

Research Article

Bureaucratic Representation, Accountability, and Democracy: A Qualitative Study of Indigenous Bureaucrats in Australia and Canada

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Abstract: *Using a qualitative study of Indigenous public servants in Canada and Australia, this article helps open the “black box” of bureaucratic representation. Findings dispel any idea that active representation is unproblematic for minority bureaucrats themselves. In fact, it exacts a high price with respect to working in isolation, confronting racism, facing formidable obstacles to pursue, or challenge policy processes and outcomes aligned with the interests of the communities from which they come and ultimately leading many to exit the bureaucracy or forego career opportunities. Despite this, our findings show that Indigenous bureaucrats bring about policy change that would not otherwise occur, and mechanisms of accountability are at work, within government and between bureaucrats and the communities from which they are drawn. Indigenous bureaucratic leadership is valuable in bridging understanding between elected officials and communities and navigating respectfully the intersections of culture and power across the policy making process to the benefit of all citizens, to “country” and across generations. These findings imply that new inclusive models of representative bureaucracy are both necessary and desirable to make bureaucracy serve multicultural societies and constructively confront environmental crises in the modern era.*

Evidence for Practice

- Concepts that equate bureaucratic “partiality” with favoritism, oversimplify the way in which public servants consider, and manage tensions between minority interests they are assumed to “represent” and the wider public interest and democratic accountability.
- Participants in our research are acutely aware of the need to balance two “lines of accountability” (to government and to their communities), and when the tension between the two cannot be managed, they beat a tactical retreat and wait for a more favorable opportunity, or, if this seems unlikely, they leave the public service.
- Indigenous public servants promote the democratic project by actively involving otherwise disenfranchised members of society, including the perspectives of time and the land itself, in the policy making process. They make government and its processes understandable and help (re)build trust.

Representative bureaucracy refers to the idea that the composition of any bureaucracy should mirror that of society and in doing so, reflect the diversity of attitudes, values, and interests found therein (Krislov 2012). To the extent that bureaucracies do reflect this diversity, they are believed to be more likely to create or facilitate policy outcomes that contribute to the well-being of the population as a whole (Bradbury and Kellough 2011; Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough 1998).

Bureaucratic representation can be (1) *passive*, with its impact following automatically from the social and cultural values and attitudes of its members. Recent scholarship has explored *symbolic* representation as a unique passive form that can change the attitudes, behaviors, and trust levels of minority citizens through their positive associations with minority

bureaucrats, thereby contributing to potential legitimacy improvement and willingness to coproduce policy and service delivery (Headley, Wright, and Meier 2021; Riccucci et al. 2015; Ryzin et al. 2017). Alternatively bureaucratic representation can be (2) *active*, in which case bureaucrats work consciously and deliberately to change existing policies and patterns of resource allocation in ways that improve outcomes for the population cohort from which they are drawn. Assuming that bureaucrats exercise a degree of discretion, bureaucratic representation, particularly active representation, can have significant implications for accountability and democracy.

Some public administration scholars consider the effects of bureaucratic representation to be negative on the basis that bureaucrats who pursue the interests of cohorts from which they are drawn are not

ected; that the sum of these interests cannot constitute the *public* interest; and that the ability of democratically elected leaders to pursue societal goals is undermined by bureaucratic partisanship (Lim 2006).

Indigenous public servants are unlike any other category of public servant because they must continuously and actively choose to participate or not in an imposed colonial institution to which they have never ceded sovereignty. This offers unique opportunities to ask questions about the choices, motives, experiences, and stories of such public servants. The overarching question motivating our research is: What do the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous public servants tell us about bureaucratic representation? The insights of this population allows us to improve existing scholarship on bureaucratic representation along two related dimensions.

First, an expansion of qualitative approaches and the type of minority bureaucrat population under scrutiny can help add depth to existing empirical studies of representation, which can be viewed as dominated by quantitative studies, many in the United States, of bureaucrats across a somewhat restricted range of functions (Park 2020). By prioritizing qualitative alongside quantitative methods, we can better explore the lived experience of “representative” bureaucrats; the links between passive, active, and symbolic representation; and the causal mechanisms that link, or might link, bureaucratic representation to policy outcomes and impacts. Enlarging the population, scope, and methodological approaches also offers opportunities to help explain apparently inconsistent findings across similar policy domains (Gilad and Dalan 2020; Kennedy 2014).

Second, the literature that considers the implications of bureaucratic representation for accountability and democracy can be enlarged in its understanding of the leadership role that bureaucrats can play and the ways in which their exercise of discretion can support the specific objectives of elected officials, as well as the achievement of goals that have broad democratic support and are in the “public interest.” We do this specifically in our study by:

- (i) linking representative bureaucracy scholarship with public sector leadership literature (see Vinzant and Crothers 1996 on the importance of making this link);
- (ii) deepening and extending the focus of representative bureaucracy scholarship (such as Maynard-Moody and Muscheno 2003, 2012) beyond street-level bureaucrats to those operating at all ranks and across all facets of governance; and
- (iii) arguing that any straightforward concept that equates bureaucratic “partiality” with favoritism (Lim 2006) oversimplifies the way in which public servants consider and manage tensions between minority interests they are assumed to “represent” and the wider public interest and democratic accountability.

We develop our arguments through a qualitative study of Indigenous bureaucrats operating across a range of policy areas in the Canadian province of British Columbia and the Australian state of Queensland. We conclude that Indigenous bureaucrats

bring about policy change that would not otherwise occur and that mechanisms of accountability *are* at work, within government, and between bureaucrats and the communities from which they are drawn. More radically, we suggest that representative bureaucracy involves more than representation of peoples but also includes the representation of the environment (“country”) as well as deliberate attention to the inclusion of time and history into policy making, in keeping with Indigenous cosmology. This is achieved by Indigenous public servants drawing on their worldviews, which revere relationships with time and place, because of ancestral connections to no-human life forms and certain pieces of “country” over successive generations. This approach has been advocated in Indigenous studies for many years, with the literature suggesting the clear proposition that the incorporation of Indigenous worldviews into policy making and public administration is vital to Indigenous peoples themselves but can also have positive effects for broader society (for examples see Althaus 2019; Burgess et al. 2005; Canada and Dussault 1997; Cornell 2007; Country et al. 2015; Graham 1999; Tynan 2021). Yet, the scholarship of mainstream Weberian public administration failed to take these calls seriously enough to envision a movement that truly embraces the ingenuity, innovation, and broader application of Indigenous worldviews (Althaus 2020). The findings of our research have implications far beyond the specific jurisdictions or bureaucratic cohorts included in our study. They imply a shift in administrative theory and practice, suggesting that new inclusive models of representative bureaucracy are both necessary and desirable to make bureaucracy serve the needs of multicultural societies and address environmental crises in the modern era.

Bureaucratic Representation: Normative Debates and Empirical Evidence

Much of the literature on bureaucratic representation revolves around an assumed conflict between ideas of representation and neutrality. The more representative a bureaucracy becomes, the more it risks its neutrality and the more it starts to take over the role of elected representatives in making decisions and exercising power. Yet, the less representative, the more neutral and the more compliant to direction by political leaders the bureaucracy becomes, the less effective and rigorous policy is seen to be and the greater becomes the possibility of psychopathic tyrants and the stronger the likelihood of a need for Nuremberg trials to test the morality and character of bureaucratic “instruments” (see Caiden 1996). The problem with this articulation is that it equates “neutrality” with the Swiss model of neutrality—one should not take sides. It discounts the judicial model of neutrality that suggests one needs to take all perspectives into account, weigh the arguments and evidence, and provide an impartial, but informed, assessment. In fact, public servants are involved in both forms of neutrality and are expected to decide which form is more appropriate to deploy in any given circumstance (Papayannis 2016). Furthermore, continuing this dichotomous model, bureaucratic representation is viewed as occurring only within *either* mutually exclusive state-agent *or* citizen-agent arenas.

Broader scholarship, however, suggests that representation has expanded beyond formalistic paradigms to acknowledge the roles played by informal representation and self-authorized representatives (Bryer and Sahin 2012). In terms of bureaucratic

representation, Bryer and Sahin (2012) call for deliberative representation to be added to representation debates suggesting that bureaucracy, and other unelected bodies, have direct roles to play in assisting politicians to engage with constituencies, aiding them to “deliberate” together to enhance legitimacy, collaboration, and authentic engagement in the governance of society. The focus of the bureaucracy in this model is to move beyond a focus on either the state–agent or citizen–agent relationships to extend into improving the buckle between politicians and citizens. This point has been taken up by authors such as Bradbury and Kellough (2011), Kennedy (2013), and Riccucci and Van Ryzin (2016) in their summation of bureaucracy “supplementing” the representation afforded by elected officials. Our findings suggest there may be much merit in pursuing this line of thinking.

Further complexity is introduced by the work of authors such as Selden et al. (1999) and Meier and Negro (1976) who map the causal variation in minority active representation. They argue organizational socialization to be as important in the representation story as much as the motivations (actual and perceived) of minority representatives and their affiliation to advancing the causes and equity outcomes for the relevant minorit(ies), as opposed to applying “neutral objectivity” to the decisions of elected officials. Meanwhile, Riccucci et al. (2015) and Riccucci and van Ryzin (2016) and Li (in various [lead] author forms [2015, 2016, 2017]) have extended the distinctions between active and passive representation to include the concept of symbolic representation, which refers to the ability for passive representation to take on substantive effects in both attitudes and behaviors when minorities associate themselves with the minority bureaucratic representative because they identify with the representative in ways that can enhance trust, cooperation, and coproduction. While the hypothesis of symbolic representation is still undergoing empirical testing and validation (Headley, Wright, and Meier 2021; Van Ryzin et al. 2017), scholarship is moving into more nuanced understandings of bureaucratic representation that position us beyond polarized discussions of representation and “neutrality.” This allows for more sophisticated assessments of bureaucracy that can start to meet the needs of the diverse and heterogenous interests that characterize modern multicultural societies.

The need for a more nuanced approach is also suggested by the literature on Indigenous leadership and representation in the public sector, which indicates that Indigenous leaders can claim a unique position in operating between two worlds of mainstream western bureaucracy and traditional Indigenous community governance. They demonstrate an ability to synthesize and navigate successfully between these worlds to advance outcomes that improve society overall (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019; Ganter 2016). It is essential to study the perspectives of Indigenous public servants because they reveal cultural cracks in the ideal of representative democracy, as well as ways to address the otherwise “impossible” task of simultaneously meeting both their professional obligations as public servants as well as their community responsibilities (Ganter 2016; Rousseau 2018).

This brief review reveals debates over the role of the bureaucracy and its relationship with elected officials and questioning of the fundamental design of bureaucracy as an institution intended to

serve democratic values for *all* peoples. Democratic principles expose tension in a democratic government acknowledging plurality in its ranks and inviting members to deliberately contribute to public service on the basis of their social identity, yet requiring them to act “neutrally” (Ganter 2016; Rousseau 2018). What is less developed in the literature is dedicated consideration of whether democracy and bureaucratic representation must be pitted against each other. This article seeks to address this critical issue by examining the lived experiences of Indigenous public servants—a group otherwise not yet studied in bureaucratic representation literature—as they seek to simultaneously represent their communities and serve the governments that employ them. Such lessons expand the theory and practice of bureaucratic representation. Theory, because it lays bare opportunities to stretch the ideals of bureaucratic representation to personalize, rather than neutralize, relationships between officials and citizens in ways that are sympathetic to, but advance, Weberian principles. Practice, because for the first time it introduces the perspectives of some of the most marginalized peoples on the planet and how they navigate and make sense of the paradox of their colonized status set against participation in the colonial apparatus itself: how they made their way into this situation, why, and with what consequences for the apparatus as well as themselves and their communities.

While the normative debates have raged, a substantial number of scholars have accepted that bureaucratic representation exists and sought to examine its implications for the behavior of bureaucrats and for their diverse roles across the policy making endeavor. There is potential to expand this empirical literature in ways that will help cast further light on the normative debates touched on above.

First, the literature focuses heavily on a constrained number of functional arenas, especially law enforcement (Hong 2017; Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty, and Fernandez 2017), education (Anderson 2017; Capers 2018), or on representation of women (Akram 2018; Yun 2020), and is largely conducted in the United States (for a rare exception see Zwicky and Gubler 2019). Opening up the scope of research to other jurisdictions and wider arenas of policy making creates possibilities to strengthen generalization from research findings (Keiser 2010).

Another possibility is afforded by expanding the application of qualitative studies to more than two decades of literature dominated heavily by quantitative methodologies, which seek to establish statistical relationships between a variable that measures the degree to which a minority group is present in a bureaucracy, and a measure or measures designed to represent administrative or policy outcomes, for instance, the frequency of arrests for sexual violence against women, or the incidence of racial profiling, or the percentage of minority students awarded high grades (Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough 1998; Gilad and Dalan 2020; Wilkins and Williams 2008). We do not seek to deny the importance and utility of quantitative studies. However, adding to them with qualitative research creates substantial opportunities to advance the field by helping to probe and establish the nature of causal processes involved in generating the observed relationships and outcomes (see Headley, Wright, and Meier 2021; Keiser 2010; Kennedy 2013; Park 2020). Given authors are often unable to establish which of several alternative causal factors explain observed outcomes (for

example Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough 1998, 734–735; Meier and Nicholson Crotty 2006, 858), the proposal that we should perform larger studies using more refined statistical techniques (Coleman, Brudney, and Kellough 1998, 735; Sowa and Sally 2003) will only take us so far.

We suggest that a complementary approach is essential: to talk to minority public servants and *ask them* about the causal processes involved. This also offers the capacity to consider what *other* outcomes might have been possible beyond those outcomes that eventuate in quantitative studies. For example, were there obstacles in terms of organizational practices and values that hindered the efforts of minority bureaucrats to achieve different outcomes, and which it might be possible to remove? Were there factors that facilitated the influence of minority bureaucrats and which could be reinforced or encouraged in the agencies involved or replicated elsewhere? The ability to identify causal factors inhibiting or facilitating the influence of minority bureaucrats might provide a basis for explaining the sometimes contradictory empirical findings that are a feature of the literature on bureaucratic representation (Kennedy 2014). Existing literature does not yet provide a firm, comprehensive basis on which to make recommendations about how to maximize the contribution of minority bureaucrats in ensuring that public policy outcomes generate equitable outcomes across increasingly diverse populations.

Qualitative methods also encourage analysis of how *minority bureaucrats themselves* experience issues around accountability, neutrality and partisanship. As Selden noted more than two decades ago (Selden 1997a, 143) “to verify partiality ... it is difficult to avoid looking into the individual bureaucratic black box.” Some important work has been carried out here such as that of Watkins-Hayes (2011), Kennedy (2013), Selden (1997a, 1997b), Selden, Brewer, and Brudney (1999), and Maynard-Moody and Muscheno (2003, 2012). We expand on this scholarship by asking deliberate questions to Indigenous public servants about their concepts of leadership and the effects and implications of ideas of bureaucratic representation on the agents themselves. For instance, do bureaucrats experience conflicts between their desire to progress the interests of their communities of origin, and their duty to pursue the policies of elected officials and governments and to promote the public interest? If they do experience such a conflict, do they have strategies for reconciling the divergent demands they face? Are those strategies successful? If they are not, do minority public servants resign, thus avoiding the risk that the public interest and accountability to the electorate will suffer, or do they remain and behave in a partisan fashion, to the detriment of these broader values?

Methods

In undertaking our research with Indigenous public servants, we were guided by the “four R’s” approach suggested by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) for Indigenous research, which requires researchers to conduct themselves and their research activities with respect, relationship, reciprocity, and responsibility. For instance, to assist us to conduct our work in a respectful manner as non-Indigenous researchers, we sought counsel from Indigenous advisers and elders. We would like to acknowledge their generous sharing of leadership, wisdom, and experience. We have sought to practice

the principle of reciprocity by offering participants a community space of practice and learning, providing support to networks of Indigenous public servants, and ensuring that our research publications are provided to participants.

Our field research was undertaken as part of a comparative project on Indigenous leadership in public services in Queensland and British Columbia (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019). A key factor shaping our approach and methodology was that only very broad statistics are published on Indigenous public servants in these jurisdictions, indicating numbers employed in total and across broad occupational bands and, for some years, the main agencies in which they are employed. There was therefore no data we could access that would provide us with an identifiable “population” of individual Indigenous public servants from which we could draw a sample. In identifying potential interviewees, we did have the advantage of existing professional contacts with a number of senior Indigenous public servants in the two jurisdictions, and with their help, we were able to identify with confidence a substantial proportion of Indigenous people holding senior managerial or policy roles.

We approached potential interviewees in several ways. We spoke in person to those with whom we already had professional contacts and requested interviews. In other cases, our initial approach was by e-mail, in which, we briefly set out the purpose of our research and attached a more detailed information sheet on the project. Where we did not receive an immediate response, we followed up with a phone call. Once we started our interviews, we finished the interview by inquiring about other potential interviewees, and in particular sought to identify participants whose inclusion would help broaden the representativeness of our sample. In seeking additional participants, we were careful not to signal any assumption on our part that leadership should be equated with the occupation of senior roles in an administrative hierarchy. The concept of leadership has particular connotations and meaning in Western practice and theory, which do not necessarily apply in Indigenous cultures and traditions (Sinclair and Evans 2015; Warner and Grint 2006). We simply asked our initial participants to nominate Indigenous public servants that they consider display leadership qualities.

We ended interviewing as we reached saturation in terms of the issues and perspectives being offered by participants. We note that the number of interviews we conducted is comfortably within the range indicated by the literature as required for qualitative studies that rely on in-depth interviews (see e.g., Dworkin 2012, 1319–1320).

We focused on the subnational level of government in Australia and Canada due to the high degree of service delivery and engagement activities that such jurisdictions play in relation to Indigenous communities. We selected Queensland and BC for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, our existing professional experience in these two jurisdictions provided us with the contacts that were essential for the process of identifying potential participants for our study. The issue here goes well beyond the convenience of drawing on existing contacts. It would have been extremely difficult if not impossible for us to proceed without established relationships given the absence of published information on the identify of Indigenous

public servants and the importance of trust to the conduct of effective research in Indigenous contexts. Indeed, in respectfully acknowledging and following Indigenous research methodology, to the extent possible as non-Indigenous researchers, it is critical to meet the responsibilities, opportunities, and obligations of *relationality* (Kovach 2009; Tynan 2021; Wilson 2008). Relationality demands ongoing personal links best cultivated through lived connections including through history and place. There are important additional reasons for choosing BC and Queensland. These jurisdictions feature similar Indigenous population levels relative to the general population and have high degrees of similarity in historical treatment of First Peoples associated with colonization. BC also resembles Queensland in its limited use of treaties with First Peoples during the colonial period. These key similarities allowed us to broaden the empirical basis of our analysis by drawing on the experiences of two distinct groups of Indigenous public servants, while at the same time, being confident that the broad contexts in which they operate render those experiences comparable.

For the BC component, we undertook semi-structured interviews with 22 participants who self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit and who had direct experience working within, or closely with, the British Columbia Public Service. Recruitment paid attention to key participant characteristics, notably age, gender, geographical location, Indigenous community affiliation, and public service agency. This facilitated access to a range of different perspectives, while not following a formal, purposive sampling approach (Palys 2008) which, as noted above, would not have been possible in the circumstances. Participants represented 10 ministries within the BC government, and two public sector organizations that work closely in partnership with the BC government. The professional position of participants comprised 12 senior managers and executive-level staff, 8 middle-level advisors and managers, and three junior staff. Including this, cross section of individuals is helpful in terms of gaining an understanding of the different ways in which bureaucratic representation can operate or indeed fail to operate. Eight participants were male and 16 were female.

A similar methodology was used for the Australian cohort. We undertook semi-structured interviews with 18 participants who self-identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Participants represented nine departments or agencies within the Queensland government, and two other public sector organizations which work closely in partnership with it. The professional position of participants comprised 10 in senior executive roles and eight in middle-level management or policy positions. Ten participants were female and eight were male. As noted earlier, participants were in general not “street level bureaucrats,” though many had occupied roles that could be described in this way earlier in their careers.

No data are published on the gender of Indigenous public servants in either jurisdiction, and so we cannot comment on how representative our participants are in this regard. However, given that they comprise a significant proportion of Indigenous people in senior managerial and policy roles, they are likely to be representative of the gender composition of this group. Both cohorts of participants are certainly representative of Indigenous public servants in the two jurisdictions in that they work for service delivery agencies rather than central policy or budgetary agencies

such as Premier and Cabinet, Finance, or Treasury (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019, 63, 66).

We used an informal interview approach with open-ended questions, aiming to create room for participants to move beyond the semi-structured topics covered in the interview guide (included as Appendix S1) and to range across topics as suited them. Interviews lasted between 30 and 120 minutes, with the large majority lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. Where possible, interviews were carried out face-to-face and in the work environment of the participant. All participants agreed to audio or video recordings of interviews.

Interviews were transcribed in full and open coded (Glaser 1978, 56) through line-by-line immersion (Walker and Myrick 2006). Codes were then reviewed and themed. The coding process began as a jurisdiction specific exercise given Canadian interviews were completed first in a group. After the Queensland interviews were conducted and all interview transcripts were complete, we jointly performed coding and analysis on a comparative basis between the two jurisdictions. For this article, interviews were scanned and thematically coded for responses that addressed issues relevant to debates regarding bureaucratic representation.

We draw extensively on interview transcripts to give the reader an immediate sense of the responses of Indigenous participants.

Findings

The following sections articulate a number of themes that suggest new insights as we simultaneously confirm existing knowledge on bureaucratic representation. Indigenous public servants do not always experience active representation as a positive force for themselves as the agents. They can pay a heavy price for their public service including experiencing structural and everyday racism, continuously battling the “burden” of representation including being the “token” Indigenous person and being asked unjustly and inaccurately to be the voice of all Indigenous peoples from their jurisdiction. Their service can often be misinterpreted by both their communities as well as by the bureaucratic machine itself. Nevertheless, they remain highly motivated by service to their communities, defined not only in terms of the interests of peoples but also the interests of place, or “country,” and time. The latter concept is particularly expressed by an advanced application of history as well as respect for the interests of generations from the past, present, and future. We articulate how Indigenous public servants understand their relationship to representation, accountability, and policy making, outlining what they put forward as a highly relational and personal approach to bureaucratic service that moves far beyond discretion over the application of rules and regulations toward an innovative balancing of their Indigenous worldview and leadership with meeting the objectives of elected decision-makers to the advancement of all members and dimensions of the society they serve.

How Indigenous Public Servants Experience “Active Representation”

It is generally assumed that if active rather than passive representation is occurring, minority bureaucrats must regard active representation in a positive light (Bradbury and

Kellough 2011, 158). Much of this positive association is due to the focusing of active bureaucratic representatives on the “citizen–agent” relationship more than the “state-agent” narrative (see Riccucci 2005), an approach linked in turn to the emphasis in the literature on the experience of street-level bureaucrats (e.g., Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003; Maynard-Moody and Muscheno 2012; Sowa and Sally 2003; Selden 1997b). Active representatives exercise discretionary authority in the enactment of standard bureaucratic rules and procedures to advance the legitimate interests of beneficiaries, within the spirit of the law and intentions of elected officials (Maynard-Moody and Muscheno 2003; Sowa and Sally 2003). An alternative understanding is that active representatives can uncover bureaucratic and/or political deficiencies that demand remedy, with their roles as “guerrilla agents” going well beyond an empathetic interpretation of bureaucratic rules (O’Leary 2010). Our interviews show that the motivations, actions, and responses of bureaucrats are even more complex than these diverse, but equally positive, interpretations of bureaucratic experience suggest.

When asked about their motivations in becoming and remaining government employees, interviewees cited a range of practical and personal circumstances, including the need to secure employment, the desire to respond to the aspirations of parents or other close relatives, and happenstance. However, the concept of service to one’s community was a constant theme.

From the perspective of Indigenous public servants in both BC and Queensland, “community” relates to the specific tribal community(ies) or First Nations from which the public servant emerged themselves, as well as the broader Indigenous population in their jurisdiction. This concept of community does not exclude non-Indigenous peoples from care and consideration, but priority is given to one’s kinship ties in terms of both bloodlines, identity, and accountability connections.

Furthermore, the different worldview brought by Indigenous public servants is evident by their extension of the concept of community to “country,” that is the landscape, waterways, sky, and animals with which their peoples are particularly attached. Many participants specifically identified relationships with “country” as foundational to their ideas of leadership, representation, service, and community. A Canadian participant stated:

The belief or value was that we are connected to everything and we wouldn’t want to disrupt that harmony or take more than we would need. We would only take what we needed to survive and then leave it for the next year, to harvest. That’s that economic and that whole piece of taking care of the land.

Interviewees believe they have a significant impact on outcomes for their communities, indicating that their active representation has positive effects. However, participants also revealed that they encounter serious challenges as representatives of a minority, and indeed that representation can constitute a significant burden. Many interviewees spoke about pressures on them to be the solo “Aboriginal voice” in their workplace, or to represent the interests of Indigenous people as a whole. Such demands were not regarded in an unequivocally negative light. Some respondents welcomed the

opportunity to ensure that Indigenous perspectives were considered in policy making, having been omitted for so long. On the other hand, demands to articulate “Indigenous interests” or “Indigenous perspectives” were seen both as placing unreasonable and onerous demands on Indigenous public servants, and as an effort by non-Indigenous public servants and elected officials to avoid engaging with affected communities and peoples. A BC interviewee recounted that:

I’m not the voice of all Aboriginal people. I am the voice of what I’ve witnessed and what I know from my own knowledge experience of how to engage with community and what has and has not worked...

Similar perspectives were recounted by Queensland interviewees:

At senior leading meetings you do feel like [people are asking] ‘Well what is the answer, what do we do, what should we do?’ Then, all eyes are on you to perform and give an answer ... It is a huge burden to carry when you are only one person and is it reasonable to have that expectation directed at you?

Interviewees drew attention to the “burden of representation” being especially heavy because of the small number of Indigenous people at senior levels in the public services, a reality that faces representatives of other minorities in many jurisdictions. Queensland interviewees stated: “There’s often only a few of us that are Aboriginal in significant positions. ... you [the interviewer] have got them all on a piece of paper... It is really lonely”

Isolation can make it difficult to have the confidence to play an active and strong role in policy forums:

... you are the only identified [Aboriginal or Torres Strait] person there ... often you just don’t feel that you can bring your full eccentric self to the conversation. You do water it down a bit.

Another problem is that if an isolated Indigenous person does regularly articulate a position critical of accepted policy, they can be labeled as difficult or obstructionist:

I have to pick my battles, otherwise you will be labelled quicker than your head can spin, as a problem, “Oh, you know she’s smart but she’s difficult to deal with.”

Small numbers also mean the support and knowledge needed to back policy initiatives are lacking: “We just don’t have the numbers in the middle management coming through that would understand all the systems. For me it’s become problematic too; the things that I am wanting to achieve but I don’t have the work force around me to help”

Barriers to Active Representation—When Representation Fails

Existing literature provides limited insight regarding the impact of minority bureaucrat actions or, if they fail to act, why this occurs. Failure to act could explain why minority representation appears to have no positive effects in some cases. The literature does sometimes offer hypotheses about factors that might undermine the effect of representation. For example, Bradbury and Kellough’s (2011) US

study suggests that the negative responses of white police officers to the arrival of black officers in their ranks may help explain why ethnic diversity in police forces may be accompanied by an increase in practices such as racial profiling. However, there is little systematic focus on the barriers that might prevent minority bureaucrats from pursuing active representation, or which might undermine actions they do attempt to take in support of minority communities. The interviews cast considerable light on these issues.

Racism was highlighted by interviewees in addition to the burden of representation confronting minority bureaucrats and the isolating effect of small numbers. Queensland and BC bureaucrats recounted instances of overt racism, but perhaps even more damaging because of its widespread occurrence and insidious nature is what Larkin (2013, 245) refers to as “everyday racism.” This refers to forms of racism that are subtle, indirect, and oblique and is often performed by well-meaning and well-intentioned non-Indigenous officers (see Ospina and Foldy 2009, 880, for a discussion of literature documenting this phenomenon as experienced by African Americans). If Indigenous officers do challenge the racist status quo they are “perceived as trouble-makers and positioned as the ‘always angry’ other” (Larkin 2013, 274), threatening their career prospects.

Interviewees referred to a tendency of non-Indigenous public servants to deny that they display racist attitudes or that racism is a systemic issue, and to react defensively when racism is brought to their attention. Confronting expressions of racism can have serious repercussions: “... they are really sensitive and so yes, you really think twice about having to say anything to them and also because they have the power in the place. You know that other white people will side with them, so you have just got to be really careful about how you do it.” Other forms of racism occur when non-Indigenous public servants devalue Indigenous skills, assume the superiority of non-Indigenous knowledge, or engage in deliberate attempts to undermine the credibility of Indigenous public servants by “setting them up to fail,” all serious threats to active representation. One executive commented in relation to an Indigenous person who had just been recruited into a senior role from outside the public service:

They’ve set her up to fail ... She didn’t do anything wrong per se, [but] she’s pissed off everyone [because] she went outside of ... a normal core process but that’s because no one told her. Now she’s going to be tarred with that ... She is skilled and they just didn’t bother to tell her the rules of engagement ...

A related issue involves assumptions that skills that are held by Indigenous public servants are dispensable because they are held by, or can easily be acquired by, non-Indigenous counterparts:

... so when they have to employ four extra people, they just go and get four white people. They go and hire their friend, their kids and things ... They get upset when they can’t apply for an identified [Indigenous] position. That drives you crazy and you go ‘What? It deals specifically with Aboriginal issues’ ... [They respond] Yes, well I have worked with Māori, so I will be right.

Indigenous skills and capacities can also be diminished by “ghettoization,” or assuming that they are only relevant to the

Indigenous context and have little or nothing to offer to the public service more broadly. According to a Queensland participant, the “pigeon holing” of Indigenous people makes it difficult for them to apply for mainstream roles and so to diversify their experience, further develop their leadership skills and have an impact on policy. One interviewee commented: “Can you really influence systemic change, if we only influence change in those policies and programs that have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in the title? Are you going to change the whole government, the whole system, the whole HR system?” Interviewees also felt that they were under pressure to demonstrate their credentials by performing at a higher level than their non-Indigenous counterparts. One BC respondent said, “you not only have to meet expectations, you have to exceed expectations.”

Other examples of racism relate specifically to policy making. These include exclusion of Indigenous public servants from policy development forums, or their involvement at a minimal level, sending strongly negative signals about their value and hampering their ability to engage in active representation. Alternatively, agencies are open to solutions proposed by Indigenous staff but only if they are “ready-made.” Agencies are not prepared to undertake the engagement required to seriously address policy issues.

Cultural differences can also create barriers to the exercise of active representation. For example, some Indigenous people have a backgrounded style of quiet communication that may be regarded negatively by colleagues with the result that their potential contribution to policy is not recognized. Many participants cited a preference for listening and taking longer to bring community members alongside with problem-solving and policy making, which may be difficult given time frames imposed by government. In other ways, communication differences have been imposed through colonization. For example, one Canadian participant stated:

We’re really good at being silent because it’s better for us. We’ve been taught that. It’s what residential school taught us, to be silent.

A further barrier for many interviewees involves the inherent constraints of working in a complex bureaucracy with slow and opaque decision-making structures, making it difficult to pursue initiatives that could improve Indigenous lives. One BC participant said: “That’s one of the biggest things I had to learn entering into the Public Service. I was like, all right, let’s get things done. It’s like, what do you mean, I have to go through 8000 steps just to get a meeting with somebody to do that?” This resonates with Watkins-Hayes’ (2011) conclusions about the importance of “red tape” and its alienating effects. Contrary to Watkins-Hayes, however, all the evidence from our study suggests that race is a key factor shaping the experiences and practices of Indigenous public servants, in terms of both their citizen-agent and state-agent work. Indigenous public servants, in other words, possess a certain ability to resist bureaucratic socialization, actively critiquing the system even if they work within it to advance community causes.

Another significant barrier is the fact that an atypically high number of Indigenous employees are in temporary or casual positions (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019, chapter 3). One interviewee

talked about how hard it is for Indigenous public servants who lack permanency to advocate strongly or adopt a position critical of existing policy. Another noted the personal cost of impermanence: “[Indigenous public servants are] disproportionately in temporary positions, so they’re always in a state of trauma, anxiety and then they can’t get a home loan, a car loan because they’re on a three-month contract that keeps getting renewed, it’s tremendous stress.” Having to address such pressing personal issues can hardly facilitate a role as an “active representative.” Another barrier involves the failure of governments in both jurisdictions to develop a systematic approach to developing the skills and capacities of Indigenous employees (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019, 58, 66–68).

Indigenous public servants in both BC and Queensland are under-represented in senior levels in the bureaucracy and almost absent from central agencies such as departments of the Premier, Treasury, and Finance when many key policy and resource allocation decisions are taken (Althaus and O’Faircheallaigh 2019, 68). This undermines the ability of Indigenous public servants to convert passive into active representation as occupying senior roles, and especially roles in central agencies, might be regarded as essential to influence policy outcomes in ways favorable to Indigenous communities. Participants were in fact divided as to whether this is indeed the case. One group believe that it is important to stay close to the communities they serve and to actively not seek promotion but to stay at lower levels of the bureaucracy in order to “fly under the radar” and keep focused and able to deliver positive outcomes for Indigenous communities. The opposing view is that Indigenous public servants are needed at the higher echelons of the public service in order to try to give effect to structural change to the overall system. For this group, “you have to be at a senior level where decisions are made.”

How Indigenous Public Servants Understand Concepts of Accountability and the Relationship between Accountability and Representation

Bureaucratic accountability is a contested concept. For bureaucrats, it is usually expressed in terms of meeting legislative and institutional rules as well as ministerial directives, but demands are also placed on Indigenous public servants to be directly accountable to “community” for expenditure of public monies or to demonstrate direct contributions to the public good. Kennedy (2014, 412) suggests the literature has little to say about how bureaucrats perceive accountability, including how they make trade-offs between active representation and accountability.

Service to community is the key motivating factor for all interviewees, and this commitment is accompanied by a belief that they are accountable to their communities. One BC interviewee said:

I think the people who consider themselves Indigenous public servants rather than public servants who happen to be Indigenous, do so because we see an affinity with the Indigenous public above and beyond our job title and our work location. I hold myself accountable to Indigenous peoples and not just to my employers.

Note here inclusion of the words “not just to my employers,” indicating an understanding that two forms of accountability may

exist side by side. This perspective was shared by a Queensland participant:

...the person obviously would need to balance their obligation and responsibility as being a bureaucrat and also their responsibility as being a Indigenous person to the community and to me that is being open about your role and articulating that... They [community members] know that I have a job to do, but I know the system and how it works and how can we do this so that we have the best outcome for you.

Some might interpret this quote as comprising resignation to an imposed system. For example, one Canadian participant quoted from a cultural competency trainer who stated: “The thing about Aboriginal people is that they already know how to live biculturally because they have to.” However, some participants indicated they saw little or any difficulty in achieving “balance” between accountability to their community and to government: One said:

I could always reconcile the two and I could always explain [my position] to both sides. The good thing about the public service, is it recognises the conflict that you face with your own community. That is what I like about the bureaucracy, but it is also very clear to me what the rules are.

Accountability to history and intergenerational perspectives is critical to Indigenous public servants and is embedded in the notion of being accountable to one’s community. All participants spoke of those who came before them, valuing their teachings and guidance, and looking across time to consider the generations past and into the future as well as the present. A Queensland interviewee stated:

...the past, the most important thing of our culture, the past tells us where we are today and it will tell us where we are in the future.

Canadian participants spoke of the seven generations principle and how the impacts of decisions made today on future generations must be taken into account. Canadian interviewees said:

There’s a whole lot more depth and breadth to the things you have to think about. Being respectful about the impacts that history has had on people.

...a good leader considers how a decision will impact future generations, seven generations is always what comes to mind when I listen to our leaders talk.

A Queensland participant recounted how they had to continuously bring elders into decision-making and, in doing so, re-established connections to country that ensured policy making occurred in “good ways” and did not remake mistakes of the past.

I have always got to... defer a decision until I am certain that I have got the elders’ responsibilities and understanding of where they want to go...you will get a story, it is always told to you in a story, and you have got to take that story and the pieces out of it and take it into negotiations. You don’t get a clear piece of instruction... you have to decipher what

is in that story... you continually reaffirm your connection to the land, through them. They are bringing you back and getting you closer and closer to the land all the time... that consideration that they have given, the time they have spent together and the experiences with their own parents and uncles and aunties and that slowly is being fed down to us.

Other interviewees indicated that they feel considerable tensions between their roles as bureaucrats and community representatives and that at times those tensions become so severe that they have to take a break from their bureaucratic careers:

Interviewer: Have there been situations where it has been a struggle for you to stay in the public service. I mean have you thought seriously about leaving? Interviewee: Yes, seriously, all the time. That is why I left and went [to work abroad for a period of time].

Participants expressed a wide range of responses to this situation. By definition, our interviewees are serving bureaucrats, but a number indicated that they were aware of colleagues who had found it unpalatable to remain and, at considerable cost in terms of their incomes and careers, left the public service. Others accepted that there was no choice but to accept the primacy of organizational loyalty:

At the end of the day you're an employee. The corporate concept dominates ... You can't get around that ... in the bureaucracy you're one amongst a sea of people ... you have to be part of the corporate team. There are some decisions you have to make that you don't necessarily like [but] your central bureaucracy defines your agenda.

Alternatively, a number of interviewees referred to an inevitable "line in the sand," indicating a day would come when they would be forced to choose their personal values and beliefs over the decisions or approach endorsed by the bureaucratic system. In the words of one participant: "If you come to that 'Is this a hill you're going to die on?' and you say 'This is it, I'm done', then it's time to walk away, and that's not always easy." A BC participant indicated: "I have felt that there would definitely come a time where I would have to ... pick between my Nation or my employer." One Queensland interviewee recounted how he had left particular roles because they involved an unacceptable conflict of values, though at the same time recounted that the decision to leave was not career ending as, ironically, he achieved ongoing work.

Our research indicates that characterization of "active representation" as leading to "partisanship" or a failure of accountability to elected governments is simplistic. Participants in our study are certainly engaged in active representation, but there is no evidence that this leads them to abandon their duty to be accountable to, and responsible to, elected officials or to seek to undermine the key priorities of government. Many participants, though not all, do perceive or experience a tension between their sense of accountability to their community and to their employer. However, they manage that tension in most situations, and when it becomes unacceptable, deal with it by forgoing specific career opportunities, changing jobs within the public service, or taking

temporary breaks from their public service careers. This evidence strongly suggests that if there are benefits associated with active representation, there seems little risk that these will be outweighed by any threat to democratic accountability or to the public interest.

Impact on Policy Outcomes

Many interviewees felt they have a significant impact on policy processes and outcomes. This drives their willingness, and in many cases determination, to continue to serve as public servants despite the challenges, and, for many people the personal cost, this involves.

Directly Shaping Outcomes. Interviewees provided examples, for instance in the child protection area, where they had been able to directly shape programs in ways that benefited Indigenous children and families. In some cases, this involved provision of the sort of practical support that was vital for Indigenous parents but whose importance was not recognized in mainstream programs. A manager in the housing area, spoke of how he overcome a lack of coordination across agencies to achieve housing quality, and community skills development to maintain housing quality, in remote communities. A BC participant working in the criminal justice system recounted how she worked with a validated research program developed to assist people to avoid recidivism using Indigenous-appropriate methods.

Interviews also illustrate the skills that Indigenous public servants bring to bear in seeking to influence policy outcomes, in particular a keen sense of timing, patience, and knowing when to keep quiet and when to speak up:

... every so often the light shines on you as a person and you have an opportunity to really start to implement some policy ... suddenly people are listening to you that weren't listening to you yesterday.

I'm going to sit here and I'm going to shut up ... and then something is going to occur where they're going to need that voice, and then I'm going to use that as an opportunity to start pushing it.

Help Incorporate Indigenous Perspectives into Public Administration and Policy Making

Many interviewees discussed cases where they had worked to ensure that perspectives of Indigenous peoples and communities and a fuller and accurate understanding of their situation and experiences were included in policy discussion and forums. This not only involves bringing in the Indigenous voice into decision-making but also reforming the way in which agencies work, including bringing along non-Indigenous staff in the process of change. A number of interviewees also stressed the need to encourage adoption of government processes that are more "Indigenous friendly." A Queensland participant gave an example of an Aboriginal council that was plagued by government departments which sought to follow time frames that suited them, rather than thinking about the Council's needs and the demands it faced. A BC interviewee gave an example of being able to influence the temporal aspect of a process:

I looked at the deputy minister and I said if you expect... a community engagement strategy by 31 March you're crazy. It's not going to happen. That's what I told him because

engagement takes time. He listened and he understood so that was a positive.

Another way in which Indigenous input into policy and service delivery can be facilitated is by providing a bridge between government and community, a possibility recognized by a number of authors under the concept of “co-production” (Lim 2006). The ability to translate information, policies, and expectations is critical, with Indigenous public servants simultaneously helping government to understand community, and community to better appreciate how to link to government processes to help get things done. This translation role demands intercultural skills as well as a great deal of patience, diplomacy and acumen. One Queensland participant described the intricacies that are involved:

So you tread that line where you step back and forth from skills that you learn in the mainstream environment and bringing that back into your own community. A lot of listening, a lot of negotiating, a lot of explaining things to people to ensure that it meets the needs of everybody in the community ... It's a very fluid environment, where you are continuously talking and jiggling and moving forward and coming back and moving forward again ...

More broadly, Indigenous public servants also play a key role bridging role in promoting reconciliation. They work to educate non-Indigenous peoples, as indicated by a BC participant:

I did lots of research on residential schools and talked to the staff because none of them have really been exposed to it. So, talking to people about what our people went through and how it's difficult for them to rise from being put down so much to making a better choice for themselves and making a better life for themselves.

Indigenous public servants also provide encouragement and translation work for Indigenous communities to assist them to understand the positive potential of government. This is often tiring because of the sheer amount of work needed to continuously bridge cultures and walk in multiple worlds. The translation role is not always easy and can pose significant challenges to Indigenous public servants themselves. Many feel like “the ham in the sandwich,” as one BC interviewee expressed it.

Mobilize Resources and “work the system”. Another dimension of impact involves the efforts of bureaucrats to mobilize resources to support Indigenous organizations and communities that interact with government, including those involved in service delivery, and more broadly to “work the system” to bring about policies favorable to Indigenous interests. A BC interviewee said:

Sometimes, we're crafty. We're creative in how we approach stuff at times. It's like, well we know that we're not going to get this money if we ask for it like this, because they want something very specific. So let's ask for it ... in a way that leaves it open for us to actually implement it the way we see fit.

“Working the system” can also involve mobilizing external entities to exert pressure for change. One interviewee, discussing an

approach to child protection that was causing harm to Aboriginal children and families:

I had to get them [Aboriginal Legal Aid] to actually do some heavy leaning on my own department, to actually get a grandmother who lived in Mt Isa, from Doomadgee, to be able to take over control of her children and we had to come through Brisbane and through the Family Court to do it.

This example illustrates the risk that Indigenous public servants can face in pushing for policy change, as involving external agencies, including the judiciary, might lead to retribution against this officer by his employer.

Another participant highlighted the Indigenous emphasis on relationships in allowing them to “navigate” the public service and to achieve outcomes for Indigenous peoples: “We have that ability to make things [happen] ... through our relationships ... because if you'd taken a combative approach or an overly asserted approach, you just put people off ...”

Facilitating Indigenous Employment and Career

Progression. Interviewees identified their work in facilitating Indigenous employment and career progression opportunities in the public service, so increasing the extent and potential influence of Indigenous representation. One Queensland interviewee noted with pride their achievement in increasing Indigenous employment in their agency from 25 to 30 percent. Another talked about their desire to provide an aspirational example that other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could follow. Other interviewees stressed their roles in providing support to individuals, often informally and “behind the scenes.” One, mentioning a young woman who was showing great potential, said that they worked “behind the scenes, just trying to profile her, keep talking about her, about her work, to just put her on people's radars.”

A number of participants highlighted the importance of influencing the attitudes of non-Indigenous public servants as a precondition for increasing Indigenous employment and promotion. Indigenous public servants do this unrecognized work as part of their day-to-day activities, including initiatives such as involving a local community in the process of changing the knowledge and attitudes of non-Indigenous public servants.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

We recognize our study is limited to specific (Westminster) jurisdictional contexts, which does constitute a limitation on the generalizability of our findings. Further research, in other sub-national jurisdictions and at the national level, would be valuable, both in increasing generalizability and adding further to potential theoretical advancement. Nevertheless, our use of qualitative methods to engage directly with Indigenous bureaucrats has allowed us to delve into the “black box” of bureaucratic representation, both supporting and extending existing research hypotheses and findings, while at the same time challenging key assumptions that underpin some of the literature.

We dispel any notion, implicit in much of the literature (for an exception see Ganter 2016; Rousseau 2018), that the practice of

active representation is unproblematic for minority bureaucrats themselves. In fact, it can be deeply problematic, demanding that they work, often in isolation and facing formidable obstacles, to pursue or challenge policy processes and outcomes that are more aligned with the interests of the communities from which they come. In the process they may forego career opportunities and must often deal with the discrimination, condescension, and lack of understanding of the organizations which employ them and the majority bureaucrats with whom they work.

We confirm the desire and ability of minority (in this case Indigenous) bureaucrats to engage in active representation and in doing so bring about policy outcomes that are more favorable to their communities of origin than would occur in their absence. Here, we acknowledge the work of Watkins-Hayes (2011) who distinguished between the *process* focus of street-level studies and the *outcomes* focus of representative bureaucracy scholarship. Our results reinforce that Indigenous public servants see both process and outcomes implications of their active and symbolic representation contributions. In terms of process Indigenous public servants recounted, for example, the relational way they worked in their connections to communities and elders, elected officials, other bureaucratic agents, citizens, “country,” and time. In terms of outcomes, they highlighted a range of ways in which they were able to influence the impact of policies and programs on Indigenous communities, discussed further below.

Our research provides important insights into the causal processes through which passive representation can translate into active representation. As suggested by Lim (2006), these include the “empathic understanding” that Indigenous public servants have for the circumstances, challenges, and value of their communities. It also includes Lim’s concept of “check, restraint, and resocialization,” as indicated by participants’ efforts to challenge negative stereotypes of Indigenous people held by some of their public service colleagues and elected officials, and their work in helping these colleagues develop a fuller understanding of, and capacity to engage with Indigenous society (see also Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006). In addition, we found evidence of client-induced demand as Indigenous public servants encouraged their communities to engage with government and take advantage of available opportunities to access public facilities and services (Lim 2006; Meier and Nicholson-Crotty 2006).

Lastly, we found that Indigenous public servants play a symbolic representative role, both in terms of galvanizing more understanding and cooperation from Indigenous communities but also in inspiring new Indigenous applicants to consider entry into public service careers and, once inside, mentoring them for success as they navigate through complex and challenging organizational bureaucracy and community-based demands.

In making this final point, we note that socialization of Indigenous public servants into the bureaucratic machine cannot be taken for granted. They continually exercise discretion not only over application of rules and regulations but also to answer fundamental questions as to whether to stay within the public service or whether to push certain policies or put them aside for another day. We note the ability of Indigenous public servants to shape policy responses,

for instance by pushing for the adoption of innovative approaches in areas such as child care; by exploiting their knowledge of administrative “nooks and crannies” to pursue Indigenous interests; by “working the bureaucratic system” to provide Indigenous groups with access to resources to undertake community projects; and by helping recruit and promote more Indigenous public servants.

Our research also allows us to address causal processes from a perspective not applied in existing quantitative studies. Several factors prevent the occurrence of active representation or diminish its impact, helping us to explore the issue of *what other outcomes might be possible* if specific causal factors were absent or had less effect. These factors include the deep-seated and pervasive of overt and “everyday” racism and of prejudice and stereotyping within bureaucracies on Indigenous public servants and their communities. They also include the lack of cultural competency among non-Indigenous bureaucrats and their tendency to shift the responsibility for addressing the needs of Indigenous citizens onto Indigenous public servants; the paucity of Indigenous public servants in permanent positions, and especially in senior policy and managerial roles; and the absence of coherent and sustained programs within government to facilitate career advancement by Indigenous public servants. By identifying barriers to active representation, we also identify the means to overcome them, for instance, through concerted public sector campaigns to combat racism, incorporation of cultural competency into the required skillset of senior public servants in particular, and the funding of long-term initiatives to support Indigenous public servants in advancing through bureaucratic hierarchies.

This discussion of what is required to facilitate active representation assumes that it is an activity that should be promoted. As noted earlier this is by no means universally accepted by public administration scholars or practitioners, raising again the wider issue of bureaucratic representation, accountability, and democracy.

We find that the risk of a failure of accountability and of a threat to democracy is overrated. Indigenous public servants find ways of managing the tension between their accountability to their communities and to their superiors and to elected officials. Participants are acutely aware of the need to achieve a balance between these two “lines of accountability,” and when the tension between the two cannot be managed their response, not surprisingly given their minority status and the fact that they do not occupy the top bureaucratic echelons, is to beat a tactical retreat and wait until they find a more favorable opportunity, or, if this seems unlikely to arise, they leave the public service. There is no evidence that they engage in partisanship or deny their duty of accountability to democratically elected officials to the detriment of other specific interests or to the public interest, thus discounting the proposition, advanced by some scholars (Lim 2006, 203) that active representation offends accountability or principles of representative democracy.

On the contrary, their work bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and issues enhances the democratic role of elected officials to serve the needs of all their constituents in ways that, importantly, would not be possible if the Indigenous public servants were not present. Their ability to bring trust, authentic

engagement skills, diplomacy, innovative thinking, and policy nous to the policy making table helps elected officials to fulfill their duties.

We argue that the sort of active representation practiced by the Indigenous participants in our research has much to offer contemporary government and society. The Weberian ideal-type of legal-rational bureaucracy, in Weber's time and place, may have facilitated the important goal of delivering repeatable universal treatment to citizens across emergent mass societies. But how does this standardization fare in contemporary societies where bureaucracies engage with diverse populations with differing demands and requiring different approaches, and where governments face declining public trust and growing threats to their legitimacy? Indigenous public servants are helping promote the democratic project because they are actively including and bringing in otherwise disenfranchised members of society into the policymaking process. They make government and its processes understandable and help (re)build trust. They also are critical in dispute resolution and avoiding unnecessary conflict by exercising diplomatic talents as well as respectful persistence that is focused on community benefit and long-term positive outcomes.

There are positive benefits to process and outcomes when relationality, kinship (construed in its broad form), and a personalized (as opposed to population-based) community focus is brought into the bureaucratic calculus. Active representation can help bureaucracies and communities to frame and act on problems and solutions together, something advocated by co-production and co-creation theorists and practitioners (Alford & Yates 2016; Blomkamp, 2018; Bovaird et al., 2015; Brandsen and Honingh Brandsen, Verschuere, & Steen, 2018). Active representation can tailor policy making to place-based needs, including to recognize and capitalize on community assets—a point not yet addressed in the literature—as well as to address community disadvantage (Althaus & Macgregor, 2019). Moreover, it draws attention to embedding structural attention to intergenerational decision making as well as authentic 'caring for country' that emphasizes long-term stewardship and provides environmental sustainability (Althaus & Morrison, 2015; Charpleix, 2018). Furthermore, when issues of (potential) conflict emerge, the Indigenous public servant will undertake proactive education and engagement on both sides—political and community—to determine if alternative solutions are possible.

Active representation can thus bring to life theoretical insights brought by authors such as Ouchi (1980) who have long advocated in favor of the benefits of using clans, or kinship systems, as opposed to only markets and bureaucracies as tools of public service design. In Ouchi's (1980, 137) framework, clans trump markets and bureaucracies as an organizational form when relationships are interdependently aligned and where trust and inclusion is needed to overcome task and measurement uncertainty. Trust and inclusion associated with kinship can result in highly efficient and effective ways to manage performance uncertainty because they come with goal congruence that has been built, over time, history and common identity. This does not suggest we throw out markets and traditional bureaucracies, but rather, we start to identify when and where different organizational forms match different needs and

circumstances. What distinguishes Indigenous public servants is their ability to listen and to read these needs and circumstances and deploy different forms of authority and leadership in keeping with community settings and sentiments.

We see bureaucrats and the institution of the bureaucracy as an active part of the fabric of democracy rather than a passive implementer of government ideas. We realize that, for some, this might be misinterpreted as us favoring an argument that public servants somehow usurp the rules of representative government and "play at being the new Platonic guardians of society" (Rhodes & Wanna, 2007). This is not the case. Instead, there are increasing examples given in the public administration literature of the abilities of public servants to straddle the complexities of serving multiple masters and successfully navigating their roles in assisting elected officials to deliver on their democratic responsibilities (Maynard-Moody & Muscheno, 2003; Scott, van de Noort, & Noordegraf, 2020).

Elected officials in the modern arena cannot rely on being the sole channels of communication between their constituencies and policy making decisions. They turn to a plethora of actors including policy advisers and think tanks to help them identify views, issues, and debates, but this group of assistants is small in proportion to the power at the disposal of the government of the day through its bureaucracy to help identify agendas and craft meaningful, cogent, and evidence-informed policy. Obviously, there needs to be appropriate constraints on bureaucratic discretion but our research suggests that minority bureaucrats understand this need and are often able to accommodate it while exercising active representation. Discretion, for Indigenous public servants, is not a threat to democracy but a way to apply discrete community- and place-specific experience and bridging knowledge that simultaneously aids the goals of elected officials as well as promotes the achievement of positive outcomes for the whole of society.

Relational and personalized policy making, in other words, is part and parcel of the logic of modern policy making (Needham, 2011). Policy making done *to* and *for* communities relies on the Weberian logic of population-based equity and efficiency. Policymaking done *with* communities relies on personalized policy making that prizes diversity, culture, and inclusion (see Mulgan, 2012), something achieved through active representation by minority bureaucrats. Our research elaborates this insight but shows concerted action is required to overcome the obstacles minority bureaucrats face if this potential is to be realized.

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Supporting Information

A supplemental appendix can be found in the online version of this article at [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1540-6210](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1540-6210).