

# Suburban Diversification and Descriptive Representation

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**Abstract:** In an era characterized by rapid racial and ethnic diversification, I ask if political representation at the local level reflects this diversity. Do similarly diverse elected officials represent these diverse populations? That is, is there descriptive representation? I define diversification and representation in America and assess whether representation has kept pace with growing diversification. I review an extensive collection of scholarly work and ask why descriptive representation is important to minorities, democracy, and the country. The analysis spans a variety of contexts, including historical perspectives on descriptive representation and how it can lead to substantive representation, which reflects the needs and interests of the people being represented. I discuss communities' changing demographics, fairness and equality in political representation, trust in government, and government legitimacy. The scholarly literature suggests that while the country and, specifically, the suburbs continue diversifying, descriptive representation has lagged. Indeed, some scholars have found that many cities and municipalities intentionally fail to allow diversity of representation. I explore many tactics, policies, and laws that constrain minority representation at a local level. For instance, white fortressing, which is white people creating communities, often within existing communities, to exclude non-whites and rebounding, the systematic failure of cities to annex surrounding poor and minority communities. Finally, in my literature review, I explore the importance of descriptive representation and some consequences of the persistent overrepresentation of whites in increasingly diversified communities. This review is the first step in my thesis project: *Suburban Diversification and Descriptive Representation*.