

# [Substantive furthermore, the legitimacy of parliament would](https://assignbuster.com/substantive-furthermore-the-legitimacy-of-parliament-would/)

[Literature](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/literature/)

Substantiverepresentation would be the tendency to vote, through an informed process, bysomeone who represents the thoughts, ideals and principles that you as acitizen want to see safeguarded.

1 Takingthis and the democratic system which the UK operates in, I intend to argue thatthere needs to be an adequate improvement of both descriptive and substantiverepresentation for it to be enough for women and ethnic minorities. The UK is arepresentative democracy hence, the state should strive to incorporate allethnic groups and genders into the political landscape. Furthermore, thelegitimacy of parliament would be brought into question if ethnic minority andfemale interests were not focused upon enough within the House of Commons inparticular. I intend to use an article by KarenBird which details research about the presence of substantiverepresentation in a representative democracy.

This will be used to argue that” better representation of members of historically marginalized groups willimprove the process of representative democracy.” 2 Inaddition to this, I intend to use an article by Zingher and Farrer that argues that descriptive representation isan important tool for political parties to appeal to ethnic minority groups. Finally, I will refer to an article by Erzeel andCelis which gives the substantive representation of women an ideologicalarc. By using this source, I intend to argue that the moderation of ideologieshas improved substantive representation for women as parties strive toarticulate women’s interests. If therewas an influx of minority MPs in parliament, then substantive representationwould inevitably rise. Historically, the lack of visible minorities has causeddisillusionment among ethnic groups.

They can potentially have doubts of thequality of substantive representation which is being delivered to them. As ofthe recent 2017 election, the current parliament is the most diverse since itwas founded. There is “ Currently around 8% of Members of both Houses are froman ethnic minority background.

This compares with 13. 6% of UK population.” 3 Inaddition to this, “ The number of ethnic minority female MPs in the House ofCommons increased from 3.

0% in 2015 (20 of 650) to 4% in 2017 (26 of 650). Currently non-white female MPs make up 12. 5% of all women MPs (208).” 4 Evenwith this parliament being the most diverse, ethnic minorities are stillsignificantly under-represented. Leading on from this, because of the lack ofproportional representation of ethnicities within parliament, the UK’srepresentative democracy, in England particularly, is inherently flawed. Mansbridge inadvertently supports my argument by proposing that more diverse representationwill provide access to more information, and will promote trust among distinctgroups, ultimately enhancing policy outcomes. 5 Therefore, this diverse representation could’ve avoided disastrous policies which mainlyaffected working class areas with high ethnic populations. There would be a strongerinterconnectedness between minority groups and parliament.

An example of thisis the Poll Tax of 1989 which led to the infamous Poll Tax riots. It could beargued that because of the lack of diversity within the parliament at thattime, there were grave miscalculations from Thatcher and her cabinet whenconstructing this policy. There was a lack of embodied culture capital whichseemingly hindered the policy making process. Embodied culture capital “ comprisesthe knowledge that is consciously acquired and the passively inherited, bysocialization to culture and tradition. Unlike property, cultural capital isnot transmissible, but is acquired over time, as it is impressed upon theperson’s habitus (character and way of thinking), which, in turn, becomes morereceptive to similar cultural influences.” 6 Therewere only 4 minority MPs at the time, who were all members of the oppositionparty.

Withthis in mind, it is possible that the Tories only held their agenda in mind anddid not consider the burden this tax would impose on the working-class minoritygroups. If, for example, there was a minority MP within the Tory cabinet atthat time, the process might have been handled differently due to the MP beingable to bring in his culture capital to drastically change the policy. However, the cabinet was exclusively white and mostly middle class, therefore they weremore than likely concerned with their agenda and did not take into account theconcerns of the politically marginalized. Historically, laws and acts, whichaffected marginalized groups in general, have had widespread opposition tothem, such as Local Government Act 19887 and theCriminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994)8. Thesubstantive representation for groups that were affected, homosexuals and youngpeople, was relatively non-existent.

Due to the marginal increases inrepresentatives of different groups, this has been somewhat improved but not toa level where marginalized groups are truly represented. Hence, to fix thecurrent flawed democratic system within the UK, the improvement of substantiverepresentation for politically marginalized groups is a necessity. Similarly, women argue “ that their gender has a more consultative approach to politics thanmen, and that parity and the inclusion of more women in politics will improvethe quality of representative democracy.” 9 I concurwith this statement for the most part since there is evidence where countrieswith higher proportions of women in government, have higher levels ofgovernment effectiveness. On the other hand, it is difficult to concludewhether it is just women which make government effectiveness high or otheromitted variables. 10 Tootell research results have found thatgovernments with increased female representation “ pass bills that increasefunding for social services and alter the nature of the government, includingdecreasing corruption. Tootell’sfindings are inline with her theoretical hypothesis which is that “ thesechanges make government more effective with more females are, in fact, moreeffective, better serving their people.” 11 I agreepartially with Tootell’s theory asthe government would be more effective at serving their people with women whoare more directly involved with government practice.

This is because the UK’scurrent state of representative democracy would be improved (along with thesubstantive representation of women) with the increase of female MPs in theHouse of Commons. Albeit this evidence is not conclusive, it is beneficial, overall, to include more representatives of politically marginalized groupswithin government as it will inevitably increase the quality of substantive representationfor not only the groups I have mentioned, but the population as a whole. Descriptiverepresentation constitutes a segment of politicians who represent the largerpopulation from which they come.

These are representatives that advocate in thename of a specific group, or groups, that are homogenous to the background ofthe politician. 12Although the importance of substantive representation is evident, nominatingdescriptively representative candidates can be a tool which political partiesare able to use to show that they are capable of showing commitment to certaingroup interests. 13Some of the electorate do not necessarily vote based on the candidate’sthoughts on current issues. Minority groups in particular tend to vote formembers of their ethnic group, if applicable, since there is a perception that theyshare a common background and life experiences with “ their representative isimportant for assuring quality representation.” 14However, the question of whether the nomination of ethnic candidates would bemore beneficial to party or more damaging. At the end of the day, parties areprimarily looking to secure the largest number of votes which sometimes leadsto there not being a more inclusive field of candidates because they want tosustain their larger, core voter base. This is why political parties have varyinglevels of success when they do have a significant amount of minority MPs.

Inthe article, studies have provided evidence that “ suggests that the nominationof ethnic minority candidates is associated with an increase in ethnic minorityturnout and support for the co-ethnic candidate.” 15 Whenlooking at the 2010 election, research found that those of Pakistani andBangladeshi heritage were likely to support co-ethnic candidates. 16 This isevidence that certain groups of the electorate are focused more on thecharacteristics of candidates rather than their opinions on issues that affectthem. As aforementioned, this is possibly due to having the belief that theywill be the most effective candidate in addressing the particular issues whichconcern their ethnic group. Theeffectiveness of having minority candidates differentiates in terms of whatpolitical party fields them. For example, parties on the left have had a “ headstart”, so to speak, due to there long-standing affliction with the politicallymarginalized which encompasses minorities. Therefore, there has been ahistorical perception that the Labour party is a more effective in representingthe interests of ethnic minorities.

17 Fromthis, we can conclude that there is a correlation between party’s ideologue andthe effectiveness of descriptive representation. Traditionally left-wingparties are more capable of offering quality representation for these groupsbut they have lacked the reputation. This can be due to the lack of majoritygovernments they have had, compared to the Conservatives, which makes itdifficult for parties like Labour to bring ethnic interests to the forefront. This makes descriptive representation, in practice, very impractical anddifficult to achieve because of how varied the levels of success would bespanning from parliament to parliament. In addition to this, there is a seriouslack of minority MPs as it is so to even make it a legitimate model ofrepresentation.

Therefore, it would not be enough, in a representativedemocracy like the UK, to implement descriptive representation. Keepingon the theme of political parties and ideology, these factors also impact onthe substantive representation of women. I argue that the position on the post-materialistscale, left or right wing, plays a role in the quality of substantiverepresentation that is delivered to women.

In terms of traditional ideology, they do not accommodate societal structures18 so theyare not a good indicator of whether or not women’s interests are representedsignificantly. Firstly, we need to define what post-materialism is. Post-materialismis value orientation that emphasizes self-expression and quality of life overeconomic and physical security. 19 Partiesthat lean on the ‘ post-materialist left’ promote the expansion of individualfreedoms on post-materialist issues which, in theory, and would be the mostsuitable to engage with women’s substantive representation. 20 This isbecause of the post-materialist agenda in the 1970s which led to a decline inclass politics and embraced new social movements which were closely linked withegalitarianism, women’s rights and feminism.

21 There isa valid probability to why substantive representation for women has not been ata level it should have been. Left-wing parties, which were developed in linewith the post-materialist’s agenda, such as the Green party, have focused moreattention to women’s concerns than traditional socialist parties. 22 It canbe argued that the reason there hasn’t been a continuous improvement historicallyin women’s substantive representation because the two-party system has notallowed more egalitarian parties to be the majority party within parliament. Ideally, within a democracy like the UK, there would be a major improvement insubstantive representation for the groups in question, if parties like theLiberal Democrats and the Green party had more of a presence within parliament. In reality, the two-party system looks like it will not be derailed in theforeseeable future and first past the post makes it near impossible for theseparties to even make a minute dent in seats to Labour or the Conservatives. However, the presence of intra-party women’s organizations does force the issueon women’s issues.

They typically have “ feminist/gender expertise” and “ offeruseful, accurate and first-hand policy information on women’s issues.” 23 Inaddition to this, this is not to say that less egalitarian left-wing parties, such as Labour, do not offer a relatively high level of substantiverepresentation (not only due to the intra-party organizations). It is found inmany studies that higher levels of left-wing activity on behalf of women is inpart due to female MPs, especially for Labour, being the most active defendersof women’s case. 24It should also be noted that efforts to increase the number of female MPs inright-wing parties as well. Across the board, the increased presence of womenin parliament has created a “ favourable condition for the expression of women’sinterests” in both right-wing and left-wing contexts.

25 Insummary, the quality of substantive representation for women is not at thehighest it could be in a democracy like the UK, but it is adequate enough towhere there is definitely a focus on women’s issues but not to a degree where theyare the predominant focus of political parties. This is mainly because of thelack of egalitarian values within these parties. Is itenough to improve substantive representation for these groups? Of course, butthe ability to do so is incredibly difficult considering the very rigiddemocratic system which the UK has. The improvement on the substantiverepresentation hinges on the two-party system being disrupted and analternative voting system being introduced. This would allow egalitarianparties to have more political power which in turn could bring a narrower focuson minority and gender issues and interests.