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# Administrative Discretion and Active Representation: An Expansion of the Theory of Representative Bureaucracy

*Recent studies of the theory of representative bureaucracy have focused on active representation, whereby administrators in public organizations work to advance the interests of particular groups, achieving policy outcomes that directly address the needs of those groups. The concept of administrative discretion is central to these studies, as an administrator must have the discretion to produce results that reflect the values and beliefs of these groups. While the presence of discretion is often implied in these studies, few have examined it explicitly. Using data from the Farmer's Home Administration, we explore whether administrators who perceive themselves as having more discretion enact policy outcomes that are more representative of minority interests. The results strongly support the conclusion that administrators who perceive themselves as possessing significant discretion and who assume the role of minority representative in their agencies are more likely to enact policy outcomes that favor minority interests.*

In the evolution of public administration theory and practice, a general consensus has been reached that the investment of discretionary power in administrative agencies is a fact of life. While public administration theorists once believed that a public administrator's actions could be dictated clearly by legislative mandate, numerous studies have demonstrated it is often impossible for legislators to anticipate all of the circumstances that may influence administrators' actions in the execution of public law (Bryner 1987; Lipsky 1980; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989; Prottas 1979; Scott 1997). From street-level bureaucrats who must make decisions about the direct provision of services, to administrators within agencies who must translate vague legislative mandates into organizational procedures, discretion is often a crucial part of public administrators' job descriptions. With this discretion, scholars have recognized that administrators often exercise political power toward the representation of citizens' interests (Mosher 1982; Rourke 1984). Recognition of the political power inherent in the exercise of administrative discretion has focused attention on how to ensure this discretion is translated into

administrative responsibility; as Krislov and Rosenbloom contend, "it is not the power of public bureaucracies per se, but their unrepresentative power, that constitutes the greatest threat to democratic government" (1981, 21).

One solution to this dilemma which many scholars endorse is the theory of representative bureaucracy, a theory that maintains bureaucratic power can be made more responsive to the public if the personnel who staff administrative agencies reflect the demographic characteristics of the public they serve (Denhardt and deLeon 1995; Krislov 1974; Krislov and Rosenbloom 1981; Meier 1975; Nachmias and Rosenbloom 1973; Saltzstein 1979; Selden

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1997; Stein 1986). This concept of representation was given prominence in the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, which called for a civil service that “reflects the nation’s diversity” (5 U.S.C. 7201) and required agencies to measure the representativeness of their workforce and to attempt to correct for underrepresentation (Ingraham and Rosenbloom 1993; Ingraham 1995). Some agencies in the United States have been explicitly designed toward the goal of active representation of certain groups, with the mandate to use discretion in a manner that promotes representation, such as the Department of Veteran’s Affairs or the Office for Civil Rights (Romzek and Hendricks 1982). However, the theory of representative bureaucracy maintains that other public agencies, while not designed to be active representatives of certain groups, can transform the passive representation of certain groups into active representation to achieve more representative outcomes (Meier and Stewart 1992; Meier and Bohte 2001). Many studies have examined passive representation in U.S. administrative agencies and explored the translation of passive representation into active representation. However, this article seeks to expand the theory of representative bureaucracy by focusing on an unexplored aspect of the theory: the impact of administrative discretion on active representation.

The first part of this article explores the theory of representative bureaucracy, highlighting the transition from passive to active representation and the ways that active representation has been empirically explored, with studies exploring active representation at both the agency level and at the level of individual administrators. The second part explores the concept of administrative discretion and puts forward a measure of individual administrative discretion that highlights the differences between organizational latitude for action and individuals’ perceptions of the discretion or latitude they have to act toward the representation of certain groups. The third section explores the hypothesis that individual administrators who perceive themselves as having more administrative discretion produce outcomes that are more responsive to the interests of minorities than those of their colleagues.

## The Theory of Representative Bureaucracy

The theory of representative bureaucracy initially focused on the benefits of passive representation—the presence of a public workforce that reflects the demographic characteristics of the society it serves. The theory first appeared in the academic literature with the work of J. Donald Kingsley (1944). However, Kingsley’s conception of representativeness in the British Civil Service differs from what is now perceived as representative bureaucracy, as he focused on social class as one of the most important demo-

graphic variables. Following Kingsley’s work, David Levitan (1946) addressed the possibility of creating a representative workforce in the public sector in the United States, arguing the public would better accept agency actions if the demographic composition of those agencies was similar to that of society. The theory was expanded by Norton Long (1952) and Paul Van Riper (1958), with an emphasis in these works on the symbolic importance of a representative bureaucracy to legitimate policy to the citizenry. The theory, further refined by Krislov (1974) and Krislov and Rosenbloom (1981), focused on aspects of individual socialization, maintaining that the demographic backgrounds of individuals—including such characteristics as race, ethnicity, and gender—provide an early socialization experience that leads to the creation of certain values and beliefs. A representative bureaucracy, reflecting the backgrounds of the citizenry and similar values and beliefs, would provide an avenue for citizens to feel a connection with government, to see their needs and desires reflected in the actions of government, actions that would reflect these similarly held values and beliefs. It would provide them with a symbol of equal access to the power of government and would fulfill the deficiencies these scholars believe were left by Congress and other political executives (Long 1952; Kellough 1990a, 1990b).

While the symbolic importance of passive representation was clear to many scholars, others argued the early theory of representative bureaucracy failed to adequately address the benefits that could arise through a representative public workforce (Meier and Nigro 1976; Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh 1977; Selden 1997). A representative bureaucracy could have more efficacy if passive or “sociological” representation could be transformed into active representation, through which the interests of particular groups could be more actively pursued by administrators holding similar values (Krislov 1974; Mosher 1982). The concept of active representation recognizes that administrators’ discretionary authority can be directed toward more representative and possibly more equitable outcomes for the people they represent (Denhardt and deLeon 1995; Saltzstein 1979). Active representation takes the assertion that certain attributes such as race, ethnicity, and gender—which lead to early socialization experiences and, in turn, shape the values and attitudes of administrators—a step further than passive representation. These values and attitudes then can be conceived of as directly influencing the behavior of administrators, directing them toward using their discretion to foster improved equity for those who have been underrepresented in the implementation of public programs.

Many empirical studies of active representation through more representative bureaucracy have focused on clarifying the relationship between individual attitudes, organiza-

tional socialization, and administrative actions (Dolan 2000; Selden 1997; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998; Meier and Nigro 1976; Meier, Wrinkle, and Polinard 1999). Rosenbloom and Kinnard (1977) found that high-ranking minorities in the Department of Defense tended to believe they should actively address the special needs of minority populations. In a study of educational bureaucracies, Meier and Stewart (1992) found a significant relationship between the presence of African American teachers and the ability groupings of children, with more African American teachers being positively associated with more African American students being placed in gifted classes. They also found that more African American teachers were positively associated with higher student performance for these groups. In a later study, exploring inconclusive findings related to active representation in the higher levels of educational bureaucracies, Meier (1993) found the relationship of active representation of minorities at the principal level to student outcomes was nonlinear, concluding there needed to be a critical mass of Latino administrators in schools in order to affect the minority student performance. In studies of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Hindera (1993a, 1993b) found that more passive representation on the part of African Americans at the commission led to more representative outcomes for these groups, measured by the percentage of charges filed on the behalf of these groups. All of these studies highlight how bureaucracies with passive representation on the part of certain minority groups demonstrate the transformation of passive representation into more actively representative outcomes.

An additional set of research on active representation, upon which this study rests, focuses on the mediating factor of organizational role in determining active representation. While many empirical studies of the theory of representative bureaucracy test the theory using the organization as the unit of analysis, these studies move the focus of investigation from the organizational level to the level of individual administrators, investigating more directly how administrators' values, backgrounds, and socialization experiences influence their actions—that is, how individual administrators go about creating active representation. In these studies, the background of individuals and the characteristics of the organizations in which they work lead to the formation of certain role perceptions—frameworks for behavior—which, in turn, shape individuals' behavior and whether their behavior is directed toward policy outcomes that represent minority interests. Selden (1997) and Selden, Brudney, and Kellough (1998) found that certain personal and organizational characteristics led some administrators to perceive their role in the organization as that of a minority representative, a role that encompasses the active representation of minority interests. They found that minorities, in particular, were more likely to adopt a minority

representative role, especially those with more liberal political orientations and those with fewer years experience in the federal government. In addition, they found that individuals who perceived themselves as being expected to increase minority access to programs were more likely to adopt a minority representative role. Therefore, they concluded the background characteristics of individual administrators and the characteristics of the organization in which they work influence administrators' perceptions of the role they should adopt, in turn influencing their behavior toward minorities. A further study of organizational role and representative bureaucracy supports this contention, but argues that individual characteristics also have a direct effect on action. Brudney, Hebert, and Wright's (2000) study of state administrators found that race, ethnicity, and gender affected the role adopted by the administrators, with nonwhite administrators having a more expansionist orientation for their agencies, as well as a direct effect on the attitudes and behaviors of these individuals.

## **Discretion and Representative Bureaucracy**

Research on administrative discretion in the public administration literature has pursued many different themes. Some scholars have examined the impact of discretion on the services received by clients of administrative agencies, many using case studies of social service bureaucracies to study the impact of the discretion held by street-level bureaucrats in the delivery of services to clients (Brodkin 1997; Kelly 1994; Lipsky 1980; Prottas 1979; Sandfort 2000; Vinzant and Crothers 1998). Other scholars have focused on the factors leading to the presence or absence of administrative discretion, focusing on organizational and task characteristics. These scholars have found that increased organizational formalization can lead to decreased discretion, and the organization's culture can have a moderating impact on the amount and type of discretion exercised (Aiken and Hage 1966; Kelly 1994; Scott 1997). In addition, scholars have found that as decisions become more complex, it is more difficult to predict the manner in which discretion will be exercised. Many public administration scholars have focused their studies on the implications that the exercise of administrative discretion has for the operation of democratic government (Dodd and Schott 1979; Frederickson 1993; Keiser 1999; Selden 1997; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998; Wood and Waterman 1991). In general, these studies highlight mechanisms that can be used to control administrative discretion and direct it toward outcomes that serve the purposes of democratic governance. Among the different mechanisms for control are legislative oversight, executive control, and administrative ethics; indeed, the theory of representative bureau-

crazy exists as a mechanism of control over administrative discretion (Meier, O'Toole, and Nicholson-Crotty 2002).

The theory of representative bureaucracy maintains that a more representative workforce can lead to discretion being exercised toward the achievement of policy outcomes that are more representative and responsive to particular groups, especially minority groups. A public workforce that is representative of the population will have values and beliefs that are similar to the population it represents, and these values and beliefs will direct the exercise of discretion toward these shared values and beliefs. In organizations that are designed to be active representatives of certain groups, the impact of discretion on agency outcomes is not of central importance, as it is assumed that discretion is directed toward and exercised to serve these groups (Meier and Bohte 2001). However, in organizations that are not designed to be active representatives, the way discretion is directed is more important. In these types of organizations, an administrator—in order to enact policy outcomes that reflect minority interests—must have a sphere of influence in which he or she can freely operate in a manner that reflects the specific values the administrator holds. Therefore, an administrator must have discretion, according to the theory of representative bureaucracy, for it is with this discretion that administrators can produce results that represent values and beliefs held by the public he or she serves (Meier and Stewart 1992; Meier and Bohte 2001). The presence of discretion in an organization does not necessarily produce actions that are broadly representative; therefore, in all of the previous cases examined, administrators need to recognize that their discretion allows them to reflect their personal values and beliefs in their actions, leading to more representative outcomes if they hold values that are similar to those of the public they serve.

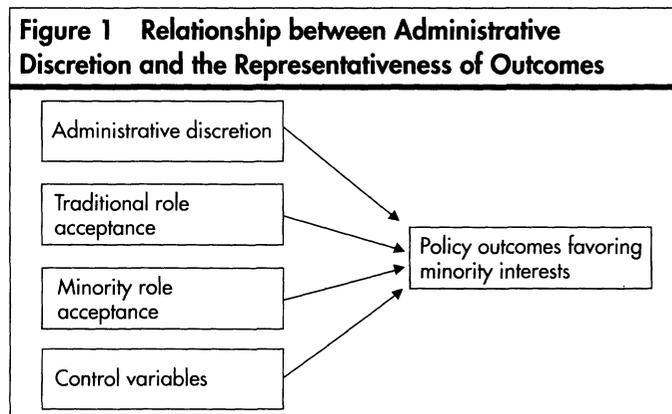
In studies of representative bureaucracy, the presence of administrative discretion is usually presumed to be a necessary condition for studying the applicability and efficacy of the theory. However, little attention has been paid to the direct impact of administrative discretion on outcomes, as discretion is usually assumed to be a constant or simply is not measured. A recent study by Meier and Bohte (2001) explores the impact of different levels of discretion on the representativeness of outcomes in educational bureaucracies. In this study, the authors maintain that most studies argue discretion is determined by individual characteristics, the characteristics of the clients served, and the structures of organizations in which people work (Scott 1997). The authors select a structural measure of administrative discretion to evaluate the relationship of discretion to the theory of representative bureaucracy. They use organizational span of control as a measure of administrative discretion, for administrators with large spans of con-

trol inevitably must allow their subordinates more discretion. With the outcome being the number of minority students who pass the Texas Assessment of Academic Standards Exam, the authors found that organizational structures permitting more discretion allow for better outcomes for minority students and are therefore desirable, as this discretion strengthens the transformation of passive representation into active representation (Meier and Bohte 2001). While these authors' study is of great importance to specification of role of administrative discretion in the theory of representative bureaucracy, the question must be raised as to what occurs in organizations with similar organizational structures and similar spans of control. Do individuals perceive themselves as having similar latitude for action, or is there more to the story?

For organizations with similar structures, it cannot be assumed that individual administrators perceive similar latitudes of discretion. We advocate using an individual-level measure of administrative discretion, one that captures how much discretion individual administrators perceive themselves as having in the operation of their duties. Studies of organizational behavior argue that in understanding their job responsibilities, workers are both affected by the environment in which they work and contribute to the construction of that environment (Salanick and Pfeffer 1978; Weick 1977, 1995). In the process of making sense of what is expected in one's job, individuals receive certain information from the environment, information that dictates socially acceptable behavior and shapes how they perceive how they should behave. However, individuals also have past beliefs, values, and experiences that serve as filters for how that information is understood. Therefore, individuals' attitudes and behaviors are constructed in response to cues from environment, but those cues are given meaning by the individual's background and belief structures (Salanick and Pfeffer 1978; Weick 1977, 1995). This concept of sense making in organizations applies to the concept of administrative discretion used here, in that discretion or perceptions of how much discretion one has in an organization can be socially constructed rather than simply designed into the structure of one's work. Although organizations may have identical structures and similar spans of control, individual administrators, through their own processes of sense making, may perceive themselves as having more or less discretion based on the meaning they construct from behavioral signals in their environment. Therefore, a measure of administrative discretion that captures these sense-making exercises and measures individual determinations of how much latitude administrators perceive themselves to have is an appropriate measure for assessing the impact of administrative discretion on policy outcomes serving minority interests in organizations of similar structures.<sup>1</sup>

## Variables in the Model

The model for examining the impact of administrative discretion on policy outcomes favoring minority interests is shown in figure 1.



The following variables are predicted to affect the behavior of administrators and determine whether they will enact decisions that represent minority interests: the amount of discretion administrators perceive themselves to have; administrators' role perceptions; the degree of demand for outcomes favoring minority interests; whether an individual administrator is a minority; and the gender of the individual administrators.

### Administrative Discretion

It has been argued that it is essential in studying the theory of representative bureaucracy that administrators possess significant discretion that can be exercised toward the representation of minority interests. In this study, the measure of administrative discretion used to explore the impact of discretion on policy outcomes favoring minority interests captures how much discretion administrators perceive themselves to have over outcomes directed toward clients and how much discretion they perceive themselves to have over certain agency operations. Like Meier and Bohte's study (2001), we predict that administrators who perceive themselves as having more discretion in relation to internal agency processes and over the outcomes directed toward clients will be more likely to produce outcomes that favor minority interests.

### Minority Role Acceptance

In general, authorities governing an agency define work roles as the particular set of behaviors expected of those occupying a particular position or job (Kahn et al. 1964). The expectations related to a work role may be conveyed to administrators both verbally and nonverbally; they may be expressed through written job descriptions or through organizational socialization. Individuals in an agency may encounter multiple role expectations in their positions, leading to conflicts as they seek to resolve which role to pur-

sue most actively. While all administrators experience pressure to adopt certain roles, it has been argued that many, particularly minority administrators, feel pressure to serve minority communities and an added sense of responsibility to these communities (Herbert 1974). Minority communities often seek public administrators who "will listen to them, who can communicate with them, who care about them" (Herbert 1974, 561). Karnig and McClain (1988, 151–52) describe the role created by this responsibility as that of "trustee" of minority interests. The trustee takes upon him or herself the responsibility for making a difference in policy outcomes for minorities, ensuring their interests are served, and ensuring they are given increasing access to the policy process. In accepting this trustee role, minority administrators are moving from passive representatives of like groups in the population to active representatives that purposively advocate for and make decisions that serve the interests of minority communities.

The impact of minority role acceptance on policy outcomes favoring minority interests has been investigated in past research (Selden 1997; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998). Among the organizational factors found to influence the acceptance of this role were the degree to which administrators perceived that they were expected to increase minority access to programs and the length of tenure in federal employment. In examining personal factors, one of the strongest factors predicting minority role acceptance was the minority status of the administrator, with minorities being more likely to accept the role of advocate for minority interests. In this study, we predict that acceptance of a minority representative role will lead to policy outcomes that represent the interests of minorities.

### Traditional Role Acceptance

The concept of merit in public service is long-standing in the United States and other modern civil service systems, with the idea of neutral competence central to the principle of merit. The idea of neutral competence embodies the need to do the work of government expertly and efficiently, without being directed by personal values or other obligations (Kaufman 1956). Therefore, the ultimate objective in a public employment system that emphasizes merit and neutral competence is the achievement of efficiency in administration. These principles have run through public administration in the United States since the evolution of the civil service system, and more recent scholars have found that economy and efficiency still remain the premier values underlying the traditional view of neutral competence in public service (Ingraham and Ban 1986). In this study, we believe that administrators who focus on efficiency in the operation of agency processes will be less likely to produce outcomes favoring minority interests. The inherent trade-off between these two roles—minority rep-

representative role and traditional role—is similar to the trade-off between efficiency and equity as it is described in the public administration literature: Those who assume a minority representative role will be focused on improving access to services for a group that traditionally has been excluded or underrepresented in the policy process. However, those emphasizing a more traditionally bureaucratic role would be expected to focus on ensuring compliance with standard operating procedures, and therefore would not be expected to demonstrate a large proportion of outcomes favoring minority interests.

### **Control Variables**

Three control variables are included in this model: the minority status of the administrator, the gender of the administrator, and the degree of demand for outcomes favoring minority interests. Since organizational socialization through the conveyance of role expectations may lead administrators of different backgrounds to accept a minority representative role, a control variable is included for whether the administrator is a minority, in order to determine whether this has an additional effect on outcomes (Selden 1997; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998). In addition, a control variable is included for the gender of the administrator, as scholars examining the role of women in government and bureaucratic agencies have argued that women in positions of control over policy often possess a “heightened awareness of feminist issues [that] often give them a better feel for the problems women encounter, making them especially adept at recognizing when policy solutions fail to account for women’s unique needs” (Dolan 2000, 514). Therefore, one may expect the administrator’s gender to have an additional impact on the policy outcomes they produce. Finally, a variable measuring minority economic hardship is included to control for differing demands for outcomes favoring minorities across jurisdictions; administrators facing greater minority need in their communities may be more likely to enact policy outcomes favoring minority interests (Selden 1997; Selden, Brudney, and Kellough 1998).

## **Methodology**

### **The Research Setting**

The focus of the empirical analysis conducted in this article is the Rural Housing Loan Program of the Department of Agriculture’s Farmer’s Home Administration (FmHA). This agency’s mission is not traditionally perceived as directed toward serving minority interests, despite the importance of the Rural Housing Loan Program to minority communities. Therefore, it provides a rigorous test of the viability of the theory of representative bureaucracy, as it allows for conclusions to be drawn about the

possibility of active representation in agencies that are not specifically designed to represent minority interests. In addition, the organization’s history and organizational context suggest minority interests may have been suppressed in the past. The Department of Agriculture has been one of the slowest to expand employment opportunities for minorities and women, and it has been found to have failed to integrate civil rights goals into its program objectives (Kellough 1990a, 1990b; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1982). These factors reinforce the conclusion that if the theory of representative bureaucracy can be found to operate in this agency, it also may operate in agencies with cultures and histories that are less antagonistic toward minority interests.

FmHA county supervisors have the opportunity to exercise significant discretion in making loan-eligibility decisions for the Rural Housing Loan Program (Hadwiger 1973; Wyatt and Phillips 1988). Created by the Housing Act of 1949, this program was designed to provide very low- to moderate-income residents in rural counties with the opportunity to secure government-backed loans for housing purchase and repair. Local supervisors are responsible for reviewing applications, interviewing applicants, and selecting applicants, and they receive no direct oversight from the district office staff and minimum attention from state office personnel in making these decisions (Pennington 1994).

The redistributive nature of the housing loans and the history of discrimination in the private-mortgage-lending industry substantiate a distinct minority interest in the program. A common factor in the racial disparities in mortgage lending has been the employment practices of the lending institution. A study of Milwaukee commercial banks showed that the likelihood of an African American loan applicant being approved for a mortgage increases with the proportion of African American employees at the institution (Squires and Kim 1995). In addition, as loan decisions are the sole responsibility of the local supervisors surveyed, these outcomes may be linked to specific individuals. Finally, for the model tested here, each supervisor encounters a similar organizational structure, allowing for structure to be held constant in order to explore the impact of individual perceptions of administrative discretion on outcomes.

### **Data Collection**

To collect information for this study, a mail survey was distributed to FmHA county supervisors in the southern region of the United States in 1994.<sup>2</sup> The initial mailing included a questionnaire, cover letter, and postage-paid envelope. Two weeks following the initial mailing, a follow-up letter was sent to respondents, and a final letter was sent three weeks after the first round follow-up. Re-

sponses were received from 234 individuals, 61 percent of the sample. Of this group, 203 had complete data on the items included in this analysis. FmHA local supervisors were queried on their personal backgrounds, organizational context, and role perceptions. The FmHA Freedom of Information Office provided fiscal year 1994 data on the number of rural housing loan eligibility decisions in each local office awarded to whites, African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians by the supervisor surveyed.

## Operationalization

Table 1 displays the variables used in this model (see appendix for descriptions of the indexes).<sup>3</sup> The dependent variable examined to determine the impact of administrative discretion on representative policy outcomes is the percentage of rural housing loan eligibility decisions in a county office awarded to minority applicants. Ordinary least squares regression is used to estimate the equation.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1 Operationalization of Dependent and Independent Variables**

<b>Dependent variable:</b> Percent of eligibility decisions favoring minorities (scaled 0–100 percent)
<b>Independent variables:</b> Traditional role acceptance (Index 1 scaled 3–15) Minority representative role acceptance (Index 2 scaled 8–40) Administrative discretion index (Index 3 scaled 1–28) Race/Ethnicity: 0 = white 1 = minority Gender: 0 = female 1 = male Minority economic hardship (Index 4 scaled 0–100)

## Findings and Discussion

Findings from the empirical analysis lend considerable support to the hypothesized links between the amount of discretion administrators perceive themselves to have, the role acceptance of the administrators, and the realization of outcomes consistent with minority interests. Table 2 presents the results from the regression analysis, in which the dependent variable is the percentage of rural housing loan eligibility decisions in a county office awarded to minority applicants. Overall, the variables included in the model account for 46 percent of the variation found in the policy outcomes favoring minority interests.

From the standpoint of exploring the impact of administrative discretion on policy outcomes favoring minority interests, one of the most interesting findings is that administrative discretion, as hypothesized, has a significant impact on the percentage of rural housing loans granted to minorities. The positive relationship between administrative discretion and the policy outcomes indicates that the more discretion individual administrators perceive them-

**Table 2 Regression Model for Percentage of Eligibility Determinations Awarded to Minorities**

Independent variables	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	Standardized coefficient
Traditional bureaucratic role	-.161	.530	-.016
Minority representative role	2.769***	.261	.605***
Index of administrative discretion	.439*	.269	.087*
Minority hardship index	.711***	.165	.240***
Minority	-.583	3.833	-.009
Gender	-2.625	3.568	-.039
R <sup>2</sup>	.457		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.442		
F	27.639***		
Number of cases	203		

\*significant at .05.  
\*\*significant at .01.  
\*\*\*significant at .001.

selves to have, the more likely it is that they will produce outcomes that benefit minority interests. However, when administrators perceive themselves as having little discretion, they will not take risks and make decisions that reflect their personal values and beliefs; they will not become active representatives of minority interests. Therefore, when administrators perceive themselves as having significant discretion over outcomes, this discretion may be used for the production of outcomes that better represent minority interests.

The findings in table 2 also address the degree to which role acceptance influences policy outcomes. Although the variable measuring the impact of traditional role acceptance does not achieve statistical significance, it is in the hypothesized direction, suggesting that acceptance of the traditional role does not further minority interests. In addition, the findings demonstrate that the degree to which the FmHA supervisors perceive their role as one of minority representative affects how much the policy outcomes they produce serve the interests of minorities. When administrators assume the minority representative role, they are significantly more likely to make decisions that advance the interests of minorities.

The control variables introduced into the model do not remove the significant influence of both administrative discretion and minority role acceptance on policy outcomes representing minority interests. Even when controlling for differing demand for rural housing loans with the minority hardship index, the statistically significant results for the impact of administrative discretion and minority representative role acceptance remain. Finally, as the roles accepted by both minority administrators and nonminority administrators have been shown to be influenced by organizational socialization, control variables were introduced to determine whether differences in outcomes exist between minority

administrators and nonminority administrators and between administrators of different genders. However, the variables do not achieve statistical significance, demonstrating that the role accepted by administrators and the amount of discretion they perceive themselves to have exerts an impact on the outcomes serving minority interests above and beyond the individual characteristics of the administrators.

## Conclusion

Along with the study by Meier and Bohte, this study adds to the knowledge base on representative bureaucracy by clarifying a previously untested assumption. While previous studies linking active and passive representation have assumed the presence of discretion as a necessary condition for evaluating the efficacy of the theory, few have explored the impact of discretion on the degree to which policy outcomes represent minority interests. In this study, we have shown that administrators who perceive themselves as having greater discretion to act tend to produce policy outcomes that are more broadly representative of minority interests. Therefore, this study sets the stage for future studies of representative bureaucracy by demonstrating that the presence of discretion is not simply an a priori condition needed to evaluate policy outcomes in testing representative bureaucracy, but is one mechanism linking passive and active representation in administrative agencies, as it strengthens the relationship between active and passive representation and has an impact on the quality of these outcomes. Therefore, in future empirical tests of the theory of representative bureaucracy, scholars must pay attention to the discretion assumed by administrators in the agencies under investigation, as administrators' perceptions of their discretion to act has now been shown to have a direct influence on the policy outcomes these individuals produce.

In studying the relationship of administrative discretion to active representation, future avenues for research exist in seeking to further clarify this relationship. One avenue is the examination of possible interaction between the role accepted by the administrator and the degree of discretion perceived by that administrator. The very acceptance of a minority representative role may imply the presence of certain personality characteristics that could, in turn, influence the perceptions of discretion. Future attention should be placed on examining the relationship between role perceptions and administrative discretion. In addition, perceptions of administrative discretion should be investigated in different agencies in order to understand which agency characteristics contribute to the formation of strong or weak perceptions of administrative discretion and how these perceptions in turn affect the degree to which agency outcomes serve minority interests.

This study also contributes to the knowledge base on administrative discretion, as it does not assume that discretion is developed solely through formal role designations or through organizational structure. The promising research undertaken by Scott (1997) highlights some of the individual characteristics that shape administrative discretion, but more research needs to be devoted to better understanding this phenomenon. If administrators in agencies of similar structures perceive themselves as having differing amounts of discretion, it is important to understand where these perceptions arise. Such great attention has been placed on understanding the impact of discretion on client services, but this attention should now be placed on understanding how public administrators make sense of their role in serving the public. If certain factors lead to the perception of more administrative discretion, the factors could be considered in addressing the needs of agency personnel. In addition, if certain characteristics lead to the perception of discretion that is then used to further the interests of underrepresented populations, understanding these characteristics could have positive future ramifications for agencies serving clients from these populations. Administrative discretion has a direct impact on active representation in administrative agencies; therefore, a better understanding of this discretion can only enhance future studies of representative bureaucracy.

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## Notes

1. As there is surprising variation in the perceived discretion of the administrators in this study—although they all hold the same position—we decided to explore which factors may contribute to this variation. While none of the factors we explored were correlated with the index of administrative discretion to any statistical significance, some of the factors illuminate certain relationships. The discretion variable is positively correlated with tenure in position, level of education, and the number of full-time minority and female employees in the office. The discretion variable is negatively correlated with the age of the respondent. Finally, we investigated whether the level of discretion was influenced by expectations placed on the employees. As anticipated, two of the expectation variables, “expected to increase minority access to programs” and “expected to balance this with departmental practices,” were positively correlated with the amount of discretion. The expectation variable, expected to implement programs according to departmental practices, was negatively correlated with the level of discretion.
2. Supervisors in the following states were surveyed: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

3. The means and standard deviations for the variables are as follows:

	Mean	Standard deviation
Minority representative role	28.96	5.88
Traditional role	8.31	2.77
Discretion index	17.82	5.54
Minority	.23	.42
Hardship index	40.06	8.94
Gender	.80	.40

4. Based on previous work, a model was explored to determine whether discretion has a nonlinear effect on policy outcomes. However, no nonlinear effect was found. In addition, using the variance-inflation factor and the condition index, we examined the equation for the possibility of collinearity and multicollinearity and found no significant problems. To determine whether heteroscedasticity was present, we used the Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey test. We did not detect heteroscedasticity in the equation (Pindyck and Rubinfeld 1998).

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## Appendix Construction of Indices

### Index 1: Traditional Role Acceptance

The following questions were incorporated in the traditional role index:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 [Disagree] to 5 [Agree]):

Regarding program implementation, I should limit my concern to the efficient carrying out of my departmental programs and duties.

I should limit my concern with "how" federal programs and services are implemented and, in particular, to the efficient execution of my own departmental duties.

I should actively advocate in favor of hiring and promotion of individuals with a focus on equal opportunity and merit.

The questions were summed to create an index from 3 to 15. A score of 3 indicates that the individual does not perceive his or her role in terms of efficient execution of duties, while a score of 15 suggests that an individual strongly perceives his or her role in terms of efficiently implementing one's responsibilities.

### Index 2: Minority Representative Role Acceptance

The following questions were incorporated in the representative of minority interests index:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1 [Disagree] to 5 [Agree]):

I should seek to provide information to policy makers to assist them in making decisions concerning minority community needs and perspectives.

I should recommend or actively advocate in favor of policies which address the needs and concerns of minority clients.

I should be supportive of procedures which may result in greater and more equitable access by minorities to federal programs and services.

I should actively advocate in favor of a more equitable distribution of program services to minorities including recommending procedural service delivery alternatives when necessary.

I should recommend and/or actively advocate in favor of institutional changes which may result in greater governmental responsiveness to minorities.

I should specifically encourage and recruit qualified minorities for professional and administrative federal employment.

I should actively advocate in favor of hiring and promotional practices which may result in greater minority representation and ethnic balance in federal personnel.

The questions were summed to create an index from 8 to 40. A score of 8 indicates that an individual does not perceive his or her role as an advocate or representative of minority interest, while a score of 40 suggests that an individual strongly perceives his or her role as an active representative.

### Index 3: Administrative Discretion Index

The following questions were incorporated in the administrative discretion index:

How much discretion do you have in the following matters? (1 [Complete discretion] to 5 [No discretion]):

Determining who receives 502 Rural Housing Loans.

Determining who receives 504 Rural Housing Loans.

Hiring county office personnel.

Publicizing the 502 and 504 Rural Housing Loans Program.

Implementing policies.

Determining who receives 502 Rural Housing Loans when the decision is borderline.

Determining who receives 504 Rural Housing Loans when the decision is borderline.

The questions were summed to create an index from 7 to 35. The index was then multiplied by -1 in order to reverse the direction. Then, a value one higher than the maximum score was added to the index. A score of 28 indicates that an individual perceives him or herself to have complete discretion in the operation of duties and a score of 1 indicates that an individual perceives him or herself to have no discretion in the operation of duties.

### Index 4: Minority Economic Hardship

Due to the high intercorrelations of area characteristics that may affect the demand for rural housing loans, such as unemployment, income level, and poverty, this study used an index developed by the Brookings Institution to gauge area hardship. Six measures available from the 1990 census comprise the hardship index.

Poverty: Percent of minorities living in poverty

Area population: Percent of population comprised of members of minority groups

Unemployment: Percent of minority labor force that is unemployed

Dependency: Percent of selected minority population that is less than 18 or over 64 years of age

Education: Percent of minority population 25 years of age or more with less than a 12th-grade education

Income level: Per capita income of minorities

Each of these ratios was standardized to give equal weight to each of these comparative measures (Nathan and Adams 1976; O'Sullivan and Rassel 1995). The following formula was applied to each of the hardship indicators to standardize them:

$$X = \frac{Y - Y_{\min}}{Y_{\max} - Y_{\min}} \cdot 100$$

Where: X = standardized ratio to be created

Y = variable calculated from census data

$Y_{\max}$  = maximum value of Y

$Y_{\min}$  = minimum value of Y

The standardized values indicate where each area served by a county office is on a continuum of hardship ranging from the worst area to the best area. Accordingly, the ratio for each hardship indicator ranges from a value of 0 (the area with the lowest rating) to 100 (the area with the highest rating).

The standardized indicators were summed and then divided by six. The values of the hardship index can range from 0 to 100. The higher the minorities' hardship index score, the more adverse the minorities' economic situation is in an area.