

## SPEAKING FOR OTHERS

In this book, a political philosopher dissects the duties and dilemmas of the unelected spokesperson, from Martin Luther King, Jr., to Greta Thunberg.

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# SPEAKING FOR OTHERS

The Ethics of  
Informal Political Representation

WENDY SALKIN

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For my parents,  
Linda B. Celauro and Richard E. Salkin,  
who took me to city council meetings as a kid.

The way in which groups of human beings are led to choose certain of their number as their spokesmen and leaders is at once the most elementary and the nicest problem of social growth.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Evolution of Negro Leadership”

It is easy to be outraged at the plight of others, especially easy (perhaps) for a man who shares or has shared that plight, but it is not easy to act for them when they are unable to act for themselves. Many men claim to do so; other men question their good faith.

—Michael Walzer, “The Obligations of Oppressed Minorities”

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# Introduction

We care a great deal about our formal political representatives (FPRs)—our legislators, governors, judges, city council members, and others whom we ourselves elect or who are appointed by others we have elected. We scrutinize who they are, how they come into their positions, what powers they wield, whether their values reflect ours, whether they listen to us, whether their actions are responsive to our interests and preferences. We laud and criticize them by turn for their handling of weighty political affairs that directly affect our everyday lives. Sometimes, we knock doors in support of their reelection; other times, we collect signatures to recall them. It is therefore no surprise that formal political representation is a familiar topic of discussion not only among democratic theorists but in our day-to-day conversations with the people around us.

What is surprising is how little attention we pay, by comparison, to political actors who can be just as influential as our FPRs, and sometimes more so, who speak and act for us in a wide variety of political contexts, who shape the terms of our public debates, who lead social movements that change the courses of our lives, and who somehow have these powers despite having never been granted them through formal, systematized election or selection procedures. They are our informal political representatives (IPRs). And this book is about them.

Informal political representation is nothing new.<sup>1</sup> It has long played a role in the public expression of the values, interests, and preferences of groups, particularly of oppressed and unjustly marginalized groups.<sup>2</sup> Consider Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise," which had its origins in a speech before an audience of both Black and white southerners at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, offering a number of

public concessions on behalf of all Black Americans. “The wisest among my race,” he said, “understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremest folly.” He even made a promise to white southerners on behalf of his informal constituency: “I pledge that in your effort to work out the great and intricate problem which God has laid at the doors of the South, you shall have at all times the patient, sympathetic help of my race.”<sup>3</sup>

Informal political representation is an inevitable and ineradicable practice in almost all societies and, indeed, in any deliberative forum besides small face-to-face committees.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon emerges even in fora some may have hoped were immune: “direct democracies often cede political power to arrogant loudmouths whom no one chose to represent them.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it was the presumed inevitability of the practice that motivated W. E. B. Du Bois, a recurrent critic of Washington’s informal political representation of Black Americans, to advocate for the training of the Talented Tenth. In his 1903 essay of the same name, Du Bois asks, “Do you think that if the leaders of thought among Negroes are not trained and educated thinkers, that they will have no leaders? On the contrary a hundred half-trained demagogues will still hold the places they so largely occupy now, and hundreds of vociferous busy-bodies will multiply.”<sup>6</sup> Yet informal political representation is not just an inevitability we must learn to live with whether we like it or not. To the contrary, there is reason to favor and even to celebrate the practice. Below, I discuss both its value and dangers.

IPRs are everywhere. Some are nationally or even internationally recognized leaders of social movements. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. informally represented Black Montgomerians during the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and Black Americans generally throughout the course of the civil rights movement. Me Too movement leader Tarana Burke informally represents survivors of sexual assault, abuse, and harassment.<sup>7</sup> Black Lives Matter informally represents Black communities throughout the United States and beyond.<sup>8</sup> Former Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School student Aalayah Eastmond informally represents not only fellow former classmates but American high schoolers generally, as when she testified before Congress, “We *are* the generation that will end gun violence.”<sup>9</sup> Malala Yousafzai informally represents Pakistani schoolchildren before the United Nations, while Greta Thunberg stands before the United Nations to informally represent Generation Z.<sup>10</sup> These IPRs have in common that they have

been serving as IPRs over time, developing relationships with their informal constituencies, and building social movements, the norms of which inform how they represent. Not all IPRs, however, are internationally recognized movement leaders. Some IPRs live in our hometowns. They are our neighbors and friends. But when they go to the city council meeting to give voice to the shared interests of the people living in our neighborhood, they become our representatives, too.<sup>11</sup> Even more surprisingly, you or I may be an IPR without knowing it.

What exactly is an IPR? That is a question to be answered over the course of this book. Succinctly, for now: An IPR is an individual or group who is treated by an audience as speaking or acting for others on matters apt for broad public discussion despite having been neither elected nor selected to do so by means of a systematized election or selection procedure.

This description gets at the core features of the phenomenon. Even so, understanding who falls within the ambit of the category *IPR* and why can be a messy business, as IPRs often simultaneously fill other familiar social roles—group leader, descriptive representative, symbolic representative, role model, moral exemplar, advocate, ally, influencer.<sup>12</sup> But one can also be an IPR without inhabiting any of these other nearby social roles. Our neighbor may speak for us at the council meeting without being our leader.<sup>13</sup> They just happen to be the neighbor who can make the meetings, so they end up attending on behalf of all of us. In fact, the status of IPR is conferred by audiences, so the role can come unbidden. Our neighbor may have gone to the council meeting intending to speak only in a personal capacity, but the council members treated their complaints as expressed on our behalf.<sup>14</sup> In so treating our neighbor, the council members made them our IPR. Many people who are far from being group leaders find themselves one day, to their considerable surprise, in the role of IPR.

In this book, I provide a systematic conceptual and normative account of informal political representation. My approach is to identify the core features of informal political representation and advance a normative theory concerning that practice, independent of its coincidence with other social roles. The theory advanced here may have implications for extant theories of these other social roles, but informal political representation merits careful examination in its own right.

Despite IPRs' ubiquity and significance to our political lives, the role of the IPR is conceptually puzzling, morally troubling, and markedly

undertheorized. What scholarship there is on informal political representation and similar phenomena has been a beacon for me as I have developed the account set forth in these pages.<sup>15</sup> To develop the theory found here, I also draw broadly on and synthesize ideas and arguments from many fields, including philosophy, political science, Black political thought, bioethics, disability studies, feminist theory, law, and negotiation theory. Scholars and practitioners across these fields have touched on this topic or nearby variants, and this book is indebted to their ideas.

### Group Representation

Although an IPR may represent either an individual or a group, I accord group representation special attention for two main reasons. First, as Alexander Bickel notes, “We have, since Madison, realized that people tend to act politically not so much as individuals as in groups.”<sup>16</sup> As political actors generally, and all the more so as represented parties, we tend both to act and to be regarded as members of groups rather than as individuals. Second, it is within the context of group representation that the most difficult and pressing moral questions arise. Although a group’s members will often be united by some points of commonality—perhaps shared values, interests, preferences, commitments, needs, or experiences—they will also inevitably diverge in other respects. As Iris Young puts the point, “It is impossible to find the essential attributes of constituents, the single common interest that overrides the diversity of their other interests, experiences, and opinions. Representation understood in this way is impossible. Yet representation is both necessary and desirable.”<sup>17</sup> Given these points of divergence, a representative will often have to make difficult and sometimes divisive choices about how to represent a group.

Moreover, group representation itself is not a monolithic category. An IPR can represent a group of any sort, and any sort of group can be informally represented. Groups vary widely with respect to features like what make them groups, how they are organized, and whether members identify as group members. For instance, a group might comprise people who share a common desire or common grievance—who “are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest”—or about whom a certain proposition is true.<sup>18</sup> Some groups have internal norms that dictate how an IPR is to receive authorization from the group, while others

do not.<sup>19</sup> Some groups' members regard themselves as sharing solidaristic ties or objectives, while others do not know themselves to be members of the same group at all. Whereas for the former type of group an IPR may primarily be valuable insofar as they can help the group realize its shared objective, for the latter type of group an IPR may be valuable simply insofar as they make the group's members aware that they belong to the same group. So, IPRs fulfill different needs faced by different sorts of represented groups—what is beneficial or required for one type of group may be inapposite or even downright harmful for another. Many discussions of informal political representation focus on the representation of social groups, overlooking other types of groups whose members share no special affinities, common history, or outwardly obvious characteristics, and who in some cases do not even recognize that they are members of such a group.<sup>20</sup> Yet IPRs may provide distinctive goods to these overlooked groups too. Accordingly, what value an IPR offers to a given represented group depends on, among other things, the kind of group being represented, what the group needs from a representative (*purposive considerations*), and what sort of relationship is possible between the group and the IPR (*relational considerations*). Throughout this book, I illustrate my analysis with real-world examples of many different varieties of group informal political representation. To further appreciate the varieties of group representation, consider how different types of groups benefit from different aspects of informal political representation.

### The Value of Informal Political Representation

To understand the value of informal political representation, we need to first consider the value of political representation generally. We simply cannot be in all the places where we might prefer that our voices are heard, or where our voices are needed if we are to have our values, interests, or preferences considered and perhaps also protected or satisfied. “Representation is necessary,” Iris Young tells us, “because the web of modern social life often ties the actions of some people and institutions in one place to consequences in many other places and institutions. No person can be present at all the decisions or in all the decision-making bodies whose actions affect her life, because there are so many and they are so dispersed. Though her aspirations are often disappointed, she hopes that others will think about

her situation and represent it to the issue forum.”<sup>21</sup> To Young’s considerations, I add these: Even if we were able to be in all of those far apart and hard-to-find places, would we be invited to speak? Were we invited to speak, would we know what to say? And even if we knew what to say, would we say it as well or as convincingly as another who might have said it for us? For each of these questions, the answer may be “no.”

So, political representation generally is not “at best a grudging concession to size or efficiency.”<sup>22</sup> It allows for effective communication, coalition building, information collection and transmission, perspective taking, and the crystallization of ideas from what people may at first only “dimly perceive” to be what they in fact value, want, or prefer.<sup>23</sup> Those who become political representatives become responsible to and responsible for others—the represented and audiences—in distinctive and powerful ways. Moreover, political representation enables all of us to better understand our shared social world and its inhabitants.

Still, you may ask: What’s so good about informal political representation in particular? IPRs can provide distinctive political goods to the groups for whom they speak or act—publicly voicing groups’ otherwise neglected interests; making overlooked groups visible to broader publics; making groups visible to themselves as groups by stirring group consciousness in the members of oppressed or marginalized pluralities; serving as communicative conduits between represented groups and their unresponsive lawmakers; and, through each of these, educating public audiences about the represented group. Consider each of these in turn.

First, IPRs often voice groups’ otherwise neglected interests. Some IPRs supplement a group’s existing FPRs, giving voice to interests their FPRs fail to express; other IPRs are lone voices for groups altogether lacking FPRs.<sup>24</sup> Groups’ interests go unexpressed for a variety of reasons. Some interests are misunderstood or belong to groups too small to receive FPRs’ attention. Other interests belong to groups excluded from the electorate, like the undocumented and disenfranchised.<sup>25</sup> Such groups rely on virtual or informal political representation to have their interests expressed.<sup>26</sup> Still other political interests enjoy no public discussion because discussing them is widely understood to be career ending for elected officials—the so-called “third rail” of politics.<sup>27</sup> For instance, the unpopularity of stigmatized groups makes it risky for FPRs, seeking reelection or donor support, to take up their mantles.<sup>28</sup> Consider an example: Registered sex offenders face stringent resi-

density restrictions. They may be prohibited from living within certain “specified distances of schools, parks, day-care centers, and other areas.”<sup>29</sup> In recent years, lawyers, scholars, and activists have questioned whether these restrictions are needed and also whether they are legal.<sup>30</sup> Despite these concerns, legislators are loath to consider (let alone put forth) bills that would be seen as providing public benefits to sex offenders.<sup>31</sup> This means that, even if residency restrictions leave registered sex offenders with nowhere to go, few elected representatives will take up the charge of representing their interests, as this would leave those elected representatives open to the staunch reprisals of their constituencies. As Robin van der Wall, a North Carolina registrant and board member of the national advocacy group Reform Sex Offender Laws, puts the point, “Who wants to risk being called a pedophile-lover?”<sup>32</sup> IPRs may tread where formal analogues dare not.<sup>33</sup> In both his 2009 *A Place for Paedophiles* and a companion magazine article, documentarian Louis Theroux uses interview and observation to give voice to the values, interests, preferences, and perspectives of sex offenders indefinitely detained in Coalinga State Hospital in California.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the advocacy group Texas Voices for Reason and Justice “advocates for more relaxed penalties for sex offenders.”<sup>35</sup> Both Theroux and Texas Voices for Reason and Justice informally represent sex offenders—people whose interests receive little to no expression by FPRs. Though not immune to criticism for representing unpopular groups, IPRs need not choose between representation and reelection.<sup>36</sup>

Second, IPRs can make overlooked groups visible. They can make governments and broader publics aware that there are groups whose interests ought to be weighed among others in political decision-making, as Indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú did in speaking to the Guatemalan government on behalf of Indigenous communities.<sup>37</sup> Of course, making a group visible to a broader society can bring with it attendant perils. It makes a difference what is made visible, and to whom.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, some groups develop norms that constrain what an IPR may disclose about the represented group to an audience of outsiders.<sup>39</sup>

Third, IPRs can raise group consciousness and even contribute to group formation. Some groups’ members have common interests but do not see it that way—either because they do not realize individually that they have such interests themselves or, despite each one realizing that much, do not recognize those interests to be shared. Not recognizing their interests in

either of these ways, *shared unrecognized interest group* members are unlikely to regard themselves as members of any such group and may, further, fail to recognize that there is such a group. But the fact that they are members of the interest group does not depend on either self-identifying or being identified by others as group members. Rather, something internal to their circumstances dictates that they are group members. Just as they may overlook their own group membership, so too may it be overlooked by others. The working poor, gig workers, and other groups whose members share economic interests are paradigmatic examples of such groups, as are survivors of sexual assault at the hands of the same assailant. IPRs can make such groups visible to themselves by impressing on their members that there is such a group, that they are members, that they share politically salient interests with other group members, that they ought to regard themselves as group members, and perhaps also that they ought to regard themselves as having obligations to fellow group members—long the aim of labor organizers and feminist consciousness-raising groups.<sup>40</sup>

Fourth, IPRs often serve as communicative conduits—ferrying messages between the represented and lawmakers, the media, or the broader public.<sup>41</sup> Menchú's ability to speak both Spanish and K'iche' enables her to communicate between government officials and Indigenous Guatemalans.<sup>42</sup> The Abahlali baseMjondolo Movement communicates between judiciaries and South African shack dwellers.<sup>43</sup> An IPR may even negotiate on a group's behalf, as King did in Montgomery, Alabama, when negotiating between bus boycotters, the bus company, and the city.<sup>44</sup>

Fifth, an IPR may educate an audience about a group, which may involve correcting existing misunderstandings that the audience has about that group. In some cases, an IPR may educate an audience by dispelling the belief that there is any such group: Some groups' members are united by the fact that a social identity has been ascribed to them from without. As is the case for shared unrecognized interest group members, what I will call *ascribed membership group members* do not, at least initially, see themselves as belonging to the group. However, unlike shared unrecognized interest groups, for ascribed membership groups, there is in a real sense no such group “from the inside.” It is not, at least in the first instance, by virtue of something internal to individual group members or their experiences or circumstances that they come to hold membership in the group. Rather, the group is brought into being by the ascription of a common identity,

often ascribed on the basis of some perceived feature of those who become group members. Consider the group *people who “look Muslim.”*<sup>45</sup> This group ascription is generated from without—perhaps based on the incorrect assumption that there is some one way Muslims look, along with increased attention brought to such identifications as a result of (among other things) restrictive travel policies, discriminatory national security policies, racism, and Islamophobia. The group label arises from, for instance, prejudicial policies that make it matter “how Muslim” a person is perceived to be by an onlooker. The group classification is generated by a mistake on the part of the classifier (an audience) that the classification is felicitous to that (or any) context. Ascribed membership group members need only have in common that they are so classified by some audience. As for their shared interests, the groups’ members may in fact have in common only the view that the errant classification tracks nothing of relevance and the demand that the classification no longer be ascribed. An IPR for an ascribed membership group will aim not to make the group itself visible (for the audience has had no trouble “finding” the group) but rather to make known to the audience their own error—namely, attempting to pick out such a group in the first place. Whereas an IPR for a shared unrecognized interest group aims to impress on group members that there is a group and that they are group members, an IPR for an ascribed membership group aims to impress on audiences that there is no such group.

Although IPRs can represent groups of any sort, the difference they make in political life is most salient in contexts where the group being represented is oppressed or marginalized. IPRs are well situated to promote more just circumstances for the most downtrodden, to empower them, and to seek equal treatment on their behalf. In fact, informal political representation can be a political lifeline for oppressed and marginalized groups, which tend to lack the political power that would aid them in redressing their oppression or marginalization. In representative democracies, this lack of political power often manifests as exclusion from or inefficacy in FPR lawmaking bodies. As a result, the interests of such groups do not tend to be expressed nonaccidentally in, let alone satisfied by, the FPR institutions that shape their members’ lives. (Sometimes, the values, interests, or preferences expressed in or satisfied by FPR institutions by happenstance align with these groups’ interests. That it is by happenstance means that such institutions are not responsive to the groups’ interests. It matters not just that our

representative institutions express or satisfy our interests but that they do so because they are our interests.) IPRs can play a *sui generis* corrective role for these groups. Informal political representation can give oppressed and marginalized groups some say—however mediate, partial, and imperfect—in how things go for them. Although unelected, IPRs come to speak for these groups in many fora, at protests and on picket lines, from city council meetings to Congress.

As these different examples illustrate, what counts as valuable informal political representation for a particular group will depend at least in part on what sort of group it is. In addition to the valuable features just discussed, IPRs can also, by their actions, promote a variety of democratic values—including relational equality, political influence, political agency, community recognition, and trust—thereby making their societies more just (see Chapter 4).

The benefits discussed here may give the impression that informal political representation provides second-best solutions, to be pursued only when formal political representation fails. This is not so, for the following three reasons, as well as many more that will come to light over the course of the book. First, informal political representation does not solely correct for FPR mechanisms' shortcomings; it also counteracts and eases communicative difficulties that are inevitable features of modern political life in large-scale societies more generally, including overlooked groups, disorganized pluralities, misunderstood interests, and siloed political fora. Second, IPRs are not only valuable under conditions of injustice, although they are especially important when there is injustice. Third, in our unjust world, IPRs are valuable for both groups that are oppressed or marginalized and groups that are not. What changes in these different contexts is not whether such representation is valuable but rather the sources of its value. In this book, I focus especially on the corrective role informal political representation can play for oppressed and marginalized groups that lack adequate or any formal political representation.

### The Dangers of Informal Political Representation

At the same time, informal political representation is perilous. In the absence of the traditional authorization and accountability mechanisms available in FPR contexts, IPRs can have outsized control over the public narratives of

the groups they represent without the represented having much recourse to object or protest. One cannot, after all, impeach the unelected. Without institutional or procedural constraints, IPRs may wield their *power to influence* free from fear of reprisal or rebuke. The power to influence is the IPR's capacity, through their statements or actions, to shape an audience's doxastic attitudes about a represented group and its values, interests, or preferences.<sup>46</sup> So positioned, IPRs may gravely mischaracterize the represented. They may *occlude* the group altogether, diverting attention away from the represented group and its interests and toward themselves. Occlusion may take another, partial form: IPRs may prioritize some group members' interests over others and, in so doing, divert public attention away from interests not prioritized. This second form of occlusion may, in turn, contribute to the marginalization of some group members by other group members.<sup>47</sup> When the IPR is not a member of the represented group, they may also *displace* group members who might have been more appropriate for the role. Through each of these actions, the IPR may contribute to the disenfranchisement of those they represent.

To make matters worse, IPRs are often the only political actors working to advance the interests of oppressed and marginalized groups, meaning that these groups come to rely on their IPRs. Those who are represented solely by IPRs are left subject to the whims and idiosyncrasies of whoever takes up the torch on their behalf—or, in cases in which the IPR is unwittingly or unwillingly conscripted into their position by an audience, has the torch handed to them (see Chapter 2).<sup>48</sup> These circumstances, taken together, leave many represented groups, particularly marginalized and oppressed groups, at the mercy of their IPRs, rendering such relationships inequalitarian and, sometimes, oppressive (see Chapter 4). And although occasionally there are plausible mechanisms for informal authorization and accountability (see Chapter 3), we cannot and should not expect these mechanisms to provide all or even most of the protections that the formal analogues of these mechanisms might. Consider these perils in detail.

First, IPRs are not (and, often, cannot be) reliably subject to authorization or accountability mechanisms that might check their power to influence. This leaves IPRs free, for instance, to pursue their own political agendas and aspirations at the expense of the represented group's members' interests, to override or simply ignore represented groups' members' expressed interests, and to forgo short-term advances for longer-term possible gains

even when represented group members would not choose to do so. IPRs' unchecked power is of special concern for groups that lack adequate or any formal political representation, as such groups rely more significantly on their IPRs for the public expression of their values, interests, and preferences. These circumstances jointly can and often do lead to inequalitarian and in some cases oppressive relationships between IPRs and represented group members, for which reason we need an account of the ethics of informal political representation. In addition to this procedural concern, there are several substantive concerns at issue, too:

Second, IPRs may misrepresent the group. Instead of correcting misunderstandings about a represented group or its interests, an IPR may be the source of misinformation. For instance, they may mislead an audience as to what a group's interests are. Consider an example. In 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, presenting himself as "the emissary . . . of the entire Jewish people,"<sup>49</sup> described the impending Iran nuclear deal as "very dangerous" and "threaten[ing] all of us."<sup>50</sup> He suggested that his concerns were voiced not merely on behalf of Israelis, for whom he was and is an IPR, but also on behalf of "the Jewish people" as such.<sup>51</sup> Earlier that same year, essayist David Harris Gershon objected, "Netanyahu has repeatedly claimed, as Israel's Prime Minister, to speak on behalf of all Jews. And it's a claim he's been articulating with troubling frequency as he prepares to attack President Obama's Iran diplomacy before Congress. However, not only is his claim both preposterous and dangerous, it's not even true with regard to the issue of Iran. Indeed, 52 percent of American Jews embrace Obama's diplomatic efforts with Iran."<sup>52</sup> An IPR may thus mislead an audience as to whether the interests or concerns they express are indeed shared by those for whom they speak or act (see Chapter 5).

Third, IPRs will often face and cause discord when engaged in the necessary task of prioritizing some group members' values, interests, and preferences over others. Some amount of prioritization among competing group values, interests, and preferences is inevitable. No group is homogeneous in all respects. Although occasionally group members unite around just one single value, interest, or preference, more often individual group members have many different values, interests, or preferences. Even within fairly cohesive groups, internal contests and disagreements arise concerning which values, interests, or preferences ought to be considered, prioritized, or expressed to broader audiences. Part of the work of the IPR is to make diffi-

cult and sometimes divisive choices about how to represent a group—deciding, for instance, which interests to prioritize over others.

Yet such prioritization becomes a cause for concern when it reflects or reinforces objectionable power imbalances between subgroups within a represented group. Barbara Ransby discusses such a concern about the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC): “The founders of SCLC were concerned primarily, but not exclusively, about access to the ballot box and dignified treatment in public accommodations. But theirs was a world apart from the lives of destitute sharecroppers and their families who constituted a considerable portion of the South’s black population—people who could barely afford the fare to ride on public transportation even after desegregation.”<sup>53</sup> In this example, although the SCLC was widely regarded to represent Black southerners as such, its founders prioritized expressing the interests of a dominant subgroup (middle-class Black southerners) over the interests of a subordinated subgroup (destitute Black sharecroppers). The prioritization of dominant subgroup members’ values, interests, or preferences over those of subordinated subgroup members raises two distinguishable concerns: (1) subordinated subgroup members’ interests may remain unexpressed to and therefore unanswered by broader audiences who may otherwise have interceded, and (2) the prioritization of dominant subgroup members’ interests may itself reinforce and deepen the power imbalance between the dominant and subordinated subgroups. I return to this criticism of the SCLC, as well as general concerns about intragroup interest prioritization, in Chapter 5.<sup>54</sup>

Concerns about power imbalances in heterogeneous groups are not unique challenges for informal political representation—such challenges arise in all kinds of group representation, formal and informal alike. In fact, informal political representation may be better equipped than formal political representation to handle the challenges of inequalitarian intragroup dynamics and unequal power distributions, in part because, although the number of FPRs permitted in, say, a legislative body is usually fixed (e.g., one hundred U.S. senators, 435 U.S. representatives), there are no such de jure limits on how many IPRs a particular group can have. There can instead be productive contestation and competition among IPRs concerning such questions as who is the group’s rightful IPR (perhaps according to particular standards internal to the group), what ought to be said on the group’s behalf, or whether the group should instead be conceived as two groups or

ten, each with different IPRs whose representation meets the more particular needs of their newly splintered constituencies (see Chapter 5). Informal political representation is, in this way, without limit: one IPR may arise, then another, and another, and their approaches to representation may shift and diverge as suits their search for new audiences and, in some cases, their search for the group they represent (see Chapters 4 and 6).

Fifth, consider the danger of *occlusion*. One of the main benefits of informal political representation is that it brings valuable public attention to represented groups and their values, interests, or preferences. In many cases, IPRs use their positions and the attendant power to influence to secure this public attention for the groups they represent. But not always. Some IPRs instead garner public attention only for themselves or only for some represented group members. Call this *occlusion*: an IPR intentionally or negligently leads their audience to focus on (1) the IPR himself rather than the group they represent, or (2) some group members at the expense of other group members (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Sixth, consider *displacement*. Although there are not de jure limits on how many IPRs a given group can have, there are likely to be some de facto limits on how many IPRs will be given meaningful attention by a broader public. When there are such de facto limits, the IPR who fills the role for a given group may displace others who might have been more appropriate for the role. A common version of this displacement concern is that a person who is not a group member may fill the role of IPR for a given group, thereby displacing group members who would arguably have been more suitable candidates. This concern has often been raised against Bono, the lead singer of the Irish rock band U2, an internationally recognized philanthropist, and an IPR for sub-Saharan Africans on matters relating to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. As George Monbiot points out in his op-ed “Bono Can’t Help Africans by Stealing Their Voice,” “Bono claims to be ‘representing the poorest and most vulnerable people.’ But talking to a wide range of activists from both the poor and rich worlds . . . I have heard the same complaint again and again: that Bono and others like him have seized the political space which might otherwise have been occupied by the Africans about whom they are talking. Because Bono is seen by world leaders as the representative of the poor, the poor are not invited to speak. This works very well for everyone—except them.”<sup>55</sup> The displacement concern Monbiot raises here depends for its force on the unstated background

principle that, when possible, it is best if a group is represented by one of its own members (see Chapters 5 and 6).

Seventh, some argue that IPRs contribute to the disempowerment of already vulnerable groups. Bono has been a target of this criticism too. Max Bankole Jarrett, quoted in the 2009 article “Are Bono and Bob Geldof good for Africa?,” expressed the disempowerment concern this way: “For most Africans it’s a turnoff when Geldof/Bono are used to present a range of African issues. . . . It perpetuates everything these guys claim to be speaking out against—an Africa that is weak and incapable of picking itself up.”<sup>56</sup> This peril, *disempowerment*, may seem to arise most naturally in cases in which the IPR is not a member of the group they represent. But concerns over disempowerment at the hands of a dominating or occluding IPR may arise even when the representative is a member of the represented group (see Chapters 5 and 6).<sup>57</sup>

In Chapter 4, I give more systematic consideration to the dangers of informal political representation introduced here, where skeptical challenges grounded in these concerns are schematized.

### The Central Ethical Question and the Argument

The central ethical challenge faced by informal political representation, the one that motivates all of the arguments set forth in this book, is this: There is a tension at the very heart of the IPR’s relationship to the represented group. On the one hand, IPRs offer valuable political goods to represented groups—publicly voicing groups’ otherwise neglected interests; making overlooked groups visible to broader publics; making groups visible to themselves as groups by stirring group consciousness in the members of oppressed or marginalized pluralities; serving as communicative conduits between represented groups and their unresponsive lawmakers; and, through each of these, educating public audiences about the represented group as well as correcting public audiences’ misunderstandings of the group. In fact, for many, there is a need, sometimes desperate, for informal political representation. Were it not for their IPRs, many groups—particularly marginalized and oppressed groups—might have no one to speak their piece in public. The valuable features of informal political representation to these represented groups helps us appreciate what is at stake in defending the practice from a variety of different forms of skepticism. On the other hand, there are dangers

built into the practice, unmoored as it is from the protections and safeguards available in FPR contexts. The substantive and procedural dangers of informal political representation are significant: in the absence of the traditional authorization and accountability mechanisms available in FPR contexts, unchecked IPRs can misrepresent the interests of represented groups; contribute to intragroup marginalization by prioritizing some group members' interests over others; occlude represented groups; displace other possible IPRs; and, through each of these, contribute to the disempowerment of those they represent. These dangers give us reason to take skeptical concerns about the practice of informal political representation seriously. Without adequate response, these dangers seem to counsel against the continued practice of informal political representation. The question before us, then, is this: How may IPRs permissibly undertake activities central to their roles without thereby harming or wronging those they represent? That is the question I answer in this book.<sup>58</sup>

To answer that question, we first need to answer more basic questions about informal political representation: What is an IPR, and how does someone become one? In what senses do IPRs represent us? What kinds of power do IPRs have and how do they come to have those powers?

In Part I, I tackle these foundational conceptual questions. I provide a general theory of informal political representation that both introduces the different features of the phenomenon and explains how those features fit together. From this general theory, we glean a few key insights: IPRs, are ubiquitous and, although neither elected nor selected through systematized procedures, are politically powerful. In some cases, however, they are also objectionably burdened by the demands of their roles.

In Chapter 1, "Audience Conferral," I provide a general analytical framework for understanding what IPRs are and how they come about—one that is conceptually clear and portable. Informal political representation is a species of a more general phenomenon, *informal representation*. An individual or group emerges as an informal representative when and because they are treated by an audience as speaking or acting for another individual or group in a context—call this *audience conferral*.<sup>59</sup> Characterizing the phenomenon of informal representation this way shows just how easy it is for a party to end up informally representing a group.

After setting out my understanding of the concept of *speaking for*, I distinguish informal political representation from formal political representa-

tion, provide a preliminary account of the phenomenon itself, explain audience conferral, and consider but reject some alternative accounts of IPR emergence. Above, I discussed the different types of groups that can be informally represented. In Chapter 1, I provide preliminary characterizations of the other two parties that make up the representative relationship: the audiences that confer on parties the status of IPR and, of course, the IPRs themselves.

While, in Chapter 1, I focus on how IPRs emerge, in Chapters 2 and 3, I turn my attention to their powers.

In Chapter 2, “Conscription and the Power to Influence,” I grapple with two considerations that, when taken together, have surprising normative implications for our theory of informal political representation.

The first consideration is that, sometimes, people are conscripted into the role of IPR. A party is conscripted just in case they are treated by some audience as speaking or acting for some group (*audience conferral*), but either do not know that they are so treated or do not want to be so treated—that is, the IPR is *unwitting* or *unwilling*. After providing a characterization of the widespread but unexamined phenomenon of IPR conscription, I consider why audiences conscript IPRs—both their motivations for seeking out parties to serve in this role at all and their reasons for treating some parties rather than others as speaking or acting on behalf of groups. I then discuss the duties that accrue to audiences by virtue of their power to conscript IPRs.

The second consideration is that, whether voluntary or conscripted, IPRs can have tremendous power to influence how those they represent are regarded by various audiences. Recall that the *power to influence* is the IPR’s capacity, through their statements or actions, to shape an audience’s doxastic attitudes about a represented group and its values, interests, or preferences. The power to influence emerges when and because an audience treats someone as speaking or acting on behalf of a group. This means that some IPRs have the power to influence the audiences they find themselves before even if (1) the IPR has not been authorized by the group for whom the audience treats them as speaking or acting and (2) the IPR themselves does not want to be or does not know they are in the position. A party may thus be an IPR for a group even when they are unwilling, unwitting, and not authorized by the represented group. I argue that when an IPR has the power to influence how at least one audience regards the represented

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