differ. However, in general, our approach is to estimate the effect of each legislator descriptive characteristic while accounting for potential confounders—most importantly, some measure of “casework demand” specific to identity groups. More specifically, our aim is to account for selection into being represented by a legislator with a shared identity trait. For each group, we evaluate this three ways: simple difference-of-means among sub-groups of legislators, cross-sectional regression controlling for confounders, and coarsened-exact matching. Our results are largely consistent across each. We confine the main text to the discussion and presentation of substantively interpretable marginal effects, with full results reported in our Supplemental Appendix.

Prior to presenting these results, it is important to reiterate two points about identification. First, since candidate selection is explicitly endogenous to constituent preferences, our analysis is properly thought of as descriptive. Second and relatedly, our analysis is not intended to adjudicate between alternative causal mechanisms examined by previous experimental research. As Butler (2014) notes, politicians may have strategic and non-strategic reasons to prioritize certain requests

and perform casework. That is, they may prioritize serving electorally relevant constituents, or exhibit personal bias (Butler and Broockman 2011). Moreover, descriptive characteristics may influence the likelihood constituents choose to contact legislators at all (Broockman 2014). Importantly, each of these potential mechanisms suggests the same relationship: that descriptive representation ought to translate into substantive representation. Thus, support for our hypotheses should be taken as evidence that one or more of these causal mechanisms has meaningful implications that are observable in the aggregate.

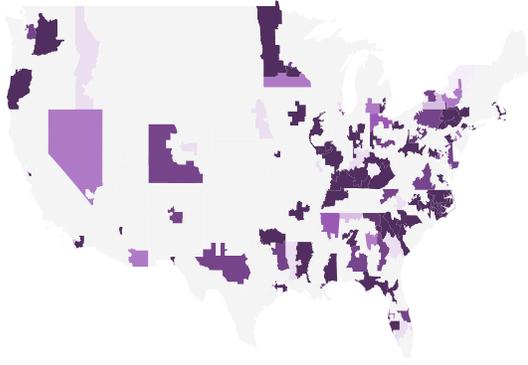
Legislator background was coded using CQ Press' congressional member profiles. Sex and race/ethnicity are taken directly from these records. The lack of diversity in Congress limits our ability to make inferences about any particular race/ethnicity. For the purposes of this analysis, the key independent variable is a dichotomous indicator for racial/ethnic minority background. With few exceptions, legislators were coded as having military service if they satisfied the federal definition of "veteran," which includes two criteria: active-duty service followed by discharge via some means other than dishonorable.¹² As an alternative measure, we excluded legislators who would be classified as "reservists" in common parlance: those who served exclusively in reserve components of the armed forces (e.g. Army/Navy Reserve, Air National Guard). This highlights an additional benefit of analyzing veteran status alongside gender and race/ethnicity. Theoretical accounts of descriptive representation highlight shared experience as a mechanism for substantive representation. Veteran legislators vary meaningfully in the degree of their shared experience with veteran constituents in ways that are observable — providing a unique opportunity to tease out nuances in the importance of shared experience for substantive representation.

For each group, we leverage multiple potential measures of demand. Figure 2 plots each measure alongside its corresponding legislator characteristic. For constituents with military service, we use veteran population (VetPop) or total VA expenditures by district. These data are aggregated and maintained by the VA (Figure 2b). Importantly, however, the VetPop survey data are imputed by unknown means and the VA does not report corresponding error estimates. Thus, we regard reported expenditures as more reliable. They are correlated with selection of a legislator

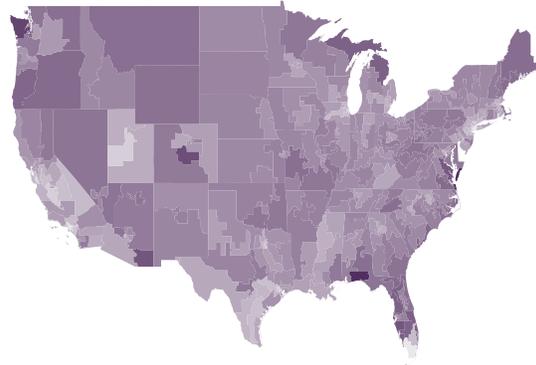
¹²Mitch McConnell, for example, satisfies both criterion, but served for three months in the Army Reserve and secured a medical discharge for an ailment (optic neuritis), which was cured months after. Veteran interest groups unanimously omit McConnell from public lists of "legislators who served."

Figure 2 – Representatives and the Represented

(a) Members with Military Service

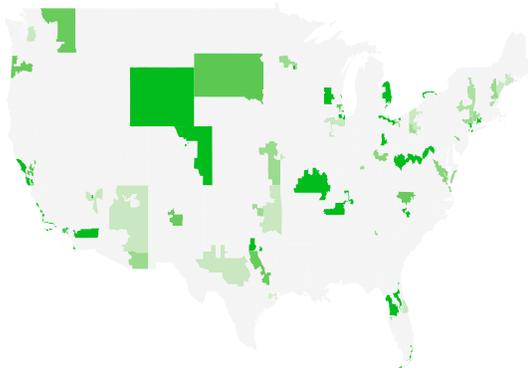


(b) Veteran Constituents

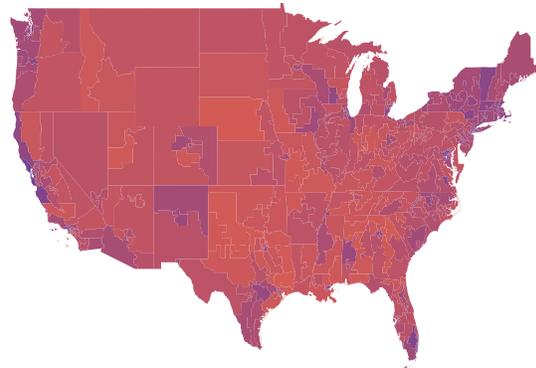


Note: Plots proportion of legislators with military service from the 108-111th Congress, and of the population which are veterans ($min = 0.01$, $max = 0.15$); darker colors indicate higher values.

(c) Women in the House

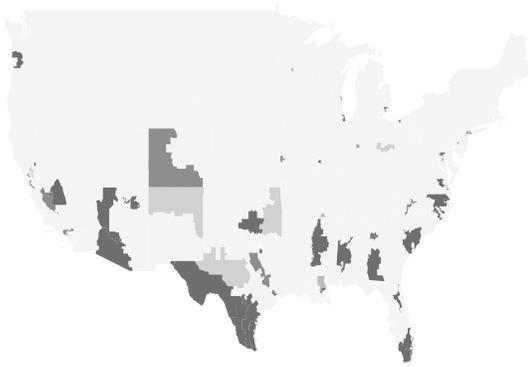


(d) District Ideology

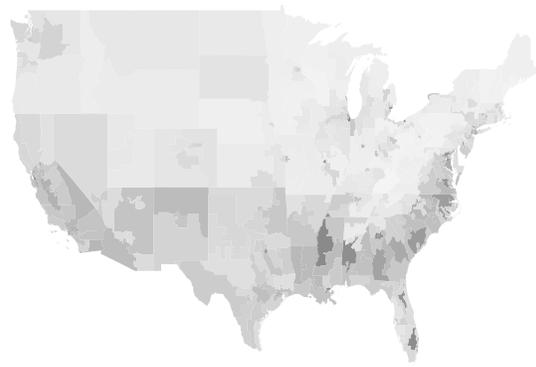


Note: Plots proportion of female legislators serving from the 108-111th Congress, and the ideology of each district, according to Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013); red indicates conservative, blue indicates liberal.

(e) Race/Ethnicity in the House



(f) Race/Ethnicity of Constituents



Note: Plots proportion of minority legislators serving from the 108-111th Congress, and the non-white population of each district. Darker shades indicate higher values.

with military service (Figure 2a). For gender and race/ethnic background, we use estimates of district ideology developed by Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013). We plot these in Figure 2d. District liberalism is correlated with selection in both cases. Finally, for race/ethnic background, we also use district race/ethnicity population estimates (Figure 2f). Each of these measures is modestly correlated in the expected direction with our key independent variables. All regression models will also include Chamber and Congress fixed-effects to account for time-specific shocks, so our results leverage variation between same-chamber legislators within a given Congress. Since our models are meant to account for factors that lead to the selection of representative legislators, we refrain from presenting results with an exhaustive set of potential covariates. Nonetheless, Appendix B reports additional results with controls for poverty, legislator seniority, and state fixed-effects. In general, the results we present in-text are robust to these specifications.

We are also cognizant of the basic limitations of our time-series and data availability. One general concern is that the number of veterans, women, and racial/ethnic minorities in Congress will limit our ability to confidently detect differences across groups. To investigate this, we conducted a simulation study of congressional representation during this period (Appendix C). We find that the research design described above recovers the effect for veterans in 75% of simulations if the true effect for veterans is greater than a 0.55 standard deviation. Predictably, our design is less effective at recovering the effects for gender and race/ethnicity. For race/ethnicity, the effect size would have to be implausibly large (1.5 standard deviations) to hit the same 75% threshold. This illustrates a basic point: that our analysis likely biases *against* finding affirmative evidence of descriptive representation for women and racial/ethnic minorities, providing a conservative test of the link between descriptive and substantive representation.

Findings

Overall, we find consistent evidence that descriptive representation matters for substantive representation in Congress. There are substantively significant differences in the content of constituency service by legislators' military service, gender, and race/ethnicity. These differences persist after accounting for confounders and "pruning" the dataset to comparable units. The most striking differences are among male and female legislators, with women in Congress around 8

percentage points more likely to contact agencies on behalf of women. This is particularly striking because the baseline probability of such contact is around 20 percentage points. We also find that the *degree* of shared experience matters for substantive representation. The differences in veteran casework are driven by legislators with active duty service in the Army, Navy, Marines, or Air Force. That is, legislators who served in their states' national guard or as reservists do not meaningfully differ in their volume of casework from those with no military background. These findings suggest that shared experience operates as a critical mechanism for representation.

Military Service

Table 2 reports differences in mean veteran-casework across legislator groups. For each analysis that follows, the dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator for contact in a given Congress, so the results can be interpreted as conditional probabilities. We present differences for all legislators, as well as split-Senate delegations. These are pairs of Senators in a given Congress who represent the same state but have different backgrounds. This allows us to hold constituency constant. In each case, there are consistent and substantively significant differences across legislators with military experience. These differences are stronger when reservists are not coded as veteran legislators. It is also larger for split-Senate delegations. In general, senators perform more casework, so the baseline probability of contact is higher. Senators with military service are 22 percentage points more likely to perform veteran-related casework than their non-veteran, same-state colleagues.

Table 2 – Casework Differences Across Members with Military Service

| <i>Any Veteran</i> | Non-veterans | Veterans | Difference (95% CI) |
|---|--------------|----------|---------------------|
| All Legislators (<i>n</i> = 2,194) | 0.25 | 0.31 | +0.06 (0.01,0.10) |
| Split Sen. Delegations (<i>n</i> = 170) | 0.44 | 0.60 | +0.16 (0.01,0.31) |
| <i>Excluding Reservists</i> | Non-veterans | Veterans | Difference (95% CI) |
| All Legislators (<i>n</i> = 2,194) | 0.25 | 0.34 | +0.09 (0.04,0.15) |
| Split Sen. Delegations (<i>n</i> = 110) | 0.43 | 0.65 | +0.22 (0.04,0.41) |

Note: Outcome is dichotomous indicator of contact; unit-of-analysis is legislator-congress; means and difference of means by subgroup; split Senate delegations are those with one member with military service.

These differences are robust to accounting for various confounders and alternative measures of representation. In Table 3, we report least squared estimates that control for legislator ideology and logged veteran expenditures. As models 2 and 4 indicate, differences in casework are primarily driven by non-reservist veterans. In model 4, veterans are about 7 percentage points more likely to contact an agency on behalf of veterans. Inclusion of confounders that should contribute to legislator selection may bias these estimates. To account for the concern, we report results from a dataset matched on each covariate in the Appendix. As Table B2 indicates, this largely replicates the findings reported in Tables 2 and 3. Restricting our analysis to the agencies for which we have complete coverage from the 110-112th Congresses does not alter these results.

We do however, find several inconsistencies in these results. One comes when we restrict analysis to the 112th Congress (Appendix, Table B1). This is the Congress for which we have the most data, as it includes the log from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Though the estimates are the expected sign, the confidence intervals are wider because of the reduction in sample size. A second is that these results are not robust to the inclusion of additional controls—specifically, seniority and state fixed-effects. We report these results in Table B3. The effects are “marginally” significant at conventional levels ($p < 0.1$) and in the expected direction. But again, this underscores the inherent difficulty of uncovering systematic differences across groups with our limited time-series. We return to this point in our discussion.

Table 3 – Military Service and Veterans Representation

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| | <i>All Contact</i> | | <i>110-112th Cong.</i> | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Veteran (Any) | 0.029 (0.024) | | 0.047 (0.031) | |
| Veteran (Excluding Reservists) | | 0.068 (0.030) | | 0.072 (0.033) |
| Commonspace Ideology | -0.016 (0.022) | -0.016 (0.022) | -0.031 (0.029) | -0.030 (0.28) |
| ln(Veteran Expenditures) | 0.073 (0.015) | 0.073 (0.015) | 0.071 (0.017) | 0.071 (0.017) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>N</i> | 2,194 | 2,194 | 1,654 | 1,654 |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> ² | 0.15 | 0.16 | 0.09 | 0.09 |

Note: “All Contact” is any veteran-related contact to the agencies/congresses in Table 1; “110-112th” is subset to these Congresses for the agencies with whom we have a complete record; least squares coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress dummies omitted for readability.

Gender

We find striking differences in constituency service across genders. Table 4 reports significant difference-in-means estimates for all legislators and split delegations. The marginal increase in each case is large enough to merit skepticism. However, it is noteworthy that rates of contact are statistically distinguishable even after reducing the sample size to the 76 senators in split-delegations. This provides preliminary indication of important differences in womens’ representation to administrative agencies.

Table 4 – Casework Differences Across Genders

| | Male | Female | Difference (95% CI) |
|--|------|--------|---------------------|
| All Legislators (<i>n</i> = 2,194) | 0.11 | 0.30 | +0.19 (0.10,0.23) |
| Split Sen. Delegations (<i>n</i> = 76) | 0.13 | 0.34 | +0.21 (0.02,0.40) |

Note: Outcome is dichotomous indicator of contact; unit-of-analysis is legislator-congress; means and difference of means by subgroup; split Senate delegations are those with one female member.

The multivariate results in Table 5 support these differences. Women in Congress are about 8 percentage points more likely to substantively represent women with constituent service. Reassuringly, other covariates exhibit expected relationships with casework. Legislators with more conservative voting records or who have more conservative districts are less likely to perform this kind of service. We take this evidence that our dependent variable is measuring theoretically-relevant substantive representation. Again, these estimates are robust to excluding observations without comparable cases, or including additional controls and state fixed-effects. Table B4 reports regression estimates for a dataset matched with chamber, Congress, and measures of district preferences. Table B5 reports estimates that include additional controls. These point estimates are not statistically distinguishable from the models in Table 5.

Table 5 – Gender and Women’s Representation

| | (1) | (2) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Female | 0.079 (0.020) | 0.083 (0.021) |
| Commonspace Ideology | -0.196 (0.015) | |
| District Ideology | | -0.256 (0.024) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>N</i> | 2,194 | 2,194 |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> ² | 0.21 | 0.19 |

Note: Dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator for any gender-related contact to the agencies/congresses in Table 1; least squares coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress dummies omitted for readability.

Race, Ethnicity and National Origin

We report least squared estimates for the substantive representation of racial/ethnic minorities in Table 6. For this section, we forgo presenting difference-of-means results because—as Figure 1 indicates—the number of comparison cases is small. This means that differences across the full sample are noisy, and limiting comparisons to split-senate delegations is essentially meaningless. Nonetheless, there are some noteworthy differences in Table 6. Though the results are somewhat inconsistent across measures of casework demand, there appears to be a positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. In models that account for district ideology, the difference is about 9 percentage points. Again, the baseline probability of such contact is low (about 30%), so this difference is large and substantively meaningful.

These estimates are less certain when controlling for non-white district population in the multivariate models. Importantly, however, the matching results reported in Appendix Table B6 show more consistent differences. After dropping several hundred caucasian legislators with no plausibly comparable legislator from a different racial/ethnic background, there is about a 10 percentage point difference in the probability of constituency contact. The results are similar after including

district poverty rate and legislator seniority as covariates, or state fixed-effects to account for unobserved heterogeneity across delegations (Table B7).

Table 6 – Race/Ethnicity and Minority Representation

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>All Contact</i> | | <i>110-112th Cong.</i> | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Non-White | 0.091 (0.034) | 0.060 (0.039) | 0.090 (0.036) | 0.078 (0.039) |
| District Ideology | -0.153 (0.041) | | -0.203 (0.046) | |
| District % White | | -0.276 (0.075) | | -0.264 (0.079) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>N</i> | 2,194 | 2,194 | 1,654 | 1,654 |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> ² | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.11 |

Note: “All Contact” is any race-related contact to the agencies/congresses in Table 1; “110-112th” is subset to these Congresses for the agencies with whom we have a complete record; least squares coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress dummies omitted for readability.

Discussion

Does descriptive representation improve advocacy for protected communities during policy implementation? We find that legislators are active advocates on behalf of protected classes with whom they have shared backgrounds. These results are consistent across women, racial and ethnic minorities, and military veterans in Congress. This research offers several contributions. First, it establishes the importance of descriptive representation for inter-branch representation of protected groups using a “unilateral” or less constrained measure of legislator participation. Representation is difficult to evaluate by focusing solely on other types of legislative behavior. Voting, bill sponsorship, committee participation, and pork are shaped by a range of constraints including leadership agenda setting, logrolling, and partisan pressures. Our results provide a cleaner test of

the outcomes and implications of descriptive representation.

Second, our findings provide important context for experimental research by using observational data to examine representation within the context of the U.S. Congress and by considering the quality of legislators' advocacy on behalf of citizens. Shared identity not only affects legislators' correspondence-based responses to mail from citizens of protected groups, but also reflects their interbranch advocacy as well. Third, we build on previous work on descriptive representation by including veterans, offering a unique comparison case for substantive representation that highlights the importance of shared experience.

Of course, there are inherent limitations in our study which we confront in several ways. We are dependent on the limited number of legislators assigned to the groups, thus the underrepresentation of women, minorities, and veterans in Congress poses a challenge for inference. In an effort to respond to this limitation, we have included the results of an analysis in which we generate a simulated dependent variable and use a matching procedure to recover meaningful differences. The results of this analysis are included in Appendix C. Additionally, like all observational studies, our ability to establish causal inference is limited, despite our efforts to limit confounding influences and alternative explanations. While our research design is unable to adjudicate between causal mechanisms, the nuance within our findings offer insight into the theoretical underpinnings of how descriptive representation in Congress reflects onto patterns of interbranch interactions. For instance, military service alone does not inspire legislators to be active advocates for veterans. The differences in veteran advocacy are driven by legislators with active duty service, while reservist and national guard service does not offer meaningful differences. This result suggests that shared experience improves legislators' representation through interbranch interactions.

Together our findings offer varied normative implications for the representation of protected groups of citizens. Our results offer a somewhat optimistic future for the representation of women, minorities and veterans as Congress becomes more diverse. Yet, in the current context, underrepresentation in Congress has troubling implications for inter-branch representation across all three protected classes of citizens. Since public policy is largely made through agency decisions rather than statutory enactment, it is important for subsequent studies assessing the quality of representation of protected communities to examine the backchannels of bureaucratic governance. Occa-

sionally, particularly egregious instances of bureaucratic disservice to these communities do make the headlines, such as the reports of inefficiency and corruption at the Department of Veterans' Affairs in 2014. However, most of the bureaucracy's decisions and interactions with citizens occurs outside of the public view. Bureaucratic policymaking does not occur in a vacuum and the incentives of legislators may not offer citizens equal representation in this arena.

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Supporting Information
Descriptive and Substantive Representation in Congress

| | |
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A Data Collection and Coding Procedure

In order to construct the dataset used in our analyses, we submitted Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for records of communication from members of Congress (House and Senate) to fifteen federal agencies.¹³ Using the agency correspondence logs, we constructed several dependent variables. These logs provide a description of each individual contact (including the subject of the communication), the originating congressional office, and the date of the contact. For each contact, coders read the description and, based on a set of coding rules, indicated whether the member of Congress was contacting the agency on behalf of a protected community and identified the represented group (e.g., women). We began by randomly selecting a subset of the contacts from our population (5% or approximately 4,000 contacts) for all authors to code (three coders total) to assess intercoder reliability. Moving forward, the contacts were randomly assigned for coding by one of the authors.

We use multiple estimates to assess intercoder reliability. All of our estimates are well above the accepted thresholds. While agreement rate should not be the sole estimate of intercoder reliability, our agreement rates for the measures used in our analyses are consistently high, never dipping below 0.97. In addition, our assessment produced a Krippendorff's alpha coefficient of 0.90, which is well beyond the standard threshold of acceptability (Krippendorff 2004).

In order to construct our dependent variables, we identified cases of substantive representation of legally protected classes. We coded cases as relevant if the contact description provided by the agency indicated that the legislator was working on behalf of, supporting, or advocating for an individual or group of individuals who are legally protected (please see examples of relevant contacts below). The majority of relevant contacts were related to issues of employment discrimination, other types or unspecified acts of discrimination, benefit denials, and support for grants or government contracts (e.g., contracts for minority-owned businesses), and other types of assistance. To be coded affirmatively, the description had to explicitly mention the group in question. For example, occasionally, the EEOC notes that a constituent alleges discrimination without referencing the type of discrimination (e.g. sex, age, race/ethnicity, disability, etc.). These cases were excluded.

We identify the following protected groups: women, racial/ethnic minorities, and veterans. Our definition of race includes ethnicity and national origin, consistent with the legal definition of protected classes. Contacts often did not offer specific details regarding race or ethnic identity or nation of origin (e.g., allegations of racial profiling at the airport or racial discrimination at work, support for minority-owned businesses), so all are categorized as a single variable. We included veterans, active members of the military, and their families, as a protected class.

¹³The Freedom of Information Act allows individuals to request information and documents from federal agencies. There are nine exceptions which allow agencies to redact information including the interest of national defense or foreign policy, trade secrets, and the geographic location of wells. For the full list of exceptions and further information, see <https://www.justice.gov/oip/doj-guide-freedom-information-act>. Information covered by the exemptions may be redacted, which is plainly indicated on the records along with the reason for the exception. When excluding information, the agency must disclose the exclusion in response letters. Any redacted information in our records was not necessary for our analyses.

A.1 Examples of each category from the congressional correspondence logs:

Examples coded as relevant for women

- “Support Proposal Submitted to DOL [Department of Labor] for the Serving Female Ex-Offenders Program”
- “Reinstate the Statistics of the Pay of the American People by Gender”
- “Reverse the actions that would diminish the vital role of women’s bureau”
- “Alleges sex discrimination”

Examples coded as relevant for race/ethnicity/national origin

- “re minority-owned auto dealerships; waive AAA requirement; enact support program for minority auto dealers and similar to Emergency Dealer Assistance Program”
- “Senator Ensign writes to on behalf of constituent who is detained by Homeland Security when arriving at the airport and feels he is being racially profiled”
- “Alleges National Origin discrimination”
- “Grant support letter for ICIRR [Asian American Community Empowerment Project]”

Examples coded as relevant for veterans

- “OFCCP [Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs]/Federal Contractor is in Violation of VEVRAA [Vietnam Era Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act] laws”
- “Support Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) Grant Proposal”
- “Admission and wait list concerns [at the Armed Forces Retirement Home]”
- “Sen. Kerry would like to know what measures DHS [Department of Homeland Security] is taking to fully utilize the procurement program for small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans”

B Additional Results

B.1 Military Service

Table B1 – Military Service and Veterans Representation (112th Congress)

| | <i>OLS</i> | | <i>Negative Binomial</i> | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Veteran (Any) | 0.003 (0.041) | | -0.118 (0.170) | |
| Veteran (Excluding Reservists) | | 0.067 (0.051) | | 0.120 (0.199) |
| Commonspace Ideology | -0.091 (0.037) | -0.093 (0.037) | -0.575 (0.164) | -0.591 (0.164) |
| ln(Veteran Expenditures) | 0.055 (0.027) | 0.056 (0.027) | 0.422 (0.089) | 0.427 (0.090) |
| <i>N</i> | 547 | 547 | 547 | 547 |

Note: Dependent Variable is any veteran-related contact (dichotomous or count) to the agencies/congresses in the 112th Congress; coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber.

Table B2 – Casework Differences Across Members with Military Service (Matching)

| <i>Any Veteran</i> | Unmatched <i>N</i> | | Difference (95% CI) | \mathcal{L}_1 | LCS |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|-----------------|-----|
| | Non-veterans | Veterans | | | |
| All Contact | 143 | 13 | +0.05 (0.00,0.10) | 0.63 | 31% |
| 110-112th Cong. | 74 | 6 | +0.07 (0.02,0.12) | | |
| <i>Excluding Reservists</i> | | | | | |
| All Contact | 287 | 4 | +0.09 (0.03,0.14) | 0.71 | 22% |
| 110-112th Cong. | 347 | 5 | +0.09 (0.02,0.15) | | |

Note: Outcome is dichotomous indicator of contact; unit-of-analysis is legislator-congress; observations matched on chamber, Congress, district ideology, and veteran-related expenditures in district.

Table B3 – Military Service and Veterans Representation (Additional Controls)

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Veteran (Any) | 0.036 (0.026) | | 0.041 (0.027) | |
| Veteran (Excluding Reservists) | | 0.061 (0.031) | | 0.054 (0.031) |
| Commonspace Ideology | -0.042 (0.025) | -0.042 (0.025) | -0.021 (0.030) | -0.021 (0.030) |
| ln(Veteran Expenditures) | 0.089 (0.018) | 0.089 (0.018) | 0.093 (0.020) | 0.093 (0.020) |
| Poverty Rate | -0.008 (0.002) | -0.008 (0.002) | -0.006 (0.003) | -0.006 (0.003) |
| Seniority | 0.005 (0.002) | 0.005 (0.002) | 0.003 (0.002) | 0.003 (0.002) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| State FE | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| N | 1,654 | 1,654 | 1,654 | 1,654 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.12 | 0.12 |

Note: Dependent Variable is any veteran-related contact (dichotomous or count) to the agencies/congresses in the 110–112th Congress; coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber.

B.2 Gender

Table B4 – Casework Differences Across Genders (Matching)

| <i>Matched on:</i> | Unmatched N | | Difference (95% CI) | \mathcal{L}_1 | LCS |
|----------------------|-------------|--------|---------------------|-----------------|-------|
| | Male | Female | | | |
| Commonspace Ideology | 160 | 0 | +0.06 (0.02,0.11) | 0.35 | 50.2% |
| District Ideology | 33 | 0 | +0.07 (0.02,0.11) | 0.43 | 56.5% |

Note: Outcome is dichotomous indicator of contact; unit-of-analysis is legislator-congress; observations matched on chamber, Congress, and covariate indicated in column 1.

Table B5 – Gender and Women’s Representation (Additional Controls)

| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Female | 0.081 (0.021) | 0.086 (0.021) | 0.081 (0.021) | 0.090 (0.021) |
| Commonspace Ideology | −0.190 (0.017) | | −0.201 (0.021) | |
| District Ideology | | −0.242 (0.025) | | −0.243 (0.033) |
| Poverty Rate | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.003 (0.001) | 0.0001 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.001) |
| Seniority | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.002 (0.001) | 0.001 (0.001) | 0.002 (0.001) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| State FE | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| N | 2,194 | 2,194 | 2,194 | 2,194 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.21 | 0.19 | 0.24 | 0.20 |

Note: Dependent variable is a dichotomous indicator for any gender-related contact to the agencies/congresses in Table 1; least squares coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress dummies omitted for readability.

B.3 Race, Ethnicity, and National Origin

Table B6 – Casework Differences Across Race/Ethnicity (Matching)

| <i>Matched on:</i> | Unmatched N | | Difference (95% CI) | \mathcal{L}_1 | LCS |
|--------------------|-------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------------|-------|
| | White | Non-White | | | |
| District % White | 169 | 0 | +0.10 (0.05,0.16) | 0.62 | 60.9% |
| District Ideology | 223 | 0 | +0.11 (0.06,0.16) | 0.55 | 59.9% |

Note: Outcome is dichotomous indicator of contact; unit-of-analysis is legislator-congress; observations matched on chamber, Congress, and covariate indicated in column 1.

Table B7 – Race/Ethnicity and Minority Representation (Additional Controls)

| | <i>All</i> | <i>110-112</i> | <i>All</i> | <i>110-112</i> | <i>All</i> | <i>110-112</i> | <i>All</i> | <i>110-112</i> |
|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Non-White | 0.102 (0.038) | 0.093 (0.036) | 0.081 (0.040) | 0.096 (0.038) | 0.098 (0.041) | 0.112 (0.039) | 0.098 (0.044) | 0.126 (0.040) |
| District Ideology | -0.126 (0.041) | -0.179 (0.042) | | | -0.093 (0.054) | -0.190 (0.058) | | |
| District % White | | | -0.264 (0.076) | -0.244 (0.077) | | | -0.122 (0.093) | -0.181 (0.100) |
| Poverty | -0.001 (0.003) | 0.00000 (0.002) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.002) | 0.0001 (0.003) | -0.003 (0.003) | -0.0002 (0.003) | -0.002 (0.003) |
| Seniority | 0.007 (0.002) | 0.007 (0.002) | 0.008 (0.002) | 0.008 (0.002) | 0.006 (0.002) | 0.006 (0.002) | 0.006 (0.002) | 0.007 (0.002) |
| Congress FE | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| State FE | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| <i>N</i> | 2,194 | 1,654 | 2,194 | 1,654 | 2,194 | 1,654 | 2,194 | 1,654 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.109 | 0.119 | 0.111 | 0.115 | 0.142 | 0.162 | 0.142 | 0.158 |

Note: “All Contact” is any race-related contact to the agencies/congresses in Table 1; “110-112th” is subset to these Congresses for the agencies with whom we have a complete record; least squares coefficients with standard errors clustered by legislator in parentheses; all models control for chamber; Congress dummies omitted for readability.

C Detecting Meaningful Differences

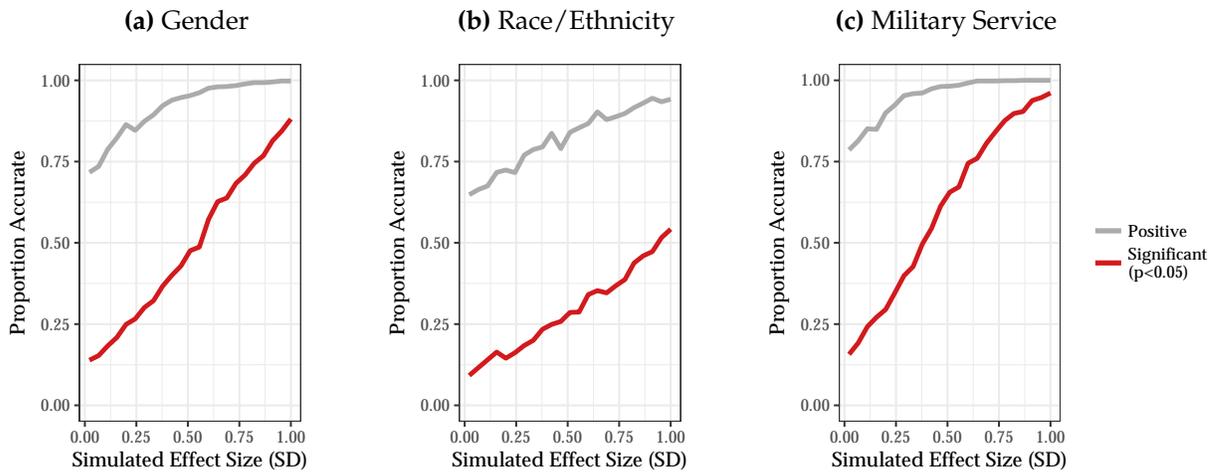
To evaluate potential limitations inherent in observational studies of descriptive representation, we present a straightforward simulation procedure. Our analysis relies on comparing legislators who do not share various identity characteristics. But the fact is that the American political process has produced relatively few comparison units. Put simply, few legislators in Congress are women or racial/ethnic minorities. This poses a challenge for inference, so it is useful to estimate how often “nature” and would allow researchers to uncover meaningful differences, *assuming our theory is correct*. In brief, we generate a simulated dependent variable, then summarize how often our matching procedure recovers statistically distinguishable differences. We describe this procedure below:

1. Generate the DV: $Y \leftarrow \text{rbinom}(\dots, \text{prob}=\text{model})$, where “model” is a linear, additive function of the identity trait*effect size, district control and normally distributed error. The district control is either ideology (women), white population (racial/ethnic minorities), or veterans population (veterans). Effect size is assumed to be normally distributed with a mean that varies according to step 3.
2. Pre-process dataset (`cem()`) by matching on white population, veterans percentage, district ideology, chamber, and Congress. Coarsen continuous variables (the results below use 10 cutpoints for each).

3. Regress identity trait on Y using the matched dataset.
4. Repeat steps 1-3 for each effect size for 1,000 iterations, then report the proportion of accurate LATE estimates.

We present the results of this procedure for each group in Figure C1. Overall, note that even under the most favorable assumptions, it is generally difficult to recover meaningful differences across legislator groups, given our data. Note, however, that one can arbitrarily increase or decrease the simulated noise in these models—and thus—shift efficacy of our procedure up or down across each case. In other words, comparing the simulation results across groups is more useful than examining overall efficacy. This provides important context for the findings we present in the main text.

Figure C1 – Detecting Meaningful Effects in Congress



Note: Simulated data based on the identity characteristics of legislators from the 108–113 Congress; estimates recovered through coarsened exact matching by district ideology, white and veteran population, along with chamber and Congress.