Accountability relations play a central role in the modern conception of democracy. To whom society should entrust the power to govern and how those entrusted should be held accountable are important questions in the context of the political participation theme. Accountability is intrinsically linked to such other concepts as representation and responsiveness. Those who are elected to represent and to govern are expected, by democratic theory, to be responsive to the needs and demands of their constituencies. The constituencies in their turn are envisioned to have the effective means to sanction representatives for their lack of responsiveness.

Although any conceptualizing of accountability and representation has at its core the notion that representing implies acting in the interest of the represented, positive political theory makes us aware of the plenitude of situations in which normatively desirable outcomes are not easily achievable. The central concern in the analytical approaches to representation is a problem of politicians’ self-interest. As one group of scholars put it, “politicians have goals, interests, and values of their own, and they know things and undertake actions that citizens cannot observe or can monitor only at a cost.” 1 This is a problem that has been conceptualized more formally in literature on principal-agent relations and the delegation of power, which explore numerous implications of conflict of interest between principals and agents. 2

There is no reason to believe that politicians that come from ethnic minority groups are less self-interested or somehow different in terms of structure of motivations from politicians of majority groups. This basic insight has largely escaped the

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attention of scholars who deal with issues of minority political participation. Writings in this research area avoided conceptualizing minority constituencies as principals and their elected representatives as agents and examining the implications of such conceptualization. The focus has been instead on discussing norms and mechanisms that can ensure minority group-based representation.

There are obvious reasons for such a focus in the literature. In many national contexts minority communities have long suffered from an inability to articulate and voice their distinct concerns. Providing them with opportunities to do so often requires introducing special mechanisms to ensure, among other things, their presence in local government, national legislature and executive. Getting minorities in positions of visibility and power has thus been a priority in normative thinking and applied research in this area. This priority has also been firmly grounded in a belief that descriptive representation matters a great deal and that ensuring such representation will make a difference for minority communities. 3

Now when substantial, albeit controversial, progress in recognizing minority rights and in designing special mechanisms for minority representation is achieved, it might be time to have a more analytical and critical approach to understanding the relationship between minority constituencies and their representatives. I take part in this refocused discussion of minority political participation by examining three types of issues. First, I consider the general issue of policy responsiveness of minority representatives. Second, I focus on patterns of recruitment and leadership inside minority organizations. Third, I return to the question of the design of rules and procedures that determines who gets into positions of leadership in minority communities. I examine these issues in the context of the legislative representation of ethnic minorities. Legislatures constitute a principal arena for deliberation and decision making in contemporary democratic polities, which justifies such choice of context for discussing accountability relations in minority communities.

I. Policy Responsiveness

The idea of mandates for policy, as one of scholars of representation notices, has been appealing to citizens, politicians, and democratic theorists. 4 By means of elections, citizens choose their representatives and provide them with a mandate to enact policies that citizens prefer. The nature of the mandate and the content of preferred policies depends on characteristics of the constituencies that elect representatives. How faithfully representatives execute policies favoured by their constituencies is frequently a matter of degree. As any attentive observer of politics can testify, organizations and their leaders do occasionally use their mandate to put into effect policies that are not favoured by their voters.

Monitoring is a critical device for ensuring the representatives’ compliance with the wishes of their constituencies. The practice of monitoring the performance of
