Establishing the Link between Representative Bureaucracy and Performance: The South African Case

Representative bureaucracy is a critical element of modern public administration and governance. Since the advent of nonracial democracy, the South African government has transformed the apartheid bureaucracy into a new public service that closely mirrors the country’s diverse population. Questions remain, however, about how this demographic transformation has impacted the public service. Grounded in the theory of representative bureaucracy, we use a mixed methods approach to examine the relationship between representation of historically disadvantaged groups and performance of national departments in South Africa. Analyses of panel data indicate that as national departments become more representative by employing a greater percent of blacks, they become more effective at achieving their goals. Interviews with officials in national departments corroborate this and reveal a range of underlying pathways linking representation of historically disadvantaged groups to performance.