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Citation: Haack, Kirsten (2018) The UN Secretary-General, role expansion and narratives of representation in the 2016 campaign. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20 (4). pp. 898-912. ISSN 1369-1481

Published by: SAGE

URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118784706>  
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148118784706>>

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# **The UN Secretary-General, role expansion and narratives of representation in the 2016 campaign**

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*The contribution of bureaucratic actors, such as those of the UN Secretary-General, has been a focus in the study of individuals' contribution to international relations and the study of UN reform. In this context, role expansion has been a central concern. In January 2017 a new Secretary-General took office on the 38th floor of the United Nations, following a successful campaign to reform the selection process by increasing its transparency. Despite different campaign foci, campaign groups framed their claims for reform in the context of 'representation', which shaped expectations and understanding of the role and its authority. Expectations play a key role in role expansion beyond personality, leeway or institutional demand. This paper discusses the representation of states, gender and the people as referents for the SG's role, which corresponds to campaign claims regarding regional rotation, a woman Secretary-General and greater independence for the Secretary-General.*

Key words: United Nations, Secretary-General, selection, representation

The 2016 process to select a new United Nations Secretary-General (SG) marked a successful innovation in an institution often resistant to reform. The innovations, and the campaigns to achieve them raised questions about the future of the role and how its nature can be explained. According to the UN Charter, the SG is appointed by the General Assembly (GA) following recommendation from the Security Council (SC). This formula has proved ambiguous in practice as ‘recommendation’ turned into pre-selection, and ‘appointment’ turned into rubber-stamping candidates selected primarily by veto powers. Reform campaigners criticised the secrecy of the process and the back-room deals involved, which, they claimed, led to the appointment of compromise candidates.

In the early 1990s Urquhart and Childers (1990) had called for wide-ranging UN reforms, including the selection of the SG, and set out an agenda whose criteria would significantly influence the 2016 campaigns. Trying to avoid a failed attempt by the World Federalist Movement (WFM) in 2005-06 to instigate reform<sup>1</sup>, reformers seized the moment toward the latter part of Ban Ki-moon’s second term. The idea for reform had remained with several key individuals in New York based NGOs<sup>2</sup>, and was reinvigorated in 2014-15 by various campaign groups. Campaign groups worked strategically with key diplomats and UN groups, while creating global public awareness. With a receptive GA, groups such as Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) exerted pressure internally (Terlingen 2017). In September 2015 the GA commenced the selection process by adopting a resolution that called for an open process guided by the principles of transparency and inclusiveness, also explicitly inviting member states to propose women candidates (United Nations 2015). Thus, under the aegis of the GA and led by GA president Mogens Lykketoft (Denmark), significant changes were introduced: First, candidates were openly nominated by member states, submitting CVs and vision statements that were made publicly available. Secondly, member states interviewed candidates in ‘informal dialogues’, which were broadcast live on UNtv. Civil society was also given the opportunity to ask questions by submitting them online. Overall, thirteen candidates were nominated, and the Security Council started straw polls on 21 July. After five rounds of voting, António Guterres, former Prime Minister of Portugal (1995-2002) and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (2005-15), was selected by the Security Council and appointed by the General Assembly in October.

The process highlighted a number of important issues, such as the role of campaign groups and their collaboration with UN groups, the process of reform more generally, as well as the relationship between GA and SC, esp. the veto powers. Commentators revisited the

appointments of former SGs (Ravndal 2016, Bertrand 2016, Weiss and Carayannis 2017), the institutional context of the role and the selection process (Peterson 2016, Sievers 2016), the lack of role descriptors and selection guidance across the UN system (Benvenuto 2016) and outlined key priorities for the future SG (Ponzio and Schroeder 2016, Weiss and Carayannis 2017). Importantly, it led to renewed engagement with the nature of the role itself, which is marked by its brevity in the UN charter. However, little consideration has been given to how the events of 2016, the reformed process, and the ideas and expectations that have been raised as part of this campaign may influence the future of this role and therefore the SGs capability to exercise leadership.

Representation emerged as a key idea in the campaign process, shaping public discourse while providing justification for the reform itself. Despite differences in outlook and goals, all campaign groups used narratives of representation to shape public understanding of the role i.e. what it is, what the office-holder can and should do, and indeed what the role signifies. In so doing, campaign groups and their different proposals created potential for role expansion beyond the standard definition of ‘chief administrator’. This paper investigates the use and meaning of the idea of ‘representation’ in the selection campaign. It offers a timely intervention in research on the role of individuals in international relations/organisations, the debate on SG leadership and institutional reform. Specifically, it adds to research on role expansion by moving from the person or personality of the SG, and institutional demands as key drivers, to focus on externally generated expectations and discourses that shape the role. Following an analysis of how the role and how role expansion has been conceptualised, the paper draws on Pitkin’s (1967) model of representation, applying the concepts of descriptive and substantive representation to three claims of representation made in the selection process. These include the representation of states, gender and people, which are associated with different levels of SG authority and mirror calls for regional rotation, a woman SG and the call for transparency and independence.

### **Role expansion**

The events of the 2016 selection of the Secretary-General gave new impetus to research on the contribution of individuals (Bode 2015; Rosenau 2008; Emmerij, Jolly and Weiss 2003) and bureaucratic actors (Dijkstra 2016; Johnson 2014; Weinlich 2014; Biermann and Siebenhühner 2009) to international relations. Much of this research has focussed on the United Nations and specifically on the role of the Secretary-General (SG). Narrowly defined by the UN Charter as ‘chief administrator’ in Art. 97, the SG may bring to the attention of the Security Council any

threat to international security (Art. 99) and further contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes under Art. 33. The divergence between observed and defined action has attracted particular attention and has been summarised as role expansion (Kille and Scully 2003), a process that works within existing role parameters while challenging the same. According to the literature, role expansion is primarily determined by two factors: first, an enabling environment in which the role-holder fills a necessary gap in leadership to meet institutional and environmental demands in fulfilling global tasks (Ravndal 2017, Schroeder 2014), and, second, agents who either accommodate or challenge the constraints of the role (Kille 2006). While the former has been described in the context of principal-agent relationships in which the agent makes use of organisational slack and leeway (Hawkins et.al. 2006) or as norm entrepreneurs who use a variety of tools to shape organisational discourse and member states' understanding of global issues (Rushton 2008, Johnstone 2007); the latter has been conceptualised under the umbrella of executive leadership and leadership styles (Kille 2006).

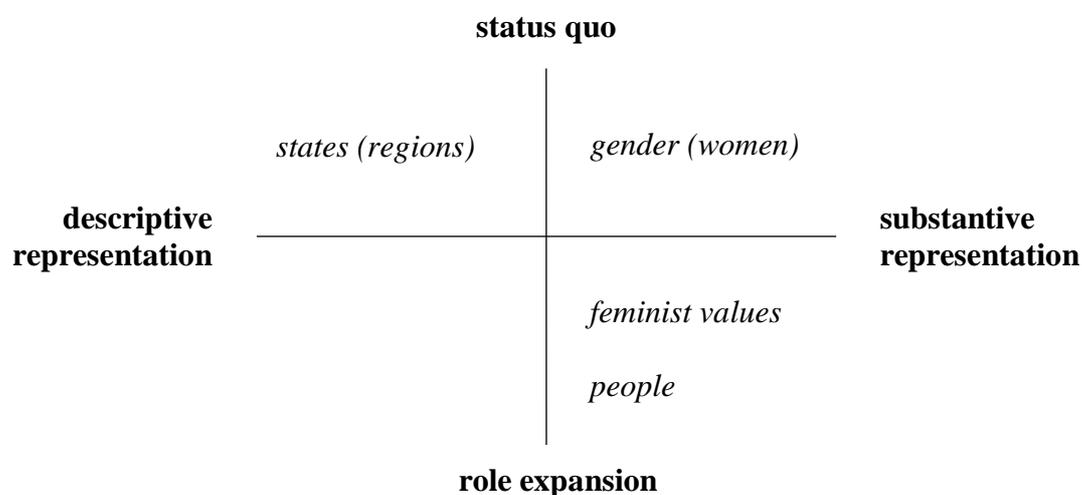
Thus, while research has shown that effective leadership can challenge and expand the boundaries of the role, the boundaries themselves and how they are set have received little attention. Boundaries are important insofar as the literature recognises, and history has shown, that agency can indeed be curtailed or withdrawn when member states consider the SG to be acting too far outside their expectations of what this boundary constitutes. The literature implies that the boundary is set where the SG acts against member states' interests (in particular the United States) or what they consider appropriate (Hawkins et.al. 2006). While so far only Boutros Boutros-Ghali has experienced the withdrawal of agency as he did not have his tenure extended beyond one term, Kofi Annan was equally put under pressure following his declaration that the Iraq war was 'illegal' and following his son's involvement in the Oil-for-Food programme. Given the difficulty of the task of defining acceptable boundaries and expectations for all 193 member states, the 2016 selection campaign offered a unique opportunity to investigate externally set demands or expectations of the role and its scope. Expectations set by civil society, here: narratives of representation, especially provided useful indicators as to how and where boundaries can be set in future. By framing the selection of the SG in the context of representation and thus creating a political relationship between the SG and something or someone to be represented, campaign groups suggested that the SG has a mandate to act. Such a mandate could justify role expansion by legitimising SG action outside the boundaries of 'chief administrator'.

According to Pitkin (1967), representation is the process of making visible what is invisible. In other words, by establishing a relationship between the represented and the

representative, it legitimises the presence of that which, or who, is represented. Although most commonly associated with institutionalised representation i.e. electoral democracy, representation takes place in a variety of ways. For example, representatives ‘stand for’ the represented by either resembling the represented in important aspects, such as gender, race or religion (descriptive representation), or representative may ‘act for’ their constituents by advancing their interests or policy preferences (substantive representation). Descriptive representation does not necessarily imply substantive representation, but can be achieved through presence alone. At the same time, a representative can achieve substantive representation for varying constituencies (Pitkin 1967).

In the campaign to select a new UN Secretary-General three narratives of representation were raised: 1) the representation of states, or regional representation, 2) the representation of women and gender equality, and 3) the representation of people. These narratives related to descriptive and substantive representation in different ways, but highlighted the claims of different constituencies and their place in the process of global governance. Campaign groups’ proposals have addressed both aspects of representation – ‘standing for’ and ‘acting for’ – yet have not addressed the extent to which reform is required. In the following I will investigate the tension between ‘standing for’ and ‘acting for’, and how these dimensions of representation are expressed in existing practices and campaign group proposals, based on interviews with campaign group leaders and an analysis of their agendas and activities. I will analyse the extent to which meaning generated by ‘representation’ may change the role. The figure below illustrates this relationship between representation and the potential for role expansion:

Figure 1: Representation claims and role expansion



While the representation of states, or regions, did not question the status quo, the representation of people implied significant role expansion. The question of representing gender, although apparently simple, contained considerable complexity due to competing feminist campaigns that placed them in different quadrants in figure 1. In the following, analysis moves from the top left corner across and then down, illustrating increasing degrees of role expansion.

### **Representing states: regional representation**

The first narrative of representation pertains to regional representation and signifies the recognition of the status quo more than any attempt at role expansion. The fact that the selection of António Guterres, a Portuguese national, ignored the principles of regional representation, shows that this form of representation and its significance needs to be revisited to be fully understood.

According to Cogan (2009), regional representation, along with the principles of sovereign equality and differential responsibilities, is a representation method applied to international organisations. Regional rotation has been applied to SG appointments after Trygve Lie's (Norway) and Dag Hammarskjöld's (Sweden) time in office. It is practised throughout the UN system, including hiring at professional grades. Initially one of several so-called 'gentlemen's agreements' at the UN that are practised but not always formalised, it has been recognised as important by the General Assembly in its 1997 resolution on UN reform, which states that "due regard shall continue to be given to regional rotation" in the selection process (A/RES/51/241). As UN membership expanded, calls for representation from regional groups became more urgent.

Today each region has been represented by at least two of their citizens in the role of SG, with the exception of the Eastern Europe group and the Latin America group. Trygve Lie (1946-52) and Dag Hammarskjöld (1953-1961) represented the Western Europe and Others group, U Thant (1961-1971) and Ban Ki-moon (2007-2016) represented the Asia-Pacific group. Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992-1996) and Kofi Annan (1997-2006) represented the Africa group.<sup>3</sup> Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (1982-1991) remains the only Latin American Secretary-General. Given this regional spread, the 2016 selection was considered by many to be the turn of the Eastern Europe group, which has not yet seen any representation in this role. The Eastern European claim for regional representation was a strong one given that US resistance during the Cold War prevented any appointments from this group into UN leadership roles. This applies across the UN system where thus far only two Eastern Europeans (Irina Bokova, Bulgaria, UNESCO 2009-2017, and Yury Fedotov, Russia, UNODC 2010- ) have led UN

agencies.<sup>4</sup> Overall nine out of thirteen SG candidates in 2016 were Eastern Europeans with Russia supporting the appointment of an Eastern European SG candidate, apparently favouring UNESCO Director-General Bulgarian Irina Bokova (Foster and Alexander 2016).

The practice of regional representation thus aims to achieve a form of descriptive representation in which each of the five regional groups are given the opportunity to fill a leadership position with a national of the region. Descriptive representation thus can mark “the extent to which an IO [international organisation] reflects the configuration of the international system within which it operates” (Rapkin et.al. 2016). Rapkin et.al. (2016) illustrate this with reference to the IMF where voting shares represent member states’ standing in the global economy, with the 24-member Executive Board comprising representatives of states’ shares: seven single chairs are filled by the largest stakeholders, the remaining seventeen are filled by aggregating votes into broadly defined regional groups. Their presence represents the equal participation of regional groups in the governance of the IMF and global finance.

Yet descriptive representation does not lead necessarily lead to substantive representation. Rapkin et.al. (2016) are clear that Executive Directors are not representatives in a substantive sense, but that they merely ‘stand for’ the groups that elected them. Similarly, analysing voting behaviour of regional group representatives in the Security Council, Lai and Lefler (2017) find that although regions do exhibit preference similarities, elected non-permanent members do not necessarily vote in line with preferences of their regions. Instead, they are more likely to vote in line with states of similar economic status. In the case of the SG, substantive representation is neither possible, nor desired. The representation of states is exercised at the moment of nomination and appointment, yet ceases once the appointee is in office, given the demands of bureaucratic neutrality. Art. 100(1) UN Charter states that “[i]n the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization.” Indeed, leaders of UN agencies who have shown preference for or prejudice against certain member states have undermined the institution and its reputation. This not only applied to cases such as WHO Director-General Hiroshi Nakajima (Japan), who was accused of financial mismanagement, cronyism and racism against African states, leaving member states disillusioned and staff with low morale (Freedman 1998), but also saw Ban Ki-moon criticised for surrounding himself with Korean nationals as his assistants (Lynch 2007).

Thus, the Secretary-General does not ‘stand for’ one state or group of states. Instead, selection following regional rotation principles represents the principle of sovereign equality of all member states, aggregated through their respective region, as each region is given the

opportunity to field a candidate. The practice of regional rotation reaffirms the participation of regions and their constituent states in UN politics, symbolising their legitimate participation in the process of global governance. Neutrality requires the candidate to become a global i.e. UN actor. Given the assumption that the SG is to be of a medium size power (Urquhart and Childers 1990), smaller states can thus see themselves as involved, recognised and indeed legitimated in or through the work of the UN. Therefore, campaign groups' claims that regional rotation is one of the key failures of the selection process and should not be followed so that 'the best' candidate could be found instead, challenged an important aspect of representation in UN politics. At the same time, the selection of Guterres selection highlights that key campaign proposals i.e. the transparency of the process and the selection of the 'best' candidate, prevailed over the status quo in procedural terms but maintained the status quo in relation to the scope of the role. Following this, the narrative of representing states does not imply any form of role expansion but remains firmly within the ambiguous limitations of the UN charter and the boundaries of leeway the office-holder is able to assume.

### **Representing gender**

The second narrative of representation reflected the demand for gender equality and the call to select a woman SG. Since 1986 the UN has been committed to raising the number of women in all professional and decision-making categories across the Secretariat, field posts and indeed the UN system, with a view to achieving gender equality by 2000. However, very few UN agencies have come close to achieving this goal. Indeed, the distribution of gender is highly uneven across the professional and decision-making levels, with some organisations exceeding parity in favour of women at higher professional levels but not at lower levels, and some organisations – like UN-WOMEN – employing overall more women than men. However, many agencies in the UN system – in particular technical agencies – remain male-dominated, as do the decision-making and executive levels. Since 1986 only twenty-one women have led UN agencies (Haack 2014).<sup>5</sup> The call for gender representation therefore responded to the fact that all eight UN Secretaries-General to date have been men.

The *Group of Friends in Favor of a Woman for Secretary-General of the United Nations* (hereafter: Group of Friends) circulated a letter to member states to support the selection of a woman in 2015 among member states. Outside the UN, a group of women academics, journalists and UN professionals formed the *Campaign to Elect a Women SG* (hereafter: She4SG) to “advocate for a woman [...] and make the selection of a woman *inevitable*” (She4SG 2015a, emphasis as in original). An early attempt by Ernesta Redi, a

Harvard Kennedy School Women's Leadership board member, to campaign for a woman SG under the banner of *SheUNited* stalled in late 2015 as other groups gained in prominence. With the campaign in full swing in 2016, two feminist groups intervened and sought to change the discourse: in February 2016 the *Women's Major Group* (WMG), a platform for stakeholders in sustainable development that channels NGO voices into the UN, launched a petition to appoint a woman and feminist SG. WMG was joined by the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (WILPF) in July 2016. Both challenged the (liberal) equality feminism promoted by the Groups of Friends and She4SG, and focussed on a more radical feminist agenda that sought to challenge existing practices and international order, with implications for role expansion for the SG.

The Group of Friends and She4SG challenged the status quo insofar as they promoted the descriptive representation of women by addressing the institutional and attitudinal hurdles that women face when trying to access leadership positions. For example, when confronted with the call for a woman SG, members of the Security Council expressed a commonly held assumption that the reason for women's absence in UN leadership roles was a shortage of qualified women<sup>6</sup>. To counter this claim and to achieve descriptive representation within the boundaries of the existing role, campaign groups set out to highlight and promote women with significant experience in politics and diplomacy. Both EqualityNow and She4SG compiled lists of suitable women in order to make, as She4SG insisted, the appointment of a woman 'inevitable'. While She4SG focussed on women in a range of roles, with a strong emphasis on women heads of state, heads of government and UN actors, EqualityNow chose to focus on women currently serving in the senior UN roles i.e. Assistant and Under-Secretaries-General. This mirrored previous selections as most Secretaries-General have emerged from national politics, and diplomatic or civil services, while most UN executive heads previously held political or diplomatic positions, followed by some form of deputising role to an UN executive head (REFERENCE REMOVED). Against convention to appoint executive heads *after* the completion of a political tenure in their home country, She4SG also included a number of currently serving women presidents, prime ministers and other ministers, as well as nationals of the P5.

By July 2016 seven of the thirteen candidates were women. Following the principle of regional rotation, four Eastern European women were nominated, including Irina Bokova (Bulgaria), Executive Director of UNESCO, Vesna Pusic (Croatia), former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, and Natalie Gherman (Moldova), also former Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, and acting prime minister, and Kristalina Georgieva (Bulgaria), EU

Commissioner. Former prime minister of New Zealand and UNDP Administrator Helen Clark, Argentinian foreign minister and former UN Under-Secretary-General for Field Support Susana Malcorra and Christiana Figueres (Costa Rica), Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change challenged Eastern Europe's claim for regional representation. Thus, the call for a woman SG and gender equality successfully changed women's visibility as well as attitudes towards gender as many member states raised the issue of gender equality in the informal dialogues, while male candidates committed themselves to the appointment of a woman Deputy-SG while also addressing gender equality across the Secretariat.

Descriptive representation dominated the campaign agenda of the Group of Friends and She4SG but was not limited to it. Indeed, figure 1 locates representative claims regarding gender in the top right and bottom right quadrant, recognising that campaign claims included claims for substantive representation. These differed significantly in scope between campaigners for a woman SG, thus creating significantly different expectations on the scope of the SG role. While the Group of Friends' call was a general one for equality, She4SG emphasised that its main purpose was to 'highlight talent'. She4SG sought not to promote any particular woman, instead highlighted 'moral leadership' as central to their cause, which would theoretically apply equally to both men and women. Yet, as the campaign progressed, She4SG acknowledged that leadership by a woman SG would offer more than just descriptive representation. Indeed, women's leadership often evokes certain assumptions and prejudices with which feminism has struggled for some time. Female leadership is often associated with peacefulness, cooperation and a social orientation, leading some to call for a feminisation of politics in order to introduce these feminine qualities into political environments that were seen as too masculinised, while others criticised these associations as essentialising women (see Steans 2013). She4SG pursued a strategy between these concerns by highlighting that women have specific 'gender knowledge' that may support UN work (She4SG 2015b). In other words, women could add 'women's perspectives' (Lovenduski 2005), rather than fully implementing women's interests or reshaping international relations through feminine qualities.

Linking 'gender knowledge' with action raised the question whether descriptive representation and its symbolic effect was sufficient for the representation of gender, yet She4SG refrained from calling for *effective* substantive representation. Instead this call was taken up by WMG and then WLIPF as they called for a woman *and* a feminist SG. Thus, they introduced – even at a late stage of the campaign – a significant new dimension to the narrative of representation. By insisting that the future SG had to be both a woman *and* a feminist SG,

WMG and WILPF highlighted that only women could fully and *authentically* represent women's interests. From this followed that a thick degree of substantive representation, compared to She4SG's limited 'gender knowledge': according to WMG, a feminist SG would be proactive in challenging the status quo and pursuing global structural change. In other words, a feminist SG would move beyond gender mainstreaming or campaigns such as UN-WOMEN's *HeforShe*, which WMF campaigners regarded as (neoliberal) window dressing that did not fundamentally change women's role and position in society.<sup>7</sup> WMG called for a feminist human rights agenda, a focus on all forms of inequality, environmental protection, inclusion of women and civil society at all levels (Women's Major Group 2016). WILPF went further in promoting a more radical feminist agenda that would see the UN's role and place in the world radically changed. This reform agenda was based on certain assumptions of what the UN currently does and can do. According to WILPF a progressive feminist SG

“must be willing and capable of challenging [...] patriarchal structures and power. This also means demilitarising and decorporatising the UN! This also means ending immunity for violations and complicity in crimes committed by UN personnel! This means protecting “the people” and the earth before geo-politics! This means investing in conflict prevention and resolution instead of its perpetuation through war profiteering!” (WILPF 2016).

The demands on the role of the SG here are significant in that the role-holder is expected not only to challenge patriarchal attitudes but to fundamentally challenge the conduct and interaction of member states, and their attitudes to international relations, thus exposing themselves to potential backlash from member states.

By focussing on descriptive representation, She4SG, the Group of Friends and EqualityNow did not seek to reframe the SG's scope for action, but sought to change the type of individual in office. Any substantive representation they envisaged would be within the boundaries set by the role; for example, just as Kofi Annan promoted people-centred politics, human development or human security as a way of reinterpreting UN activity, a woman SG might promote the gender and security agenda, raise question about the effects of member states' actions or UN activity on women and girls, or indeed reframe how member states understood women's needs in security, development and human rights. By contrast, the call for a feminist SG who implements a specific feminist agenda moved significantly beyond descriptive representation and the idea of adding a woman's perspective. In doing so, WMG and WILPF did not accept the role's status quo to the extent that others, such as She4SG, did.

Instead, they envisaged a proactive form of substantive representation that emphasised not just the pursuit of women's needs, issues or interests, but of specifically feminist agendas. To achieve this agenda, the SG would require different powers i.e. an expansion of the current role as chief administrator. Alternatively, it would require a SG who was able to use the force of their own personality to push the boundaries of the existing role to breaking point; for example, by ignoring member states' interests and cultures. This role expansion, most commonly expressed in a call for 'independence', was also addressed by The Elders and 1for7billion.

### **Representing people**

The third narrative of representation – people – bundles the activity of several campaign groups that ostensibly called for more transparency, procedural reform, a change in the length of term to be served by the SG, and independence. The representation of people served as both a rhetorical device and as a campaign device; for example, the largest campaign group chose as its name "1for7billion" deliberately to appeal to the public in order to create interest in what is generally a process far removed from public view.<sup>8</sup>

The idea of 'the people' as a UN constituency that is to be represented beyond the presence of their governments, i.e. UN member states, had gained traction in the 1990s. As an inter-governmental institution, the organisation's founders did not envisage a role or place for 'the people', even as civil society eventually carved out a place within the UN. Yet in the 1990s the charter's opening phrase – 'we the peoples' – began to define this new constituency as Boutros-Ghali (1995) and legal scholars (Franck 1992) started to articulate a role for democracy in the international. Boutros-Ghali pursued an agenda of democratisation, not only questioning sovereignty's absolute nature but also emphasising that the people and not states signified the Charter's 'true meaning' of 'we the peoples' (Boutros-Ghali 1995). Indeed, the preamble and its opening phrase had been a compromise of the 1945 negotiations in San Francisco as Field Marshall Smuts' standard legal phrase – 'the high contracting parties present' – was exchanged for the phrase 'we the peoples' in order to appeal to the people and guide them in the spirit of global peace (Russell 1958). The subsequent reference to 'our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco' at the end of the preamble sought to maintain the charter's character as a treaty between sovereign states, yet left an element of tension in the charter in how the UN constituency is defined (Haack 2011).

The literal interpretation of the preamble became even more prominent as Kofi Annan developed his people-centred politics, entitling both his Millennium Report as well as a

collection of his key speeches, published in 2014, with the phrase ‘We the peoples’. Annan emphasised that the end of the Cold War had led not only the emergence of a global agenda but also saw people increasingly looking to the UN to solve these issues. Annan was convinced that the UN had to reach out to the people and that the SG as a ‘public figure’ had a role to play in this as the SG represented the UN, its principles and ideals:

“the United Nations belongs not only to the governments of its Member States but above all to their peoples, in whose name it was founded. That means that it must become more democratic by ensuring that all the world’s peoples, and not only the richest and most powerful, have a voice and also that those who make the decisions genuinely represent their peoples and are accountable to them.” (Annan 2014, p. 11)

Annan thus stated that his ‘mission’ as SG was “built around a vision of bringing the organization closer to the peoples whom it was founded to serve, and to place each individual’s aspirations for security, development, health, and human rights at the center of everything we did” (Annan 2013). Indeed, while legal and political science analysis of the role tended to define the SG’s role conservatively by ultimately referring back to Art. 97 (chief administrator), the UN set out the role on its webpage in much broader terms:

“Equal parts diplomat and advocate, civil servant and CEO, the Secretary-General is a symbol of United Nations ideals and a spokesperson for the interests of the world’s peoples, in particular the poor and vulnerable among them. [...] The Secretary-General would fail if he did not take careful account of the concerns of Member States, but he must also uphold the values and moral authority of the United Nations, and *speak and act for peace*, even at the risk, from time to time, of challenging or disagreeing with those same Member States (emphasis added, United Nations 2014).

Calls for the representation of the people may not have formed part of formal campaign agendas as all campaign leaders insisted that they did not seek any form of charter change, yet calls for representation emerged within the wider discourse of the campaign. For example, 1for7billion inspired many on social media and at campaign events to make references to an SG who ‘represents us’. This was then reflected back by campaign groups, who articulated their demands in the language of representation, mandates and accountability on several occasions. Thus, despite apparently pursuing procedural reform demands, this potentially radical idea permeated campaign discourse and shone a different light on the demands campaign groups made on the role of the SG and its reform. Representing the ‘people’ at the UN, i.e. in

international politics, would require substantive representation. Thus, groups that campaigned for ‘the best’ candidate, a single term and greater independence for the SG, implied a degree of role expansion.

All campaign groups supported the reform of the selection process, with both 1for7billion and The Elders foregrounding procedural change over questions such as gender, even if individual members of both groups acknowledged that a woman SG would be desirable (Robinson 2015). Both groups called for public nominations of candidates by member states, the submission of CVs and mission statements, and public ‘debates’. With the support of Mogens Lykketoft, GA president 2015-16, and UN groups such as the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT), this reform moved the selection process from behind closed doors into the open, thereby enhancing transparency. This was intended to make it more difficult for the P5 to engage in back-room deals and horse-trading, and, with it, avoid the selection of a compromise candidate in favour of finding ‘the best’ candidate. Campaign groups criticised that candidates chosen through compromise deals behind closed doors often lacked the right kind of skills and temperament to fulfil the role successfully. This applied equally to Ban’s poor English language-skills as well as Boutros-Ghali’s assertive and forceful conduct. Instead, they claimed that an open and transparent selection process would provide opportunity for the ‘the best’ candidate to emerge. What defined ‘the best’ was largely left unspecified.

The absence of person criteria impedes the goal to find, indeed to define ‘the best’ candidate. The Charter does not set out any particular person specification for the SG. In fact, only a small number of international organisations, such as the World Bank and the IMF, set out general candidate criteria, such as a ‘track record of leadership, knowledge of the public sector and managerial experience’ (UNelections.org, undated). The clearest indicator of desired criteria for the role of SG was provided in a note of a 1945 US state department meeting in preparation for the San Francisco negotiations, which outlines criteria for a UN Secretary-General as: between 45 and 55 years old, fluent in both English and French, should not be from the USSR or France (or indeed any P5 state), and should be chosen based on unspecified (educational) qualifications. Outstanding qualifications (i.e. experience), a diplomatic or political background, impartiality and the ability to ‘escape the veto’ are considered essential (Urquhart and Childers 1990). These, Urquhart and Childers surmise, would most likely be found in a candidate from a small or middle power.

Further indication as to what is considered desirable (the ‘best’) can be gleaned from Hammar skjöld’s and Annan’s popularity. According to Kille (2006), both created and pursued

visions for the UN, leaving a legacy of policies and practices (e.g. peacekeeping, Millennium Development goals and human security) that promote global values. While, Kille identifies Hammarskjöld's leadership style as that of a 'visionary', i.e. a leader who may challenge the constraints of the role to the extent that they break the rules, Annan is identified as a strategist, i.e. a leader who accommodates such constraints and carefully manages their relationship to member states as well as pursuing their own vision. Following this, the ability to expand the confines of the role to promote global values and doing so in a non-confrontational manner, may be considered as essential criteria for 'the best' candidate. This appears particularly relevant, given that Annan was by far the least qualified candidate as he lacked the diplomatic and political experience common to all IO executive heads and indeed all SG candidates. Consequently, given the absence of formal criteria, campaign groups such as 1for7billion, The Elders and WMG linked the idea of 'the best' with more authority and independence. The context in which 'the best' was defined, illustrated how campaign groups framed their expectation of the SG's role:

“At the United Nations, it is the Secretary-General who has to uphold the interests and aspirations of all the world's peoples. This role requires leadership of the highest calibre.” (The Elders, 2016)

Further illustrating the expectation of what leadership by the SG should entail, the group 1for7billion used the language of 'mandate' to frame the role:

“A mandate to lead

A more open and inclusive selection process, that engages all Member States, could give future Secretaries-General a stronger mandate, which in turn would boost their *ability to mobilise support for, and drive forward, the UN's agenda*. A more inclusive process would help revitalise the UN, enhance its effectiveness and credibility, as well as reaffirm its global authority and popular appeal.

A mandate to act

A longer, single term of office would further strengthen the UN Secretary-General's role. It would provide future candidates with the required political space *to develop and implement a more independent, long-term and visionary agenda*. Removing the need to campaign for re-election and the constraints that this imposes would also give future Secretaries-General the leeway required to be *bolder in pushing for this agenda to be implemented*. (1for7billion, 2016, emphasis added).”

The scope of leadership and action required for to meet these demands, mirrored those made by WMG and WILPF, who called on the SG to implement feminist agendas and values. This envisaged change was to move considerably beyond general degrees of leeway commonly associated with the role. Indeed, it suggested that the SG was to become a critical actor with their own agenda, similar to Kille's (2006) visionary leader.

Moreover, while the submission of mission statements somehow implied that the SG has the ability to pursue an independent agenda, rather than merely administrating the affairs of the organisation, The Elders and 1for7billion highlighted that the SG should not be subject to the pressures of re-election and thus called for a single term of 5-7 years. Independence was framed in the context of standing up to the P5 and challenging unilateral action – reminiscent of Annan's response to the 2003 Iraq war, which he declared to be illegal. Thus, the 'best' candidate would be one who has the communication skills, diplomatic ability and leadership skills to enable them to challenge the P5 as the need arises – be that to defend UN charter values or the plight of the poorest and most vulnerable people.

In sum, calls to find 'the best' candidate ostensibly addressed role performance in the absence of role criteria, while references to the representation of people showed that in reality the SG is more than merely an administrator. While it is clear that he may not go as far as campaign groups may have desired, he may and indeed often does serve as an inspiration for both people and states in relation to UN values, defending and promoting global values, and even holding states and people to account. Indeed, this seems to be ever more pertinent in times of growing populism and anti-globalism.

## **Conclusion**

The 2016 SG selection process challenged traditions and appears to have been largely successful: While change to a single term was not achieved, and the SG turned out to be neither Eastern European nor a woman, the process was largely open and transparent. Even the results of the 'secret' Security Council balloting were quickly reported, and the person who had been assumed to be 'the best' candidate by many observers was selected. The process highlighted different interpretations of the role and its significance in global politics, expressed through the idea of representation.

While representation as linked to states should have supported the selection of an East European candidate, campaign groups did in fact undermine Eastern European's representation by disputing the relevance of the practice of regional rotation. The proposals to select a woman SG raised interesting questions: On the one hand, reform proposals to merely change the gender

of the SG were modest in scope but highlighted the issue of women's representation across the UN. On the other hand, the call for a feminist and woman SG challenged the scope of the SG's authority significantly, highlighting that the need to make visible and/or give voice to something through both presence and action, would change our understanding of the role. This was also evident in the case of the idea to represent people.

The idea of representing people recognised a new form of action for the SG – substantive representation. No longer representing states' equal participation through process or women's representation through presence, the SG in this context is seen as substantively representing people and global values. Moreover, he may do *so for* people and *against* member states, potentially creating new chains of accountability and legitimacy. The fact that this extensive form of representation has found comfortable association with far less significant changes, e.g. the introduction of standard job application procedures, illustrates how reform is framed and pursued, and the potential consequences on role expansion.

The events of 2016 and campaign groups' platforms thus helped in understanding the kind of expectations that may drive either the reform of the SG's role or enable the SG to claim a degree of legitimacy in pursuing action beyond what he has been explicitly tasked with by the GA or SC. This provided a reference point for analyses of SG leadership, as well as opportunity to conceptualise role expansion. While the SG performs the role on a daily basis ostensibly outside the confines of a 'chief administrator', the scope of legitimate expansion is ill-defined. Member states may have continued with established practices by ignoring regional representation and the representation of gender, they accepted the new, more transparent selection process. Selecting the SG in an open and transparent manner has certainly enhanced the legitimacy and therefore the accountability of the SG; however, whether António Guterres will draw on this to defend the legitimacy of his action in the future, e.g. where conflicts of interests with member states arise, remains to be seen. For the time being, the reformed selection process had a significant symbolic function, enhancing democracy between member states as well as the governance of the organisation. Future research may further investigate how such expectations are bundled and assumed by various stakeholders and constituencies, be that member states or civil society, and how these expectations are then transformed into wider reform agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Bill Pace, president of WFM-IGP, 17 June 2016; see also “Process of selection and appointment of the next Secretary-General: A call for ACTION”, panel discussion, 30 June 2015, available at UNtv <http://webtv.un.org/>. According to Pace, WFM-IGP build directly on Urquhart' and Childers' proposals; however, despite securing support from many major NGOs and several states (e.g. Canada), their efforts failed due to poor timing: they came too late in the official selection process and also coincided with the customary extension of Ban Ki-moon's tenure, thus obviating the need for a major campaign.

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<sup>2</sup> According to Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of UNA-UK and 1for7billion, Ian Martin, Executive Director of New York-based Security Council Report, who raised Urquhart's and Childer's ideas as he accepted the 2014 Sir Brian Urquhart Award for Distinguished Service to the UN. Samarasinghe then networked with other NGOs, such as WFM-IGP, to reinvigorate the campaign (interview with Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of UNA-UK and 1for7billion, 26 May 2016).

<sup>3</sup> This presented an anomaly as Boutros-Ghali did not see his term renewed after five years, while Kofi Annan, who was envisaged to complete a second term for the African regional group, saw his term renewed despite claims by the Eastern Europe group in 2001 that it was turn to hold the position (Sievers 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The Eastern European group is, of course, somewhat anachronistic as many of its member states are not only member states of the EU, but more importantly members of NATO.

<sup>5</sup> Since then two more have been appointed.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Jean Krasno, Chair of Campaign to Elect a Woman UN Secretary-General, 15 June 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Kate Lappin, Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development/Women's Major Group, 14 July 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Natalie Samarasinghe, Executive Director of UNA-UK and 1for7billion, 26 May 2016.