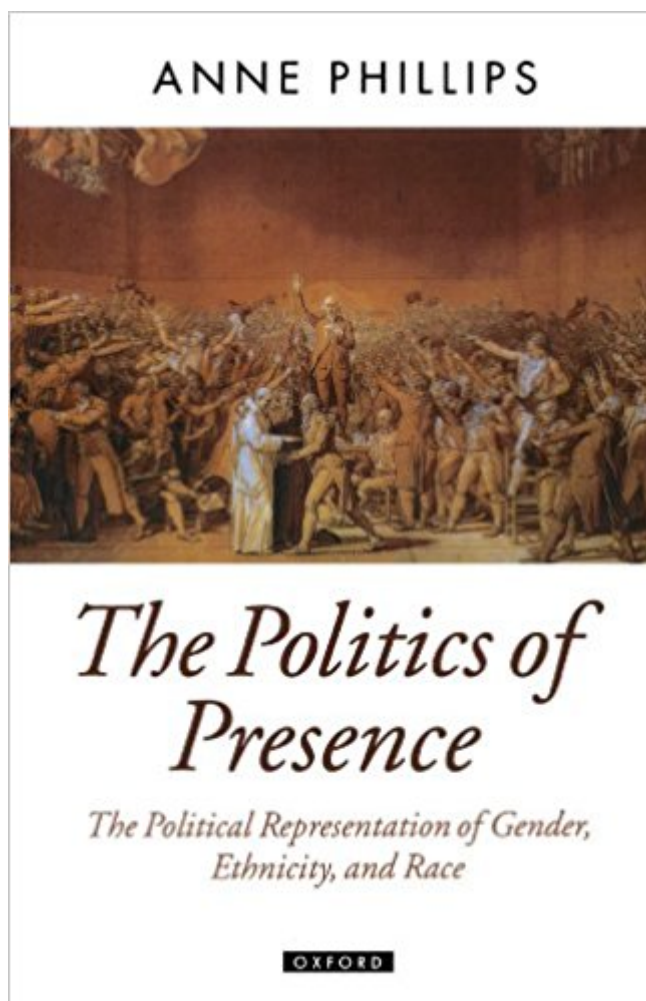


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# The Politics Of Presence (Oxford Political Theory)



## Synopsis

One of the most hotly-contested debates in contemporary democracy revolves around issues of political presence, and whether the fair representation of disadvantaged groups requires their presence in elected assemblies. Representation as currently understood derives its legitimacy from a politics of ideas, which considers accountability in relation to declared policies and programs, and makes it a matter of relative indifference who articulates political preferences or beliefs. What happens to the meaning of representation and accountability when we make the gender or ethnic composition of elected assemblies an additional area of concern? In this innovative contribution to the theory of representation--which draws upon debates about gender quotas in Europe, minority voting rights in the USA, and the multi-layered politics of inclusion in Canada--the author argues that the politics of ideas is an inadequate vehicle for dealing with political exclusion. But eschewing any essentialist grounding to group identity or group interest, she also argues against either/or choice between ideas and political presence. The work then combines with contemporary explorations of deliberative democracy to establish a different balance between accountability and autonomy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The strength of Phillip's book lies in its ability to theorize the political in an empirically and historically informed manner."--Choice  
"It would be a pity if the title of this book caused it to be overlooked, for there is much to stimulate thought and ideas within its pages."--Talking

Politics"Phillip's book is a useful discussion of such contemporary issues in democratic theory as equal representation, participation, group interest, and accountability"--Ethics"Anne Phillips has written an extraordinary book....She has blazed a trail worth following."--Law and Society Inquiry

Anne Phillips is Professor of Politics at London Guildhall University.

Phillips does a good job of raising some important and often ignored problems about representation and presence in her book. I originally read this for a feminist political theory class as a graduate student, and hope to go back and read it again. Her discussions of what representation means and looks like in contemporary US politics is excellent and brings home the problems of "representative" democracy when those elected to represent do not in fact do that, and perhaps, as many scholars have argued, never can. An excellent read for anyone interested in feminist scholarship, social equality issues, political representation and accountability in modern politics.

Purchased for a faculty member and I received no complaints.

The feminist book of the year.

Really enjoy this shopping experience. money well spent The product is really good and working well as described. Will definitely buy several more sets in the future! Love them and get compliments all the time. Great product, received it faster than anticipated, and enjoy it. Thank you

English writer Anne Phillips is among the best feminist political thinkers of our time. In *The Politics of Presence*, she develops a major issue present in some of her previous books, notably *Engendering Democracy* and *Democracy & Difference*: the shift in democratic thought, when the politics of ideas (where the identity of representatives is not a concern) is challenging by a politics of presence. Since Hanna Pitkin's famous attack on what she called "descriptive representation", in the sixties, political theorists usually see the search for typical representation—that is, the parliament as a microcosm or mirror of the whole society—as a minor task. The question was not "who" the representatives are, but "which interests" they defend. Enhancing their accountability was the way to improve democracy. This view was compatible with the hegemonic liberal affirmation of "equality before the law", regardless the individual's identity. And compatible, too, with Socialist analysis, both Marxist and social democrat, that saw political access as dependent on changes in social and

economic conditions. As Ms Phillips shows, this view was challenged by an alternative politics of presence, which emerged with the demands for the political inclusion of silenced or excluded groups, specially women and ethnic minorities. These groups don't judge "equality before the law" is enough; and they are not willing to wait for always-postponed structural changes. With such demands for political equality, they focalize on institutional mechanisms that could achieve more immediate change in their life's condition. Thus, political equality is now a crucial issue in political battles. However, this approach to democrat reform is not free of problems, and The Politics of Presence extensively discusses such problems. A mirror legislature gives no certainty about protecting minority's interests; accountability mechanisms can't be dispensed. And more, determining which social cleavages, among countless ones, deserve to be considered in order to promote fair representation is a controversial issue. The book studies a number of cases that illustrate some of these difficulties-electoral quotas for women in Europe, race-conscious districting in the USA, and Canadian politics, emphasizing the problems of Quebec and native population. Clearly written, full of intelligence and passion, The Politics of Presence is a valuable book to anyone who wants to think about contemporary challenges of democracy.

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