How Intersectionality Shapes Political Representation at the Individual Level

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Abstract

Different groups in society have their particular interests and identity which they usually desire to have present in government and legislatures. Political representation links the population and legislators, commonly distinguishing between substantive representation (of interests) and descriptive representation (of social groups). Here I draw on Ruedin (2012a) and the concept of individual representation to describe how well individuals in society are represented. Such representation is expressed in terms of left-right positions and policy preferences in four other issue domains. As individual-level characteristics, individual representation scores are ideally suited to give full consideration to intersectionality unattainable in traditional approaches to political representation. Using data from the European Social Survey (ESS-5) for the population and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) for the legislative, this paper examines whether intersectionality affects political representation in different policy domains, and what consequences differences in representation have on trust. Intersectionality is considered in terms of interactions between sex, age, and minority status, and there is little evidence of intersectionality.

Keywords: intersectionality, political representation, left-right, gender, ethnicity, minority status
Introduction

Political representation is central to modern democracies. There are clear normative principles that democracies should be inclusive, and the same applies to representation as a central pillar of modern democracies. Despite many advances in recent decades, many social groups still struggle for more equitable inclusion in formal decision-making such as full participation in legislatures. Existing research has concentrated on the inclusion of women (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007; Hughes 2009; Ruedin 2012b), and to a lesser extent of ethnic and national minorities (Ruedin 2009a; Wüst 2014; Dancygier 2014). These studies consider the so-called descriptive representation of groups: to what extent the size of a group in the population is reflected in the legislature (Pitkin 1967). Only a few studies of descriptive representation have addressed issues of intersectionality (Paxton and Hughes 2014), either by looking at women from ethnic/racial minorities (Hughes 2011; Hughes 2013b; Krook and O’Brien 2010; see Hughes 2013a for a review) or indirectly by comparing the representation of women and ethnic groups separately (Ruedin 2010). While these studies make headway towards understanding the role of intersectionality, this approach requires researchers to identify the groups of interest before inferences about the substantive representation of these groups can be made. As a consequence, they usually assert intersectionality and do not adequately take into consideration the complexity of the situation, particularly that these pre-defined group (women, ethnic/racial groups) are not homogeneous (cf. Goodin 2004; Htun 2004; Minta 2012).

A different literature has focused on the distance between individuals and their preferred party, the legislative, or the government (Rigby and Wright 2013; Overby and Cosgrove 1996; Lublin 1997; Rosset, Giger, and Bernauer 2013; Giger and Lefkofridi 2014; Giger, Rosset, and Bernauer 2012; Kluver and Giger 2013; Deschouwer and Depauw 2014). Here the focus is on so-called substantive representation, and the link to group interests tends to be ignored or asserted rather than demonstrated. Given that distances between individuals and parties can be expressed as the property of individuals, issues of intersectionality could be addressed more readily. However, by expressing the distance between individuals and a fixed position – of a party, of the government as a whole, of the mean representative, etc. – these studies tend to ignore the distribution of positions within these representative bodies. A parliament consists of a wide variety of positions, and these positions are of importance for political representation. It is unlikely that the exact policy preferences of each citizens have direct correspondence in the legislature. In the literature this is usually approached with the assumption that citizens minimize distances – the closest position is the next best thing, so to speak.

1Theoretical accounts tend not to be clear whether proportionality should exist with regard to the (resident) population or the citizenry. With relatively large proportions of the population in many Western countries not being citizens, this distinction is not trivial, although it may have limited empirical impact (Ruedin 2013a).
In this paper I combine these perspectives, arguing that for individuals the distribution of positions is of importance. Using individual representation scores (Ruedin 2012a), this paper provides the first extensive empirical overview of how intersectionality affects political representation: Whose preferences tend to be over-represented, and whose preferences tend to be under-represented, and to what extent? The paper includes considerations of whether different minority statuses interact to create particular phenomena: intersectionality. The results of this paper indicate that there is little evidence for actual intersectionality. Instead, it seems that the relevant effects are additive. This lack of intersectionality implies that each disadvantage can tackled individually (e.g. women, racial/ethnic minority group), and no specific measures are needed for subgroups (e.g. black women).

Representing Groups and Interests

Political representation is a central pillar in modern democracies. It links the preferences in the population with those of the representatives. Normative accounts are clear that legislative bodies should resemble the population at least to the extent that all major groups in society are included (Phillips 1995; Mansbridge 1999; Mansbridge 2003; but see Goodin 2004). What constitutes a major group, however, is far from clear. On the one hand, political views are recognized as the basis of modern politics, and an insistence on competitive multi-party elections means an insistence on different political views being represented. Philosophically, proportional representation is associated with the view that all major groups in society should be represented, while first-past-the-post systems focus on the largest groups only (Powell 2000). Most theoretical accounts are silent on the issue domains that constitute these groups, although political left and right, as well as any other salient issue seem like obvious choices. On the other hand, there is insistence to represent other major groups proportionally, in particular men and women. This view is rooted in proportional representation, but takes a wider view what constitutes a relevant group or political cleavage. Gender and ethnic/racial divisions appear widely accepted as relevant (Ruedin 2013a), but subsequently things get a bit blurry: language groups, religious denomination, sexuality, class, education, or age are just some of the possibilities. Ruedin (2013a) suggests taking the salience of divisions as a guide: depending on the country and time, different divisions may be salient.

There are several reasons to insist on the political inclusion of the most important groups in society in legislative bodies and government. Instrumental reasons include the reduction of conflict, particularly in the case of ethnic/racial groups.

\footnote{The inclusion of class in the present list is instructive, as it highlights the insistence on descriptive representation beyond mere substantive representation: parties on the left traditionally cater for working-class interests, but legislators rarely are of the working class (cf. Kim 2013; Holvino 2010). In the case of education and age, issues of experience make things more difficult, as these are desirable qualifications (Dovi 2007).}
(Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2007; Wucherpfennig et al. 2012). Other reasons include the observation that political representation can increase trust in key institutions and political participation, the fact that the inclusion of different groups has symbolic value and increases legitimacy (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes 2007), or that it is a reflection of the quality of democracy and the status of different groups in society (Ruedin 2009b). Another central reason to insist on the inclusion of different groups in legislative bodies and government is that these groups may have substantive interests that are not covered otherwise (Phillips 1995; Celis 2012). The identification of such interests is in most cases contentious, but a focus on life experience makes it a more compelling argument (e.g. Lloren 2014; Celis et al. 2014; Xydias 2013; Smooth 2011). Members of a particular group are included because they have experienced society from a particular perspective, and for that reason have unique insights non-group members cannot have. For example, the experience of having grown up as a woman in a particular society is not accessible to men.

Accounts that insist on the political representation of groups – women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, sexual minorities – do so in good faith, but they tend to ignore practical limitations. Such practical limitations stem from the tension between the size of the legislature – larger assemblies can include a more diverse group of legislators – and actual participation in deliberations: the larger the assembly, the shorter the time available for each legislator and by extension each particular perspective (Goodin 2004). Rather than giving up on the idea of inclusiveness and that intersectionality may matter for political representation, the way forward is agreement that not all social divisions are as important as others all the time. What is more, it may highlight that descriptive representation can be a crutch at best if we expect only group members to represent the interests of groups.

Technically, there is no reason why the presence of group members is required to represent the interests of a particular group – any legislator could do so, just like a solicitor represents his or her client without necessarily being member of the same group (Mansbridge 1999). After all, the expectation of legislators is that they represent the interests of the society as a whole (Dovi 2007). At the same time, research has demonstrated many times that legislators are more responsive to some groups than others. In some instances, this is by design: citizenship and residence requirements are used to exclude some members of the population from voting, and prisoners are usually not permitted to vote either (e.g. Ruedin 2013a). If age is a proxy of wisdom, greater responsiveness to older voters is not as problematic as it is sometimes depicted (Joshi 2013; Kissau, Lutz, and Rosset 2012) – but we can suspect differential representation to reflect instrumental actions of legislators seeking re-election to some extent (Ruedin 2013a). In other instances, greater responsiveness to richer, more educated voters, or members of the middle class, however, should be regarded as a significant deviation from

3But see Htun (2014); even if descriptive representation is not needed, there is no reason to exclude major groups.
the ideals of representative democracy and the mantra of ‘one person, one vote’ (Rigby and Wright 2013; Celis 2012).

**Individual Representation and Intersectionality**

Much work on why legislators tend to be more responsive to some sections of society than others seems to be empirically guided. When the focus is on descriptive representation, groups are – necessarily – defined in advance, and with a focus on substantive representation intersectionality is often left out (but see contributions in Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2014b). In this paper, the focus is on intersectionality, which is approached using statistical interactions. In regression analysis, the coefficients can be understood as the extent to which group membership influences one’s level of political representation. Interaction terms reflect membership in multiple groups, like being a woman and belonging to an ethnic minority group. It refers to the effect of being in two groups in addition to the cumulation of individual group membership (Essers, Benschop, and Doorewaard 2010). Put differently, by including interaction terms, representational disadvantages are not merely added up, but it is tested whether anything happens in addition – intersectionality.5

Rather than simply trying interaction terms between all kinds of groups – most surveys would offer an array of possibilities – in this paper, it is argued that groups of lower social status are likely to be under-represented (cf. Ruedin 2009b). While this paper is unable to test the stipulated mechanisms, it is assumed that groups of lower social status may be disadvantaged in terms of political representation due to several reasons. First, given the strong incentives of legislators to focus on the interests of voters rather than non-voters, it can be assumed that any group more likely to vote is over-represented. This tends to be groups with higher social status. Second, groups of lower social status are less likely to engage in consequential protest and lobbying outside the sphere of formal politics because they tend to have fewer resources. In this sense, these groups are less visible in political debates, and their interests more likely to be overlooked. Third, legislators tend to come from groups of higher social status. Following the argument that some interests are strongly tied to experience – like experiencing racial discrimination from the receiving end – it can be expected that the interests of other groups are less accessible to legislators and thus more likely to be ignored. Here, I focus on three social divisions to capture groups with lower social status: women, ethnic minorities, and young voters.

The question addressed in this paper is how intersectionality affects political representation. Intersectionality is of great importance, because it goes beyond

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4 There are certainly different definitions and understandings of the concept *intersectionality* in the literature (Anthias 2013; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2014b); outlined approach is both clean and parsimonious.

5 Contrary to Werbner (2013) I reserve the term intersectionality to any effect *in addition* to cumulation and do not insist on a negative outcome.
double burdens from being a woman and being a young voter, for example, but because allegedly the accumulation of these lower statuses can aggravate the situation. The intuition is that large groups defined by social divisions – gender, race/ethnicity, age – hide important internal divisions which may be translated into lower levels of political representation. A single generic hypothesis is derived:

\[ H_a: \text{If intersectionality affects political representation, there are significant statistical interactions between groups of lower social status.} \]

What is more, is can be expected that the extent to which individuals are represented affects their trust in key institutions like parliaments or the legal system. The intuition is that individuals whose interests are more likely to be overlooked – because of lower status and intersectionality – are less supportive of the system that institutionalizes such disadvantage.

Methods and Data

This paper primarily uses data from the European Social Survey 5 (ESS 2012). Individual-level data from the ESS are used to capture group membership, as well as issue preferences in five domains (generic left-right, postmaterialism, redistribution, multiculturalism, and immigration policy). Data from the ESS are weighted using post-stratification weights. To express political representation, data on the legislators are necessary. These positions are approximated using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey 2010 (Bakker et al. 2012), using seat share times position to reflect the composition of the parliament (see Ruedin 2013a for a discussion of this approach and of the comparability of question wordings). Conceptually, this approach means that on average the position of each legislator is assumed to be equal to the party position.

To express levels of political representation, individual representation scores are used (Ruedin 2012a). These scores express the level of political representation – in a specific issue domain – for each individual. Individual representation scores are based on a double comparison: First the average ideological distance between each individual and all others is calculated. This gives an indication of how marginal an individual’s ideological position is in society. Second, the average

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6In this paper, I do not address to what extent the electoral system (PR system, vote-seat proportionality), other contextual factors (attitudes towards groups of lower status (cf. Ruedin 2013a), or the quality of democracy affect the relationship between group membership and political representation.

7Future work will use data from the World Value Survey (World Values Survey Association 2009) to check the robustness of the results presented here. Compared to the ESS, given the data used for the legislators, the WVS offers a larger number of issue domains, but a slightly smaller number of countries that can be retained and frequently compromises the match of survey years.
ideological distance between each individual and all legislators is calculated. This gives an indication of how marginal an individual’s ideological position is among legislators. Individual representation scores express the difference between these two measures of marginality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue Domain</th>
<th>ESS Wording</th>
<th>CHES Wording</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left-right</td>
<td>‘left’ and ‘right’</td>
<td>overall ideological stance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmaterialism</td>
<td>gay men and lesbians</td>
<td>favour euthanasia, same-sex marriage, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redistribution</td>
<td>reduce differences in income</td>
<td>redistribution from the rich to the poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiculturalism</td>
<td>cultural life undermined</td>
<td>favours multiculturalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration policy</td>
<td>(scale)</td>
<td>against tough policy</td>
</tr>
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Table 1: issue domains and question wordings in the ESS and CHES.
For immigration policy, the following items were considered: “allow many to come”/”allow none” – people of same race/ethnic group; people of different race/ethnic group; poorer countries outside Europe (Cronbach α = 0.87).

By definition, the individual representation scores for two individuals in the same polity with the same issue preferences are the same. The scores consider the distribution of positions in the population and the legislature, and two different issue positions can lead to the same individual representation score. Put differently, knowing an individual’s representation score is not sufficient to identify this person’s issue preference. Figure 1 illustrates individual representation scores for left-right positions in Belgium. It makes it apparent that individual representation scores (bottom panel) are clearly different from the original positions (top-left panel) – because they consider the situation in the legislature (top-right panel). We can see that parties in this case tend to be either left or right of the centre, while the population tends to identify as central. With parties right of the centre having more seats in the legislature, and with very few individuals identifying as ‘far right’, the positions right of the centre are over-represented.

In the statistical analysis, individual representation scores are primarily used as the dependent variable. It is examined which groups are over-represented and which groups are under-represented, with a particular focus on statistical interactions between group variables to capture intersectionality. Multilevel...
Figure 1: Individual representation scores in Belgium (as illustration). The top-left panel shows the distribution of left-right positions in the population as recorded in the ESS. The top-right panel shows the distribution of left-right positions in the legislative, as approximated by seat shares and positions in the CHES. The bottom panel shows the resulting individual representation scores.
models are used, with individuals (and their representation scores) nested in countries. The following countries are included in the ESS and CHES: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

**Findings**

**Individual Representation in Left-Right and Beyond**

In a first step, I focus on statistically explaining individual representation scores in five issue domains (left-right, postmaterialism, redistribution, multiculturalism, and immigration policies). To understand the coefficients, initially no interaction terms are included. Figure 2 illustrates the situation for individual representation scores in political left-right. The dots are the point estimates; the thick lines indicate ±1 standard deviation, and the thin lines indicate ±2 standard deviations. We can see that men tend to have higher representation scores than women, while ethnic minorities do not have significantly lower representation scores. Older and more educated individuals tend to have higher representation scores. When comparing the size of the effects, it should be borne in mind that the coefficients for men and ethnic majority are binary contrasts, while for age and education the coefficients both stand for an additional year.

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<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>0.036***</td>
<td>0.278***</td>
<td>0.124***</td>
<td>-0.0004</td>
<td>0.025**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.013)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnic majority</td>
<td>0.010</td>
<td>-0.523***</td>
<td>0.165***</td>
<td>-0.045***</td>
<td>-0.054**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.010)</td>
<td>(0.036)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.017)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
<td>0.013***</td>
<td>-0.005***</td>
<td>-0.001***</td>
<td>0.001***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(0.0004)</td>
<td>(0.0004)</td>
<td>(0.0002)</td>
<td>(0.0003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>edu</td>
<td>0.003***</td>
<td>-0.051***</td>
<td>0.035***</td>
<td>-0.003***</td>
<td>-0.011***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
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Table 2: Standard errors in brackets; also in model: countries; N ≥ 37,462; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2 includes the results of regression analyses for all five issue domains considered. The model furthest on the left corresponds to the one in figure 2. With the exception of the multiculturalism domain, men tend to have higher
Figure 2: DV = Individual representation scores: Left-right; also in model: countries.
representation scores than women. Individuals from ethnic minorities do not necessarily have lower representation scores, in some domains the representation scores of the majority population tend to be lower. In most instances representation scores for older individuals are higher, while the representation scores for individuals with higher levels of education are not necessarily higher. Taken together, for the five issue domains considered, only women as a group seem to be disadvantaged most of the time; for the other groups the evidence is mixed.

Intersectionality, however, is not merely about observing that when women and ethnic minorities tend to have lower representation scores in redistribution preferences, a women from an ethnic minority is predicted to have doubly low representation scores: Intersectionality means that the combination of the two statuses leads to a particular situation, which will be captured using statistical interaction terms. Generally, no significant interaction effects can be found between the explanatory variables. In particular, there is no evidence for significant interaction effects between gender and ethnicity (table 3). Similarly, in almost all cases there is no evidence for interaction effects between gender and age and education (not shown).

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender:ethnic maj.</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.021)</td>
<td>(0.071)</td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.052)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Including a statistical interaction term between gender and ethnicity. Only coefficients for the interaction term are shown in the table; the model also includes variables for gender, ethnic majority, age, and countries. Standard errors in brackets; N ≥ 37,462; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 3 exemplifies this lack of significant interactions. It shows a triple interaction between gender, age, and ethnic minority status for individual representation scores in left-right. The predicted effects in all four panels largely correspond, indicating that the statistical effects of age are equivalent for men (right panels) and women (left panels), and the majority population (top panels) and ethnic minority groups (bottom panels). None of these combinations is associated with particularly high or low representation scores.

If we widen the scope of groups considered a bit, the situation does not change significantly. This widening of scope is undertaken as a test of robustness. For example, having children is not a status that is associated with lower representation scores as could be expected from the hypothesis outlined above (not shown). Similarly, having a so-called immigration background – i.e. both parents born abroad – is not associated with significantly lower representation scores. Given the lack of significant statistical interactions for the groups
Figure 3: (Lack of) interaction between gender, age, and ethnic minority status; also in model: countries.
considered most relevant (gender, racial/ethnic group, age, education), it is impossible to tell whether these additional findings of no association are in line with the results outlined above, or whether they are symptomatic of the groups for which somewhat weaker associations could be expected in the first place. In any case, these additional considerations do not provide evidence that would challenge the interpretation of no intersectionality indicated above.

Consequences of Intersectionality and Individual Representation on Trust

To highlight that individual representation scores are not without consequence – irrespective of evidence for intersectionality –, in this section it is shown that they are associated with trust in key institutions. Figure 4 shows a model with trust in parliament as the dependent variable, equivalent results can be obtained with trust in the legal system (not shown).

Figure 4: Trust in parliament. Coefficients for individual representation scores (IRS) above grey line; also in model: countries.
We can see that individual representation scores are associated with trust in parliaments. This result stands after controlling for gender, race/ethnic group, age, education, whether the individual voted in the last election, and generalized trust. The coefficients for individual representation scores (IRS) are given above the grey line, and not all representation scores have the same effect.

Higher representation scores in generic left and right are associated with higher levels of trust in parliament. Similarly, higher representation scores in redistribution are associated with higher levels of trust in parliament. These two associations are in line with the expectation that higher levels of representation are conducive to higher levels of trust. At the same time, however, higher representation scores in postmaterialism and multiculturalism are not associated with higher levels of trust, while higher representation scores on immigration are associated with lower levels of trust. Put differently, higher representation scores in traditional political divisions (left-right, redistribution) are associated with higher levels in trust in parliament. At the same time, higher representation scores in new divisions (postmaterialism, multiculturalism) are not associated with trust.

The negative coefficient in the case of immigration policies stems from similar positional distributions across European countries: parties tend to be somewhat more open towards immigrants than the population (Lahav 1997), which leads individuals more favourable towards immigration to be over-represented. These tend to be individuals on the political left (Pecoraro and Ruedin 2013; Ruedin 2013b), who by and large are also more critical of key institutions like parliament than individuals on the right. Taken together, the coefficients in the figure indicate clearly that individual representation scores have consequences in terms of trust in key distributions (cf. Ruedin 2012a), although this association is not the same to all the issue domains.

Discussion

This paper has assessed whether intersectionality affects political representation. Statistical interactions were used to identify situations where two or more social divisions add up to something more than just the accumulation of individual effects. While there is evidence that groups of lower social status have lower representation scores, generally there was no evidence for intersectionality. Explicitly, with reference to the hypothesis tested, there is no systematic evidence of significant statistical interactions between groups of lower social status.

This lack of association, however, should not detract from the fact that there are cumulative effects, and individuals belonging to multiple groups of lower social status tend to have lower representation scores than individuals who belong to a single group of lower social status. More concretely, a woman from the ethnic majority group (one relevant group membership) is predicted to have a higher representation scores than a woman from an ethnic minority group.
(two relevant group memberships). This means that any effort to address under-representation can focus on the major groups, and according to the results in this paper, there is no need to have special measures for particular subgroups. For example, measures that address the under-representation of women and ethnic minority groups seem adequate to address the situation of ethnic minority women – provided of course that these measures do not compete (cf. Htun and Ossa 2013).

Such competition between measures to address under-representation are an important factor to consider. Evidence from descriptive representation suggests for instance that where ethnic minority groups are represented relatively more numerously, it tends to be minority men who are included rather than minority women (e.g. Mügge and Michon 2013; Celis and Erzeel 2013). In these cases, joint efforts seem necessary to address the under-representation of ethnic minorities and women – but according to the findings presented here no specific programmes for ethnic minority women are required.

The analyses in this paper offer a first glimpse into the potential presence of intersectionality in factors that shape political representation. More and better theory is needed to identify the combinations of group membership where interaction effects are most likely. These associations should then be tested directly. With explicit reference to theory, in this paper it was argued that groups of lower social status are likely candidates for lower representation scores – which is indeed the case. More explicit theoretical expectations are needed to refine this generic argument, as it is possible that there are relevant interactions among other groups defined by social divisions.

It should also be borne in mind that the policy domains covered in this paper do not correspond to specific interests of the groups considered (compare Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2014b). One potential avenue for theoretical considerations would be to outline under what circumstances we can expect the representation of specific group interests to be affected by intersectionality. While such an exercise is difficult even (or particularly?) in the case of large groups like women (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2014a), theoretical advances are needed to specify the interests of subgroups characterized by intersectionality.

The analysis in the final empirical part demonstrates that it is important to understand the factors that shape political representation. With individual representation scores, this paper is a priori well placed to identify relevant interaction effects, but there was no evidence for systematic intersectionality. The resulting representation scores were shown to have significant influence on trust in key institutions: national legislatures and the legal system. These statistical effects can be found in models that incorporate a range of other variables, suggesting that political representation constitutes a relevant mechanism. This is particularly the case for the representation of left-right positions and preferences for redistribution.
Conclusion

This paper addressed how intersectionality affects political representation in five broad issue domains. It was argued that groups of lower social status are likely to have lower representation scores, and statistical interactions were used as evidence of intersectionality. These interaction effects would pick up situations where the combination of group membership is more than the accumulation of these group memberships and creates something new – like a particularly low representation score. The analysis provides no evidence that a focus on large groups like gender, race/ethnicity or age hides significant intersectionality.

While there was no evidence for intersectionality, the findings in this paper should not distract from the fact that groups of lower social status tend to have lower representation scores and cumulative effects may put certain individuals at significant disadvantage. It was shown that lower representation scores can negatively affect trust in key institutions, highlighting that political representation is a likely mechanism for trust in institutions and by extension the functioning of democracy. The results in this paper suggest that any – non-competing – effort to increase the level of political representation of groups defined by social divisions is likely to benefit all individuals with low representation scores and no focus on specific subgroups is needed.

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