

Beyond Identity: Shared Experiences as a Politically Mobilizing Force

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Recently, many democracies have adopted policies to promote the representation of underrepresented groups in government. Most policies are quotas or reserved seats aimed at improving the number of groups historically excluded from politics such as women or ethnic minorities. The increased number of representatives that share identities with minority citizens' usually leads to more public goods or services for that minority group. In a [new article](#) published in the *American Political Science Review*, Mathias Poertner demonstrates that voter turnout is higher among citizens represented by a legislator with a similar social background who are part of local networks. His research highlights the importance of descriptive representation for political mobilization in support of historically excluded candidates in Mexico.

To test these claims, Poertner leverages unique data on random lotteries used to select and nominate candidates for national public office. The recently founded political party MORENA (Movimiento Regeneración Nacional; National Regeneration Movement) selects two-thirds of its candidates for legislative office (federal deputies) through publicly conducted randomized lotteries among local activists. These lotteries allow citizens in some localities to randomly receive political candidates that are locally embedded in their community. Poertner understands this as embedded representatives: representatives who share their constituents' social background and experiences and are part of local social structures.

Drawing on a novel dataset that reconstructs the randomization procedure and combines it with information on national legislative candidates, and voter turnout data in Mexico, Poertner shows that embed-

ded representatives are able to leverage local networks such as labor or peasant unions to create important political connections to underrepresented citizens. These data were gathered through information requests and a lawsuit under Mexico's 2015 General Transparency Law. The results demonstrate that voter turnout is significantly higher among citizens who have been represented by embedded representatives and the party with embedded representatives (MORENA) also received significantly more votes in the next election. By using grassroots characteristics and shared experiences, embedded representatives are able to relate to lower-class voters and win their support.

The results suggest that embedded representatives, compared to more traditional representatives (who are often upper-class candidates), are able to politically mobilize lower-class citizens or citizens who share similar life experiences. Poertner provides extensive evidence for this. Using survey data, he shows that

citizens with a lower-class background who randomly received an embedded representative develop a stronger sense of political efficacy, become more interested in politics, and express more support for political institutions. Poertner also finds a similar pattern using citizens' news consumption through Google searches: citizens with an embedded representative become more interested in political topics.

Overall, Poertner demonstrates that embedded representatives can help mobilize voters from underrepresented groups. He finds that representation by politicians that share citizens' social background and are also embedded in the community are effective at politically mobilizing citizens. The results are promising for policy makers, as they suggest that descriptive representation beyond single ascriptive identities can promote future political participation among historically marginalized groups. Grassroots activists are unlike traditional career politicians but their shared experiences with lower-class citizens can be a useful strategy for political parties to appeal to marginalized voters. ■

POERTNER, MATHIAS. 2022. "Does Political Representation Increase Participation? Evidence from Party Candidate Lotteries in Mexico." *American Political Science Review*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000533>



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