

Voice is Sometimes Enough: Voice, Influence, and the Moderating Impact of Descriptive Representation

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This study offers a more nuanced look at the findings regarding procedural voice and influence by considering the context created by descriptive representation. Procedural justice researchers have long argued that giving people more of a voice in decision-making proceedings leads to heightened satisfaction with the outputs of that process and enhanced compliance with decisions. More recently, this concept has been applied to the political arena with the finding that voice alone is not enough. A voice that is not perceived to have an influence can be more detrimental than not having a voice at all.

This paper investigates satisfaction with the outcome of citizen-initiated contacts with governmental officials, with the expectation that the effects of non-influential voice will be moderated by descriptive representation. Non-influential voice is expected to boost satisfaction with governmental response to an individual's request when that voice is targeted at a government official who is racially or ethnically similar to the individual making the request. Findings corroborate previous research showing that influential voice does indeed have a positive impact on attitudes toward government, but also show that under conditions of descriptive representation non-influential voice can be beneficial as well.

“Many a man would rather you heard his story than granted his request.”

—Phillip Stanhope, *Earl of Chesterfield*

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Voice, Influence, and Satisfaction

Procedural justice research has long shown that people are concerned not only with the outcomes of decision making processes, but with the procedural aspects of that process as well. Early work revealed that people involved in dispute-resolution decisions handled by a third party reacted more to the perceived fairness of the decision-making procedures than to the actual favorability or fairness of the decisions reached (Thibaut and Walker 1975). The key procedural factor shaping people's views of fairness seems to be the balance of control between the participants and the third party. A distinction was made between process control—the participant's control over the presentation of evidence—and decision control—the participant's control over the actual decisions made, with decisional control thought to be more important. Having a voice in the proceedings was viewed as important only as it was seen as a mechanism for controlling the outcome.

While the basic finding about the importance of decision control has been reiterated over the years (see Lind and Tyler 1988), subsequent research has also illustrated that control over the process can rank as more important than control over decisions, and that process control can be important even in the absence of decision control (Lind, Lissak, and Conlon 1983; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick 1985; Tyler 1987, 1990). Thus, not only is voice important as an instrumental means of influencing decisions, but voice can have value in its own right. This "value-expressive" conception of voice suggests that even when participants do not feel their input has any influence on the outcome, they still feel better about the process when they get to speak. The effects of non-influential voice have been linked to assessments of a range of targets such as traffic and misdemeanor courts, classroom evaluations, hypothetical city council proceedings (Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick 1985), simulated trials (Lind, Lissak, and Conlon 1983), and actual municipal police and court interactions (Tyler 1987, 1990). Similarly, these effects have been documented with regard to a number of overt political

attitudes and behavior, including evaluation and endorsement of political leaders (Tyler and Caine 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw 1985) and presidential vote choice (Rasinski and Tyler 1988).

More recently, researchers have suggested that in the political realm value-expressive voice is not always enough and might actually have corrosive effects. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002a; 2002b) point to earlier evidence of a “frustration” effect (Cohen 1985), which suggests that in real-world political settings participants will likely view the process allowing only their voice to be insincere when that voice is not perceived to play an instrumental role in the final decision. Recent experimental work substantiates this claim (Gangl 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002b; Morrell 1999), and evidence of this effect even surfaces in some of the earlier procedural justice research (Tyler 1994; Tyler and Mitchell 1994; see Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002a: 198 for details). Most recently, this effect has been shown with regard to feelings of political trust and policy satisfaction among the general public (Ulbig 2008). Neither political trust nor policy satisfaction seem to respond to increased non-influential voice alone. Believing that one’s voice, loud or quiet, has an influence is paramount. Thus, there appear to be some situations in which non-influential voice improves attitudes and others in which it erodes them.

The Ameliorating Effects of Descriptive Representation

The representational context in which individuals exercise their voice could be an important moderating factor that helps explain why non-influential voice is beneficial in some circumstances and harmful in others. Descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967) has been shown to positively affect a range of political attitudes and behaviors, and it is likely that it will affect the impact that non-influential procedural voice has as well. When an individual interacts with a governmental official who shares his/her racial or ethnic background, having a chance to exercise his/her voice, even if it is perceived to be of little influence, can improve feelings about the outcome of the interaction.

Descriptive representation has been shown to affect a number of important political attitudes and behaviors among minority populations. Feelings of political efficacy (Abramson 1972; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Rodgers 1974), interest in politics, confidence in government, and evaluations of government officials (Gilliam 1996) have all been shown to be higher under conditions of descriptive representation. In fact, conditions of descriptive representation have been shown to alleviate one of the most persistent attitudinal gaps in American politics—the gap between the political trust levels of Anglo and minority citizens. The “trust gap” has been shown to

significantly diminish when minority groups are descriptively represented. While this effect has been documented most frequently with regard to the impact that the election of African-American mayors has on the political attitudes and behavior of African-American citizens (see e.g., Abney and Hutcheson 1981; Banducci, Donovan, and Karp 1999; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Howell and Fagan 1988; Schuman and Gruenberg 1970; but see also Emig, Heese and Fisher 1996), it is evident more broadly (Abramson 1972; Long 1978; Rodgers 1974), and some evidence exists to suggest that this effect can be seen at the state legislative and Congressional levels for other minority groups as well (Pantoja and Segura 2003).

Descriptive representatives by their appearance or actions send messages to their constituents that they will be more responsive to their needs (Gilliam 1996; Tate 1993, 2001; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Pantoja and Segura 2003). Some argue that descriptive representation can build a trust between representative and constituent, which makes the constituent feel more included and view the government as more legitimate (Mansbridge 1999). Constituents might also use descriptive cues as a way to identify those who share their values and concerns, and beliefs about common interests can help establish trust in the member-constituent relationship (Gay 2001). Finally, constituents might perceive more accessibility and the “assurance that two-way communication is possible” (Fenno 1978) when they are more descriptively represented. Thus, shared background, however “imperfectly captured” by descriptive representation, can form the basis of greater confidence in public officials and institutions (Mansbridge 1999).

It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that even a non-influential voice can serve to boost feelings of outcome satisfaction in the context of a descriptively representative relationship. Individuals contacting governmental representatives who are racially or ethnically similar to themselves are likely to have more trust in those officials and feel that the officials share their beliefs and desires. Consequently, they are more likely to report satisfaction with their interaction than individuals contacting a governmental representative unlike themselves even when they believe they do not have an influence over the outcomes. Given this likelihood, I hypothesize that a non-influential voice in the context of descriptive representation will increase outcome satisfaction.

Data and Measures

I examine the moderating impact that descriptive representation has on voice and influence using the American Citizen Participation Study conducted by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995).¹ This study examined the

political and nonpolitical civic participation activities of a representative sample of American citizens. Among the many activities explored, respondents were asked a series of questions about contacts they initiated with government officials. These measures form the heart of the present study.

Respondents were asked a series of questions about their “most recent contact with a public official.” Of the 2,517 respondents interviewed, about 40 percent (1,005 respondents) reported contacting a federal, state, or local governmental official (see Appendix A for all question wording and coding). Respondents were then asked if they got a response or were ignored. About 81 percent of respondents who contacted a government official report receiving a response, while almost 10 percent report being ignored and almost 8 percent say it was too soon to tell. Next, respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the response they got. Most respondents (88.9%) were able to report whether they were satisfied or not, while about 11 percent report that it was “too soon to tell.” The 723 respondents making a contact, receiving a response, and stating whether or not they were satisfied serve as the sample for this analysis.² Of these respondents, about one quarter (27.7%) report their most recent contact being with a national government official, while the remainder report contacting an official of the subnational government most recently. (See Table 1 for a summary of all variables.)

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Valid %	N
Respondent Made Contact		
Yes	39.9%	1005
No	60.1%	1512
Respondent Received a Response		
Yes	81.3%	820
No	9.8%	99
Too Soon to Tell	7.9%	80
Respondent Satisfied with Response		
Yes or No	88.9%	723
Too Soon to Tell	10.9%	90
Respondent Satisfied with Response (“Too Soon” excluded)		
Yes	73.3%	530
No	26.7%	193
Level of Government Contacted		
National	27.7%	200
Subnational	72.3%	523

... table continues

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (continued)

	Valid %	N
Voice (Attention Paid to Complaint)–Local		
A Lot of Attention	21.6%	113
Some Attention	55.9%	292
Very Little Attention	19.2%	100
None at All	3.3%	17
Voice (Attention Paid to Complaint)–National		
A Lot of Attention	11.1%	22
Some Attention	48.2%	96
Very Little Attention	33.7%	67
None at All	7.0%	14
Influence (Influence Over Government Decisions)–Local		
A lot of Influence	19.7%	103
Some Influence	51.1%	267
Very Little Influence	23.9%	125
None at All	5.4%	28
Influence (Influence Over Government Decisions)–National		
A lot of Influence	5.0%	10
Some Influence	34.2%	68
Very Little Influence	47.7%	95
None at All	13.1%	26
Racial/Ethnic Congruity		
Race/Ethnicity of Contactor and Official Same	81.7%	561
Race/Ethnicity of Contactor and Official Different	18.3%	126
Respondent Gender		
Female	44.8%	324
Male	55.2%	399
Education (Number of Years of Formal Education Completed)		
Mean (Std. Dev.)	14.34 (2.3)	
Age (in Years)		
Mean (Std. Dev.)	44.6 (14.3)	
Respondent Race/Ethnicity		
Anglo	77.5%	560
African-American	14.9%	108
Hispanic/Latino	4.6%	33
Other	3.0%	22
Ideology		
Liberal	33.3%	237
Moderate	25.7%	183
Conservative	41.0%	292

Satisfaction with the outcome of the contact serves as the key dependent variable in this study. It is important to distinguish the form of “outcome satisfaction” examined here from that prevalent in much research. While some studies conceive of “outcome satisfaction” as the public’s approval of system-level factors such as policy outputs (Easton 1965; Rasinski and Tyler 1988), governmental trustworthiness and system legitimacy (Gangl 2000; Ulbig 2008), or assessments of political actors and institutions (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002a; Rasinski and Tyler 1988; Tyler and Cain 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, and McGraw 1985), it is important to remember that much of the procedural justice literature focuses on a more individualized conceptualization of “outcome satisfaction”—one focused on the outcomes of a particular interaction with governmental authority. Satisfaction with the outcome of a criminal court proceeding (Casper, Tyler, and Fisher 1988; Tyler 1987, 1990; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick 1985), with the outcome of a particular decision making process (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002b; Morrell 1999; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick 1985), or outcome of a specific dispute/conflict resolution process (Thibault and Walker 1975; Lind, Lissak, and Conlon 1983) have all been linked to procedural justice concerns of perceived voice and influence. Similarly, the focus here is on respondents’ satisfaction with the outcome of their most recent interaction with a government official. Respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the response they got. Overall, almost three-quarters (73.3%) of respondents report being satisfied, while about 27 percent report being unsatisfied.

The combinations of voice and influence citizens perceive that they have in the level of government they contacted serve as the key independent variables in this study. Not surprisingly, respondents are more positive about their voice and influence in local governmental decisions than in national governmental decisions. As a measure of voice, respondents were asked separate questions about how much attention they felt local and federal governmental officials would pay to a complaint from the respondent—none at all, very little, some, or a lot. While more than three-quarters (77.5%) of respondents contacting a sub-national governmental official believe that they have a voice in local government decisions, slightly more than half (59.3%) of those contacting a representative of the national government feel they have a voice in national government decisions. Similarly, when asked how much influence someone like them has over government decisions, about 70 percent report feelings of influence over local government decisions, while less than half (39.2%) of those contacting a federal government official feel this way about decisions made by the national government.

Respondents were classified into one of four categories based on their responses to the separate voice and influence questions.³ Those who felt they had very little or no influence and very little or no voice were classified as

reporting “Neither Voice nor Influence” (12.7% of valid responses); those who felt they had little or no influence and some or a lot of voice were classified as reporting a “Non-Influential Voice” (22.0% of valid responses); those who felt they had some or a lot of influence but very little or no voice were classified as reporting “Influence Only” (15.3% of valid responses); and those who felt they had some or a lot of both influence and voice were coded as perceiving an “Influential Voice” (49.9% of valid responses).⁴ Dichotomous, “dummy,” variables created to represent each of the four categories are used in the analyses that follow (with the “neither voice nor influence” group representing the excluded category in the regression models).

Since the effect of voice and influence is expected to be moderated by descriptive representation, I interact the voice and influence variables with a measure of racial congruity. Respondents were asked to identify the race or ethnicity of the government official they contacted. When the respondent and the government official being contacted are of the same race or ethnicity, the racial/ethnic congruity variable takes on a value of 1. Conversely, when the contactor and official are racially or ethnically different, racial/ethnic congruity is scored a 0. The racial/ethnic congruity measure is interacted with each of the three voice/influence dummy variables to test the conditional effects of voice and influence.⁵

In addition to measures of racial/ethnic congruity and respondent’s race/ethnicity, I also included control variables for a number of other relevant demographic and attitudinal factors thought to influence perceptions of outcome satisfaction. First, research into the effects of descriptive gender representation suggests that women might feel they receive fewer benefits from government (Bratton and Ray 2002; Mandel and Dodson 1992; Saltzstein 1986; Thomas 1991, 1994; Vega and Firestone 1995) and therefore be less satisfied with government officials than men. To account for this possibility, a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is female or not is included with the expectation that women will be less satisfied than men. Further, those with more education might be expected to be more confident about their interactions and more understanding of the complexity of governmental decision making. Consequently, a measure of formal education is included, and the more highly educated are expected to be more satisfied than the less educated. Similarly, older respondents might better appreciate the nuances of governmental decision making so a measure of age is included with the expectation that older respondents will report higher levels of satisfaction than younger respondents. Finally, ideological factors may matter as well. We might expect more conservative respondents to be more skeptical of government’s ability to solve personal problems, and therefore be less satisfied than more liberal respondents. To test for this

affect, separate dichotomous variables indicating whether the respondents calls him/herself a liberal or a conservative are included in this analysis with the expectation that liberals will report higher satisfaction levels than conservatives.⁶

Analysis and Findings

To investigate the moderating impact of descriptive representation on feelings of voice and influence, multivariate regression analyses are performed. Given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, probit regression analyses including the voice, influence, and descriptive representation variables as well as pertinent control variables are utilized.⁷ This analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Racial/Ethnic Congruity and Outcome Satisfaction

	B	I. S.E.	Sig.	B	II. S.E.	Sig.
Voice Only	0.265	0.179	0.137	-0.635	0.455	0.163
Influence Only	0.992	0.205	0.000	0.331	0.446	0.457
Voice & Influence	1.355	0.169	0.000	0.917	0.406	0.024
Racial Congruity & Voice Only	—	—	—	1.062	0.493	0.031
Racial Congruity & Influence Only	—	—	—	0.812	0.501	0.105
Racial Congruity & Both	—	—	—	0.513	0.444	0.248
Racial Congruity	0.301	0.193	0.119	-0.294	0.398	0.460
Female	-0.195	0.116	0.094	-0.196	0.117	0.095
Education	0.002	0.027	0.973	0.002	0.027	0.931
Age	0.007	0.004	0.116	0.007	0.004	0.096
Racial/Ethnic Minority	0.225	0.187	0.230	0.265	0.190	0.162
Liberal	0.338	0.152	0.027	0.337	0.153	0.028
Conservative	0.219	0.145	0.131	0.213	0.145	0.144
Constant	-0.897	0.466	0.054	-0.428	0.547	0.434
Number of Cases	647			647		
Pseudo R-square	0.1525			0.1596		
Chi-Square (significance)	114.61 (0.000)			119.89 (0.000)		

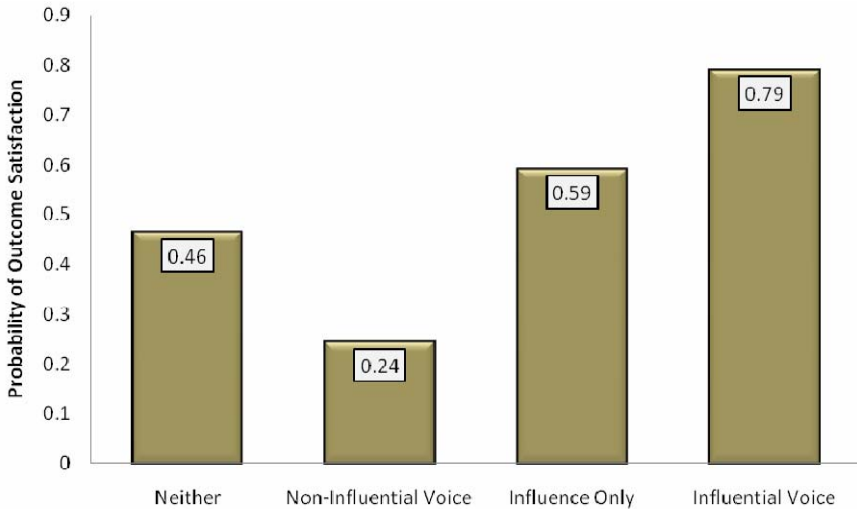
The results confirm previous findings about the relative importance of feelings of voice and influence. As the first model in Table 2 suggests, feelings of influence, alone or in combination with feelings of voice, boost satisfaction. At the same time, however, perceptions of a non-influential voice do not significantly improve feelings of satisfaction. The positive and significant coefficient for the *Influential Voice* variable (1.355) suggests that respondents believing they have an influential voice in their interaction with the governmental official are significantly more satisfied with the outcome than those who feel they have neither a voice nor influence. Similarly, feelings of *Influence Only* also appear to increase satisfaction levels. Importantly, however, the *Non-Influential Voice* variable fails to achieve statistical significance, suggesting that the perception of having a voice alone did not significantly boost feelings of outcome satisfaction.

The moderating effects of descriptive representation are evident in the interactive racial/ethnic congruity variables presented in Model II on Table 2. In contrast to negative and insignificant *Non-Influential Voice* variable, feelings of having only a voice in the context of racial/ethnic congruity with the government official seem to boost feelings of outcome satisfaction. The positive (and significant) coefficient for the *Racial/Ethnic Congruity & Non-Influential Voice* variable (1.062) suggests that when a respondent contacted a government official of the same race, (s)he was more satisfied with the outcome even when having a non-influential voice. Interestingly, the effects of having an influential voice or influence alone are not heightened because of racial/ethnic congruity.⁸ This finding suggests that when citizens feel they possess influence, alone or in combination with voice, the racial/ethnic similarity of the government official becomes less important.⁹

Substantively, the effects of voice, influence, and racial/ethnic congruity are impressive (see Figure 1).¹⁰ In the context of racial/ethnic incongruity, the typical respondent who feels that (s)he has neither voice nor influence has a probability of being satisfied with the outcome of her/his interaction of approximately 0.46. In comparison, a similarly situated person feeling she/he has a non-influential voice has only about a 0.24 chance of being satisfied. Respondents feeling that they have influential voices have the highest probability of being satisfied (about 0.79), and those believing they have influence but little voice exhibit the second highest satisfaction (with a probability of 0.59). Thus, when respondents are contacting a government official who is not of the same race/ethnicity, they are least likely to be satisfied with the outcome of that interaction when they feel that have a non-influential voice and most satisfied when they feel they have an influential voice.

In contrast, non-influential voice boosts outcome satisfaction in the context of racial congruity (see Figure 2). In this setting, the typical respondent

Figure 1. The Impact of Voice & Influence on Outcome Satisfaction Without Racial/Ethnic Congruity

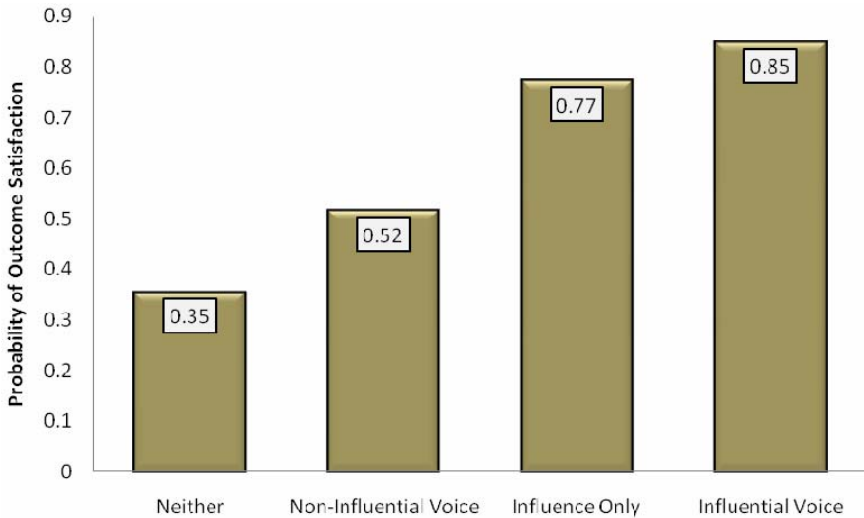


Notes: Probabilities calculated using regression model presented in Table 2, Model II. Control variables were set to their modal values & all other variables to the appropriate levels. The two-tailed significance levels of the differences in probabilities across the four columns were as follows: Neither and Non-Influential Voice, $p < 0.001$; Non-Influential Voice and Influence Only, $p < 0.001$; Influence Only and Influential Voice, $p < 0.001$; Neither and Influence Only, $p < 0.10$.

who feels that (s)he has neither voice nor influence has a probability of being satisfied with the outcome of her/his interaction of approximately 0.35. In contrast to the findings with regard to a racially/ethnically incongruent situation, respondents feeling that they have a non-influential voice in the racially/ethnically congruous setting are more likely to be satisfied with the outcome. These respondents have about a 0.52 chance of being satisfied with the outcome of the interaction, a level more than twice as high as that of respondents contacting officials who are descriptively different than them in a non-influential voice. Similar to the racially/ethnically incongruent setting, those feeling that they have an influential voice are most likely to be satisfied (with a probability of 0.85) and those feeling they have influence but little voice are the second most satisfied (with a probability of 0.77). It thus appears that descriptive representation can enhance the effects of non-influential voice when it comes to interactions with government officials.

Given the importance of descriptive representation in boosting a range of attitudes among minority citizens (see e.g., Gilliam 1996; Tate 1993, 2001; Bobo and Gilliam 1990; Gurin, Hatchett, and Jackson 1989; Pantoja and Segura 2003), the moderating effect of racial/ethnic congruity on

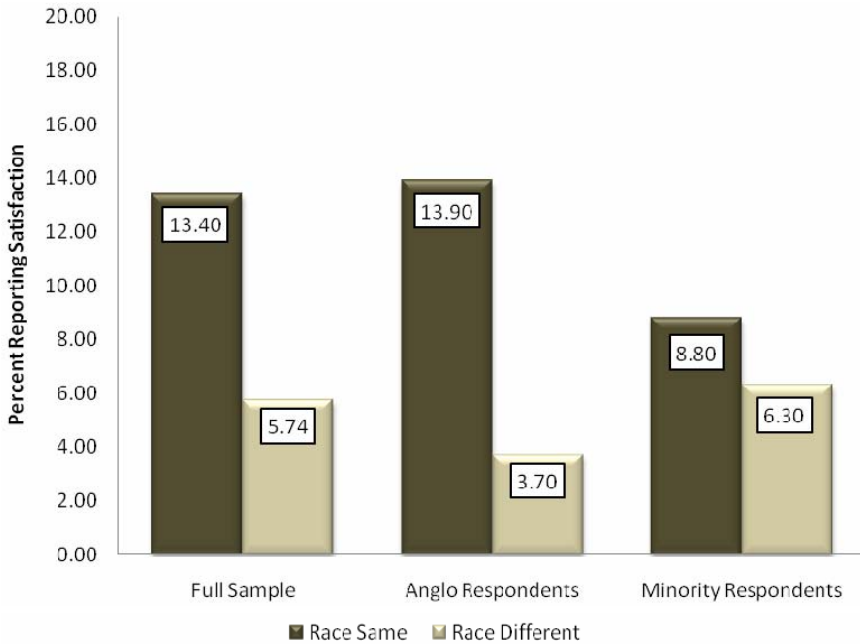
Figure 2. The Impact of Voice & Influence on Outcome Satisfaction With Racial/Ethnic Congruity



Notes: Probabilities calculated using regression model presented in Table 2, Model II. Control variables were set to their modal values & all other variables to the appropriate levels. The two-tailed significance levels of the differences in probabilities across the four columns were as follows: Neither and Non-Influential Voice, $p < 0.05$; Non-Influential Voice and Influence Only, $p < 0.001$; Influence Only and Influential Voice, $p < 0.05$.

non-influential voice might be expected to be even stronger among racial and ethnic minorities than it is among Anglo citizens. To test whether racial/ethnic congruity increases outcome satisfaction among minority citizens even more than among the Anglo population, satisfaction levels of Anglo and minority respondents were examined separately. As Figure 3 illustrates, even without feeling they have a voice, respondents were significantly more satisfied if they contacted a governmental representative who was racially/ethnically similar to them. While about 13.4 percent of respondents who contacted a representative who was racially/ethnically similar to them expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the contact, less than half that many (5.7%) of those contacting a racially/ethnically different representative felt this way. This general pattern holds for both Anglo and minority respondents. In fact, the satisfaction differential between those contacting a descriptively similar representative and contacting a descriptively different representative is greater among Anglo respondents than among minority respondents. While the satisfaction rate is more than four times as high (a 10.2 percentage point gap) for Anglo-to-Anglo contact as it is for Anglo-to-minority contact, the gap for minorities is less than 3 percent.

Figure 3. Satisfaction Among Those Expressing Voice Only



Note: The two-tailed significance levels of the differences in percentages for the full sample is $p < 0.05$; for the Anglo sub-sample is $p = 0.26$; and for the Minority sub-sample is $p = 0.80$.

While this finding is suggestive, it is important to remember that the rate of racial/ethnic congruence is much lower for minority respondents than it is for Anglo respondents. Almost 95 percent of Anglo respondents report contacting a descriptively similar governmental representative, but only about 39 percent of minority respondents report the same. Thus, the number of minority respondents in racially/ethnically congruous relationships ($N=57$) and Anglo respondents in non-congruous ($N=27$) interactions is relatively low. Consequently, the results here should not be extrapolated too far.

At the same time, however, the results support previous research suggesting that Anglo citizens value descriptive representation as well. More than three decades ago, Cole (1976) illustrated that a context of descriptive representation affected Anglos' attitudes, with at least 40 percent of the white respondents feeling that African-American elected officials would "mainly represent the interests of the black community ahead of the entire city's" (Cole 1976:114). More recently, the election of African Americans to Congress is shown to negatively affect white political involvement (Gay

2001). The results here further illustrate the importance of descriptive representation to the Anglo, as well as the minority, community.

Summary and Conclusions

Overall, these findings add a caveat to previous research showing that a non-influential voice can be more detrimental than no voice at all (Gangl 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002a, 2002b; Morrell 1999; Ulbig 2008). The analyses presented here confirm previous findings that perceptions of an influential voice improve attitudes about governmental interactions. Specifically, respondents believing they possess an influential voice are more likely to be satisfied with their contacts with governmental officials. Consistent with previous research the findings also suggest that a non-influential voice does not improve feelings of satisfaction, while believing one has influence even without a voice might improve satisfaction.

At the same time, however, the present study illustrates the moderating impact of descriptive representation. When respondents contact a government official who is of the same race or ethnicity as themselves, a non-influential voice serves to boost their satisfaction with the outcome. Conversely, when they contact an official who is racially or ethnically different, non-influential voice drives down their satisfaction level.

Further, these findings serve to reassert the importance of the value-expressive voice championed by earlier procedural justice literature (Lind, Lissak, and Conlon 1983; Tyler, Rasinski, and Spodick, 1985; Tyler 1987, 1990). In some settings, particularly those of racially/ethnically descriptive representation, it appears that even when citizens do not feel their input influences the outcome, they still feel better about the process when they were able to speak. Interestingly, there is some evidence that this effect holds for Anglo as well as minority citizens. So while descriptive representation is important, its effects may not be limited to the minority community.

While the data utilized here are two decades old, these questions remain relevant today. Despite the fact that gains have been made in the representation of minorities at all levels of government, minority representation remains low and concerns about racial discrimination in elections persist. While African-Americans have represented between 12 percent and 13 percent of the American population over the past 20 years, the rate of elected officials has been, and continues to be, far lower.¹¹ Twenty years ago, only 5.8 percent of our U.S. House members were African-American (and no Senators were). While African-American representation has increased, it still lags. Today, slightly less than 8 percent of our U.S. Congresspersons and Senators are African-American (1% in the Senate and 9.4% in the House).¹² Similarly, while about 7 percent of state legislators

(both house members and senators) in the early 1990s were African-American, they comprise about 8.5 percent of state legislators today (9% of house members and 8% of senators).¹³ Additionally, the Supreme Court's recent decision upholding section 2 of the Voting Rights Act suggests that issues of racial discrimination in elections persist.¹⁴ Further, racial violence may be on the uptick, with some claiming that our nation is facing "an unprecedented level of conflict and racial turmoil," that even the election of America's first African-American president will not stop.¹⁵ Thus, questions about the effects of racial representation remain as relevant today as they were 20 years ago.

Thus, the results speak to larger questions about democratic governance in America. The findings suggest that representational politics remain as important as procedural ones. Allowing citizens a non-influential voice in government without descriptive representation can be detrimental to the public's opinion about the government. Conversely, a non-influential voice in the context of a racially/ethnically representative relationship can serve a positive function. Thus, the nature of democratic representation and the processes of democracy appear to be intimately intertwined, and ignoring either jeopardizes public support for government.

APPENDIX A

Measures and Coding

Official Contacted: "I'd like to ask you a few questions about your most recent contact with a public official. What was that official's title or position?" 1=President (1.5%; N=15); 2=U.S. Senator (14.2%; N=143); 3=U.S. Representative (10.1%; N=102); 4=State Senator (8.4%; N=85); 5=State Representative (11.8%; N=119); 6=Governor (3.9%; N=39); 7=Mayor (10.0%; N=101); 8=City Council (9.6%; N=97); 9=School Board (4.5%; N=45); 10=Local Official (7.5%; N=76); 11=State Official (1.7%; N=17); 12=Local Board (8.6%; N=87); 13=State Board (3.3%; N=33); 14=National Board (4.6%; N=46)

Response Received: "Thinking still about this contact, did you get a response or were you ignored?" 1=Got Response (81.3%; N=820); 2=Ignored (9.8%; N=99); 3=Too Soon to Know (7.9%; N=80)

Outcome Satisfaction: "Were you satisfied with the result [of contact with government official]?" 0=No (26.7%; N=193); 1=Yes (73.3%; N=530); "Too Soon to Know" excluded (N=90)

Voice: "If you had some complaint about a [local/national] government activity and took that complaint to a member of the [local/federal] government council, do you think that he or she would pay a lot of attention to what you say, some attention, very little attention, or none at all?" 1="a lot of attention" or "some attention" (71.2%; N=715); 0="very little attention" or "none at all" (28.8%; N=289)

... continues

APPENDIX A (continued)

Influence (voice): “How much influence do you think someone like you can have over [local/national] government decisions—a lot, some, very little, or none at all?” 1=“a lot” or “some” (64.9%; N=454); 0 = “very little” or “none at all” (35.1%; N=246)

Voice & Influence: Four separate dichotomous variables representing each of the following categories:

		Voice	
		<i>A lot or some</i>	<i>Very little or none</i>
Influence	<i>A lot or some</i>	“Influential Voice” (49.9%; N=345)	“Influence Only” (15.3%; N=106)
	<i>Very little or none</i>	“Non-Influential Voice” (22.0%; N=152)	“Neither Voice nor Influence” (12.7%; N=88)

Racial/Ethnic Minority: “What is your race? (Which category describes your racial background?)” 0=“White” (77.5%; N=560); 1=“Black, “Hispanic/Latino,” “Asian,” “Alaskan Native,” or “Other” (22.5%; N=163)

Racial Congruity: A dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent and official contacted are of the same race or ethnicity or not. 1=Same Race/Ethnicity (81.7%; N=561); 0=Not Same Race/Ethnicity (18.3%; N=126). Computed using the following questions:

- (a) “What is your race? (Which category describes your racial background—White, Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Alaskan Native, or Other)”
- (b) “Was the official you contacted white, black, Hispanic, or Asian-American?”

Respondent Gender: Sex of respondent coded as 1=female (44.8%; N=324); 0=male (55.2%; N=399)

Respondent Education: “What is the highest grade of regular school that you have completed and gotten credit for? If necessary say: By regular school we mean a school which can be counted toward an elementary or high school diploma or a college or university degree.” Coded on a 20-point scale of 0 years through 7th year of college. Mean = 14.43; Std. Dev. = 2.3

Respondent’s Age: Age in years. Mean=44.6; Std. Dev. = 14.3

Respondent Ideology: “We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal—point 1—extremely conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” Coded as separate dichotomous variables indicating whether respondent identified as a Liberal or Conservative. Liberal Dummy: 1=Liberal (33.3%; N=237); 0=Not Liberal (66.7%; N=475); Conservative Dummy: 1=Conservative (41.0%; N=292); 0=Not Conservative (59.0%; N=420)

NOTES

¹ICPSR study #6635.

²While the available sample size is 723, missing cases on variables investigated decrease the number of available cases to 647 cases for the multivariate analyses that follow.

³Respondents reporting a contact with a federal official were coded according to their response to the federal voice and influence measures while respondents reporting contacts with state or local officials were coded according to their local voice and influence measures.

⁴Respondents not providing valid responses to both the voice and influence items (12.7% of the sample) were excluded from this analysis.

⁵Nearly 95% of the Anglo sub-sample (94.8%) report that they contacted a governmental representative of the same race, while 38.6% of minority respondents reported contacting a minority governmental representative.

⁶The effects of partisanship were also tested, but proved to be insignificant. Republicans were no more or less satisfied than Democrats, nor were those contacting a member of the same party any more or less satisfied than those contacting a member from another party. The partisanship variables were removed from the models presented here because their inclusion increased the number of missing cases and the degree of multicollinearity in the model, but did not improve the overall model fit.

⁷The dummy variable indicating that the respondent felt he/she had “Neither Voice nor Influence” serves as the excluded variable.

⁸It is interesting to note, however, that notwithstanding statistical significance the coefficients for both of these interactions are positive, suggesting higher outcome satisfaction under conditions of racial/ethnic congruity.

⁹Since the incidence of minority racial congruence is higher at the sub-national level, separate local and national analyses were conducted. The multivariate models presented in Table 2 was run for separate sub-samples of respondents who contacted sub-national officials and those who contacted national officials. Though the results are statistically weaker (significant at $p < 0.10$ instead of $p < 0.05$), the findings hold at both levels (and are slightly stronger at the sub-national level). Feelings of voice & influence boost satisfaction, and feelings of voice only do so in presence of racial congruity.

¹⁰Probabilities calculated using regression model presented in Table 2, Model 2. Control variables were set to their modal values & all other variables to the appropriate levels.

¹¹Population estimates from the Census Bureau’s on-line “American Factfinder”: http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en.

¹²“Black Americans in Congress.” Office of the Clerk, U.S. House of Representatives: <http://baic.house.gov/historical-data/representatives-senators-by-congress.html>.

¹³“Number of African-American Legislators.” National Conference of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/Default.aspx?TabID=746&tabs=1116,113,782#1116>.

¹⁴*Bartlett vs. Strickland* 556 U.S. ____ (2009).

¹⁵Carol Swain, as quoted in Washington, Jesse. “Holocaust Museum Shooting Signal of Increasing Violence from Threatened Whites, Some Say.” *The Associated Press*. June 11, 2009.

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