

## CHAPTER 10

### ***Empirical Research into Political Representation: Failing Democracy or Failing Models?***

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#### **Introduction**

The results of empirical research into the process of political representation are not very reassuring for stern believers in democratic government. Members of representative bodies are more inclined to follow their own conscience than to follow the lead of their constituency. The extent to which the electorate coerces legislative bodies to act according to its will is very limited, because most voters don't know the record of political parties and individual candidates, let alone whether they would vote according to their judgment on this record. In many respects, the political attitudes and opinions of members of representative bodies hardly reflect the attitudes and opinions of the electorate.

The organizing principle of most studies of representation is political linkage. This refers to "any means by which the political leaders act in accordance with the wants, needs, and demands of the public in making government policy" (Luttbeg 1974, 3). The different means or mechanisms by which this can be achieved are also referred to as models of representation. The most widely recognized models are the delegate model, the political parties model, and the consensus, or belief sharing, model. What these models have in common is that they refer to an empirical model of political representation that is deduced from a normative theory of democracy. Therefore, the purpose of most studies of political representation, is *not* to develop a causal model of political representation that can explain as much as possible of the empirical reality of the process of political representation, but to assess to what extent political reality is consistent with the normative ideal. Therefore, by criticizing models of political representation because of their poor explanatory power, one would be missing the point. A more logical interpretation of a poor fit of models of political representation would be that there is a wide discrepancy between the normative ideal and empirical reality, and therefore, that there is something wrong with representative democracy.

However, this is only a legitimate conclusion when the model of political

representation involved is an impeccable translation of a viable normative theory of political representation. In this paper, I will try to evaluate the delegate model and the political parties model from this perspective. The consensus, or belief sharing, model will only be referred to in the context of the political parties model.

By accepting Luttbeg's definition of political linkage as the essential issue in the study of political representation, one has implicitly accepted a populist view on representative democracy (see also Dahl 1956). According to this definition "the policies passed by government must reflect both the preferences of the governed and, most desirably, the public's interest" (Luttbeg 1984, 1). In this view, a representative democracy is only "a sorry substitute for the real thing" (Dahl 1982, 13), whereas the "real thing" is a direct democracy. Therefore, the ideal of a representative democracy is the identity between the will of the people and government policy. Ideally, parliament should make the decisions that the people themselves would have made had they been able to decide themselves.

However, one should be aware of the fact that this view on representative democracy is not the only legitimate one. In the liberal theory of democracy, there is a division of labor between voters and their representatives that yields a less rigid view of the relationship between the opinions of the voters and the behavior of their representatives (Herzog 1989; Kielmansegg 1988; Riker 1982).

### **The Mandate-Independence Controversy: Spellbound by Edmund Burke**

The most famous ideal types of representation are the two sides of the mandate-independence controversy: should deputies act according to the will of their constituencies, or according to their own mature judgment? The intellectual source of this controversy is Edmund Burke's famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, and in particular this quote:

Parliament is not a *congress* of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest, that of the whole—where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. (as quoted in Birch 1972, 39)

I'm not sure when Burke's thoughts began to dominate political representation research, but I suppose it was in 1959, when Eulau and his associates published

		Delegate	Trustee
Focus	District	A	B
	Nation	C	D

Fig. 1. Style and focus of the representative's role

"The Role of the Representative: Some Empirical Observations on the Theory of Edmund Burke." Much more than Burke himself, Eulau et al. made a distinction between two variables: the *focus* and the *style* of political representation. These two perspectives can be presented simply (see fig. 1). The figure does not exhaust all possibilities mentioned by Eulau et al. There is a third role conception with regard to the style of representation (*politico*), and the focus of representation can logically refer to an almost infinite number of entities. But figure 1 is sufficient as a frame of reference to illustrate Burke's conception of political representation and its persistent influence on discussions about political representation.

The focus of representation refers to the interest representatives must defend: local interests of their constituencies, or those of the *one* nation. Burke's position is clear: he chooses for the national interest. The style of representation refers to the question of whether representatives should act as agents who take instructions from their constituents, or act according to their own "mature judgement." Burke chooses for the latter role conception. Therefore, Burke's position is represented by cell D in figure 1.<sup>1</sup> The conception he opposes is in cell A: the role conception of deputies who defend the *interests of their districts* according to the *instructions* from their constituencies. The two logically remaining possibilities are those of deputies who defend the interests of their constituencies without following the instructions from their constituents (B) and deputies who defend the general interest, but according to the views of their constituents (C).

Only the role conception of a delegate (cells A and C) can be considered as a model of linkage. A pure Burkean role conception of deputies, who think that the will of their constituents should not be decisive for their behavior, cannot, by definition, be an instrument to implement the people's will. This does not necessarily mean that such deputies do not, in reality, express the will of their constituents. It only means that their role conception in this respect is irrelevant, because it cannot explain a possible correlation between their roll call behavior and their districts' will.

It is my feeling that the scientific interest in the mandate-independence

controversy is inversely proportional to its relevance in a modern representative democracy, in particular in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe. It is hard to see how the role conception of an instructed delegate can be reconciled with the mechanisms of modern parliamentary democracy.

One might even argue that it was already becoming obsolete in Burke's days. The idea of instructed delegates, taking their instructions from their districts, comes from another time, with different ideas about the role of the state. Political theories are, more often than not, formulated after a certain political practice. Theories of political representation are no exception to this rule. Modern parliaments descend from a practice of representation that has little to do with modern mass democracy. The institutions that preceded modern parliaments, and the first stage in the history of representative government, began in several European kingdoms in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when representatives of the different estates or communities within society were invited to give consent to measures by the king, in particular, measures of taxation. These institutions emerged in feudal societies where rights, powers, and privileges depended on the ownership of land. Therefore, they are a heritage of feudalism, in which the power of the king was ultimately limited and very much dependent upon the consent and the financial support of his vassals, who were reigning in their own estates. These early representative bodies were formed by the representatives of the different regions (however defined) of the country. They were there less to deliberate on national policy than to defend the local interests vis-à-vis the king. They were representatives just as a diplomat is a representative of his country. It is also clear that the first task of a diplomat is to defend the interests of his country. An important function of parliament was also the possibility and the duty of the members to present the grievances of their constituents in parliament. As such, parliament was a part of the judicial system. No principal change in the theory of representation was needed, as long as political representatives could be viewed as agents, sent to the national parliament by the estates or communities within society to give or withhold their consent to measures of taxation or legislation proposed by the executive (Birch 1972, 24–37).

However, the development of the relationship between king and parliament, especially in Britain, made this theory of representation gradually obsolete. The more parliament succeeded in placing the sovereignty of parliament above that of the king, the less parliament became the body of agents of district interests opposite the king. The more parliament became the center of power, the more responsible it became for the national interest, and the less welcome pure geographical interests became. In Britain, the Tory attitude in the eighteenth century "was the traditional one that the function of MP's was to represent local interests and to seek redress for particular grievances, it being assumed that the king and his ministers had the main responsibility for inter-

preting the national interest. In contrast, Whig spokesmen insisted that parliament was a deliberative body, representing the whole nation, whose decisions should be more than a mere aggregate of sectional demands" (Birch 1972, 38).

Therefore, Edmund Burke was following in a long tradition when he made his famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774. His conception was nothing less than the logical requirement of a modern nation state. And yet, it would be a surprising thought to consider Edmund Burke as the father of modern democracy. Of course, he was not. But even a pure populist view of democracy does not necessarily lead to a different conclusion. The radical Rousseauistic view on democracy that was dominant during a short period of the French Revolution was extremely hostile to the possible influence of regional interests in the national assembly. In this view, the general interest and the will of the people are indivisible, and can most certainly not be considered as the resultant of different interests. Accordingly, the new constitutions on the European continent demanded of members of parliament that they represent the general interest, and forbade them to take instructions from anybody. Therefore, it is at least disputable to argue that a Burkean role conception can hardly be considered democratic, whereas the role conception of an instructed delegate would portray the real democrat (Farah 1980, 251).

The objections against the instructed delegate model, therefore, can hardly be seen as an infringement of modern democracy. It is fairer to say that it prepared the road for modern democracy. The idea of representing geographically defined collectivities to the throne had to yield to a modern conception of popular rule, where general individual enfranchisement enabled individual citizens to participate in the rule of the nation.

The argument so far can be summarized on the basis of figure 1. The role conception of an instructed delegate is to be found in the first column. Cell A represents the role conception of deputies who defend the interests of their constituencies and, at the same time, follow the will of their constituents in doing so. I have argued that this combination of roles portrays a conception of representative government that is completely obsolete. The representatives' role is no longer to defend the interests of their local districts with central government, but to participate in the national policy-making and legislative process. A more differentiated conclusion might be that the task of members of parliament to defend local interests, acting as delegates or as trustees, has become marginal, compared to their role in general policy making, where *specific* local interests are hardly at issue.

But once one accepts the argument that representatives should serve the general interest of the nation, rather than the interests of their constituents, how can one at the same time persist in a delegate role with respect to one's own constituency? This role conception means that one is willing to serve the general interest, but is guided by the vision on this of one's own constituency.

For Burke, this was undoubtedly a strange position. Living in the age of the enlightenment, he believed in a parliament as “a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest, that of the whole—where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole” (as quoted in Birch 1972, 39). In his view, parliamentary debate was an essential stage in parliamentary decision making among representatives who were free to act according to their “own mature judgment.” Therefore, he rejected a system “in which the determination precedes the discussion; in which one set of men deliberate, and another decides; and where those who form the conclusion are perhaps three hundred miles distant from those who hear the arguments” (as quoted in Pitkin 1967, 147).

Of course, Burke was not the greatest friend of populist democracy. But, as argued above, even from the point of view of populist democracy, the instructed delegate model is not the most logical alternative in a modern representative democracy. Once one accepts that the major content of a modern conception of political representation refers to matters of general policy, the fruitfulness of an approach of political representation in which the representation of geographical districts is essential becomes very doubtful. Purely regional issues have, over the past century, undergone a secular decline in intensity through the progressive nationalization of most political controversies.

In modern states, the lines of political dispute cut across purely geographic boundaries (Converse and Pierce 1986, 517–18). There are few reasons to believe that people living within the same district will have common views on matters of general policy such as “censorship, capital punishment or the merits of the divorce laws” (Birch 1972, 89). Electoral districts tend to be “so diverse in the kinds of values and beliefs held, that whatever measures of central tendency are used to classify a district are more likely to conceal than to reveal its real character” (Eulau and Wahlke 1979, 115–16). Policy preferences tend to be related to interests and interest groups that must, of necessity, cut across a purely geographically defined division (Weissberg 1978, 537). In these circumstances, it is difficult to see how a single deputy would be able to act according to *the* district sentiment. Therefore, if the purpose of representative democracy is to translate the policy views of the electorate into public policy, it is very dubious whether one should lay such an emphasis on the relationship between individual members of parliament and their constituencies. The modern mechanisms to express different views on matters of national policy are political parties, not individual deputies. By focusing on the relationship between individual deputies and their districts, one tends to neglect a major element in modern representative democracy—that is, the overriding importance of political parties and interest groups.

Summarizing, there are three reasons to doubt whether the delegate model, in the sense of an individual relationship between members of parlia-

ment and their districts, is consistent with the normative view underlying a modern conception of representative democracy. First, it is contradictory to the dominant Burkean view of political representation that is inserted in the constitution of most continental parliamentary democracies. Second, modern politics are dominated by national controversies on which electoral districts tend to be heterogeneous. Third, it neglects the overwhelming importance of political parties in modern representative democracy.

This does not necessarily mean that it should fail as an empirical model of representation. It only means that a possible failure as an empirical model cannot easily be interpreted as a failure of representative democracy. In the next section, it will be seen to what extent the model is fruitful as an empirical model of political representation in comparative research.

### **The Delegate Model as a Model of Linkage**

The mandate-independence controversy has been introduced into empirical research by Eulau and Wahlke (see above). But its prominent position in the comparative research on political representation is due to the fact that it is incorporated in the Miller-Stokes model that was introduced in the 1960s (Miller and Stokes 1963; Stokes and Miller 1962; Miller 1964). This model was the source of inspiration for a major comparative research project that was initiated by Warren E. Miller of the University of Michigan in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Book-length reports were published on the studies in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and West Germany (Barnes 1977; Converse and Pierce 1986; Farah 1980; Holmberg 1974; Thomassen 1976).

Miller and Stokes presented their model as a simple, but ingenious, causal scheme (see fig. 2). It is an ingenious scheme because this paradigm makes it possible to test the empirical validity of the two sides of the mandate-independence controversy. The lower path of the model (ACD) presents deputies who are willing to behave according to their districts' will. This role conception is only an effective instrument to enact the will of the district when their perception is at least correlated with the actual will (AC). Above, it has been argued that a pure Burkean role conception of deputies, who think that the will of their constituents should not be decisive for their behavior, cannot, by definition, be an instrument to implement the people's will. However, this does not necessarily mean that such a deputy does not, in reality, express the will of his constituents. It only means that the role conception, in this respect, is irrelevant, because whether the deputy concerned will vote according to his district's will or not depends on the correlation between his own opinion and the district's will (AB). However, the explanation of such a correlation lies outside the mandate model, because in these circumstances, the deputy is a representative *malgré lui* (Converse and Pierce 1986, 502).

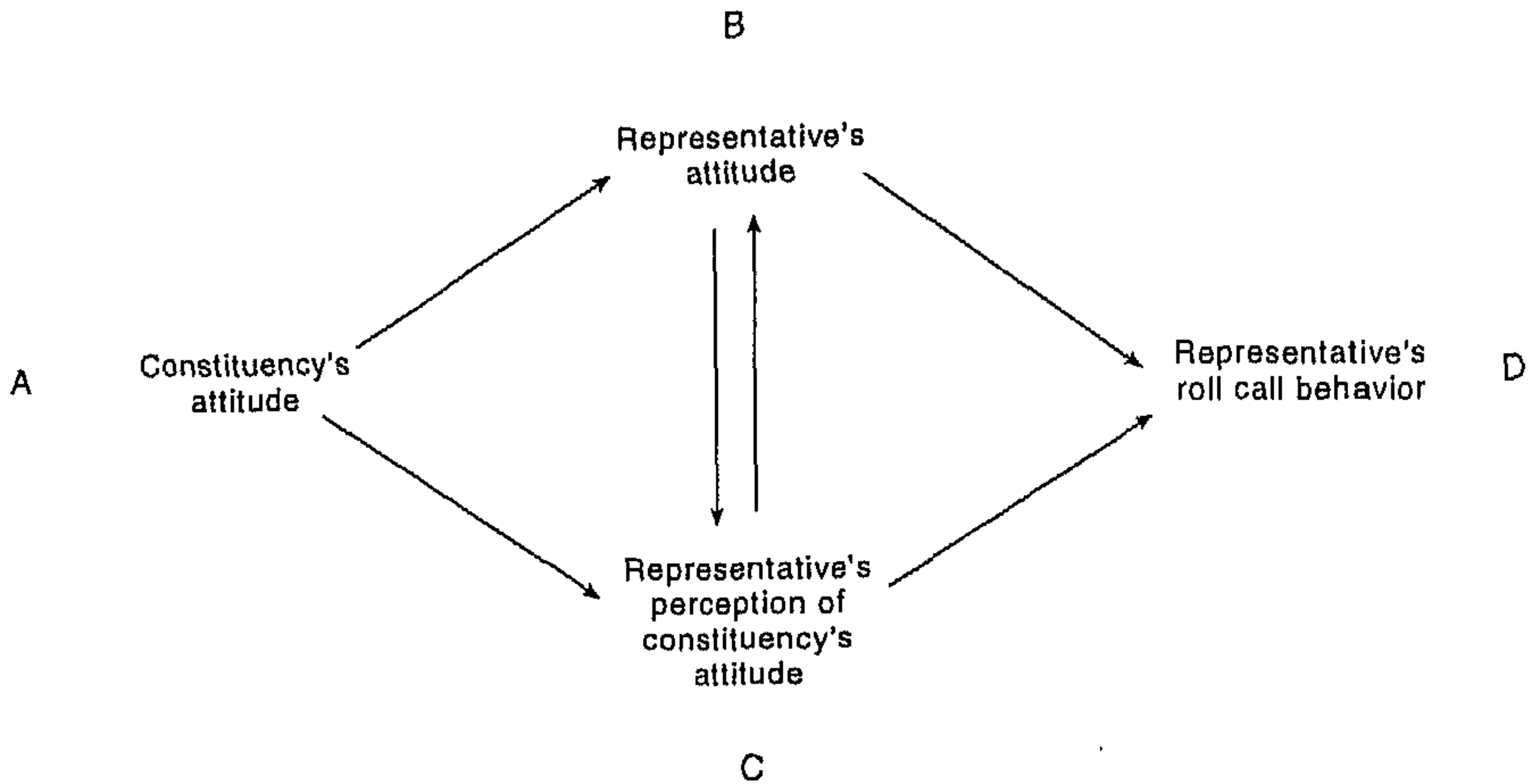


Fig. 2. Connections between a constituency's attitude and its representative's roll call behavior. (Adapted from Miller and Stokes, *o.c.*, 361.)

Miller and Stokes report that the results of their analysis are different for different policy domains. In the domain of foreign policy, there was hardly a correlation between the roll call behavior of the deputies and their districts' will. In the case of social welfare and civil rights, there was a substantial correlation between voters' opinions and the roll call behavior of their representatives. The explanation in these two cases was different, however. In the case of social welfare, influence ran via the upper path of the model, whereas in the case of civil rights, the lower path was involved. Miller and Stokes conclude that it would be wrong to choose just one model of representation. The strength of the different models depends on the kind of issue. In the case of foreign policy, members of the House themselves have hardly enough information to make a sound judgment, let alone allow their constituency to judge them on their record on these issues. The situation with respect to the civil rights issue was completely different. Representatives from the southern states, in particular, could not afford to take a wrong stand on this issue, on pain of an electoral defeat (Miller and Stokes 1963, 55).

Miller and Stokes' pioneering study was followed by a great number of publications challenging or refining the initial approach. A large part of this literature is devoted to methodological problems, such as the use of a correlation coefficient as a measure of congruence (Achen 1977, 1978) and the problem of small sample size within congressional districts (Cnudde and McCrone 1966; Erikson 1978). Several authors have tried to develop a more refined model to explain roll call votes by introducing possible explanatory factors, like the relative importance of constituency characteristics versus party mem-



bership (Page et al. 1984), the accuracy of congressional perceptions of constituency views (Clausen 1977; Friesema and Hedlund 1974; Hedlund and Friesema 1972), and role orientations (Friesema and Hedlund 1974; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979).

However diverse these different approaches are, they have one thing in common: the conceptualization of the representational relationship as dyadic (Hurley 1982). A notable exception to this rule is Weissberg's challenge of the dyadic perspective. He argues that, according to an equally valid tradition, the central question should be "whether Congress as an institution represented the American people, not whether each member of Congress represented his or her particular district" (Weissberg 1978, 535). Weissberg's approach has not gathered much of a following in the United States. In general, the dyadic perspective of the Miller-Stokes model, as such, has hardly been disputed.

Therefore, it is no wonder that this model became the source of inspiration for a number of studies in different countries. In some of these studies, however, it became immediately clear that the Miller-Stokes model was not fully applicable. Barnes, in his study on representation in Italy, decided against a precise replication of the Miller-Stokes design, mainly for two reasons: first, because of Italy's system of proportional representation; and second, because of the overriding importance of political parties in explaining deputies' political behavior. Because of the fact that on most votes almost all deputies accept party discipline, it hardly made sense to study roll call votes as a dependent variable. It made even less sense because roll call voting is secret when a substantial minority requests it. As a consequence, most of the important and controversial votes are secret. Members sometimes vote against their parties on these ballots, but individual deviations cannot be documented. Italian members of parliament are elected in multimember districts. However, Barnes found that constituency explained very little of the variation in representatives' opinions, once political party was taken into account. Party differences, rather than constituency differences, could explain the impressively strong relationship between the opinions of elites and masses (Barnes 1977). Therefore, one can conclude that implementation of the Miller-Stokes model in the Italian context was neither feasible nor fruitful.

For more or less similar reasons, the Miller-Stokes model has never been applied in the Dutch and Swedish studies. In the Netherlands, use of the model was out of the question because of the electoral system of proportional representation, which uses the whole country as one single constituency. Members of parliament are elected according to a list system and have no special relationship with a particular district (Thomassen 1976). In Sweden, it was decided in advance that the Miller-Stokes model was hardly applicable, because of the overwhelming influence of party compared to constituency (Holmberg 1974, 1989).

In the two remaining countries, France and West Germany, the full Miller-

Stokes model was applied by Converse and Pierce, and Farah, respectively. The difficulties that had to be met in these two studies illustrate, in addition to the theoretical considerations above, the limited feasibility of the delegate model, or of any model based on the relationship of individual members of parliament and their constituencies, in the context of a parliamentary system. In addition to the heterogeneity of geographically defined districts in any modern state, the two major problems are the dominance of party discipline and the role conceptions of members of parliament, topics to which I shall now turn.

### **The Problem of Party Discipline**

The dependent variable in the Miller-Stokes model is the roll call vote of the individual deputy. A first requirement for the fruitfulness of the model is that there is something to be explained, that is to say, that there is a certain amount of variance in the dependent variable that can be measured. In the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe, contrary to the United States, it is very questionable whether much variance will be left after political party membership has been taken into account. As Converse and Pierce correctly observe, “substantial party discipline in voting is a standard feature of most of the world’s legislative bodies, and therefore the U.S. Congress, with its relatively weak party discipline, is more to be remarked upon than the French situation” (Converse and Pierce 1986, 552). Knowing the strength of party discipline in European legislatures is a major a priori reason for being somewhat doubtful about the fruitfulness of the Miller-Stokes model. Therefore, it is not much of a surprise that the measurement of individual roll call behavior was very difficult, if not impossible, both in France and in Germany.

In France, in the time period of the study, between the beginning of the Third Legislature in May 1967 and the termination of the Fourth Legislature in December 1972, in more than 96 percent of all roll call votes, there was no substantive defection in the roll call vote from the party position (Converse and Pierce 1986, 552–54). This means, of course, that in all those cases, knowledge of a deputy’s district does not add anything to the explanation of his roll call behavior, once we have established his party group membership. Therefore, it seems to be a legitimate conclusion that direct constituency influence has only a marginal impact above the influence of political parties. This, of course, does not mean that in all other cases deputies would be deviating from their district’s opinion. Insofar as a deputy votes according to his party line, and the majority of the district agrees with that line, he acts according to the will of at least the majority of the district, without any deliberate act. However, if that is the case, it only confirms the general point to be made—that in cases of general policy, it is ideology and political parties that count first, and districts only second.

In Germany, it was even more difficult to use individual roll call votes as a dependent variable. Farah observes that in Germany “there are three kinds of roll-call votes: the secret ballot, used only in cases of elections of parliamentary officials; the show-of-hands ballot, the most common form of voting; and *namentliche Abstimmungen*, the only vote which has the deputy’s name affixed to it. For the purpose of testing the Miller-Stokes model of representation the latter voting form is the only one that is directly applicable because it is the only one that can be linked to the district” (Farah 1980, 148).

However, during the sixth session of the Bundestag, the period of Farah’s study, no *namentliche Abstimmungen* were recorded. This made it impossible to distinguish the actions of the individual MPs from that of their party. Therefore, Farah draws the obvious conclusion: “At this stage district-level representation loses its meaning” (Farah 1980, 218). To solve the problem that individual roll call votes were not registered, she decided to construct a surrogate measure for the roll call vote. Because most issues are party specific, it was decided to treat the roll call voting of the elites as party specific. All CDU members were assigned a score of “0,” and the SPD members a score of “1.” The FDP elites were given a score midway between the two other parties, “.5” (Farah 1980, 148–52). Because of this procedure, individual deviations from the party’s position are, by definition, impossible. In the case of the French study, there was at least a theoretical possibility of a district’s influence over and above the parties’ positions in about 4 percent of all votes. In the German case, even this marginal influence was, by definition, impossible.

Therefore, as far as a constituency influence can be measured, this is nothing more than the correlation between district sentiments and the positions taken in parliament by the party whose candidate was chosen in a particular district. A positive correlation indicates that CDU-oriented districts tend to agree more with CDU policy than SPD-oriented districts. This is not to say that such correlations tend to be high by definition. Quite the contrary, both the French and the German study prove that this is not the case at all. In the German case, there is no trace of such a correlation. Farah, therefore, concludes that “the mandate version of representation does not seem to be operative in Germany” (Farah 1980, 182). At the same time, she is puzzled by the findings that emerge with respect to the responsible party model. “On the one hand party voting dominates the legislative process while on the other hand there is nothing in our initial findings to suggest that the German parties act in an accountable or responsible way vis-à-vis the district. The concept of the responsible party system, after all, assumes that there is at least some basic level of congruence between voter attitude and deputy behavior. Our results indicate that there is essentially no relationship between these two terms” (Farah 1980, 185).

A similar comment is made by Converse and Pierce. District positions on

specific issues have hardly any predictive meaning for roll call behavior in France. However, the model seems to be saved by the fact that there is a substantial correlation between left-right position of districts and roll call behavior.

The authors explain this “ironic” fact by the supposition that, on the one hand, relative to judgments about district sentiments on specific issues, the perceptions of left-right district coloration are heavily constrained by reality, while, on the other hand, “the deputy is also more like his district, seemingly because elections winnow along left-right lines much more clearly than they do along lines of more specific issues” (Converse and Pierce 1980, 719). I cannot think of any better explanation. But is not the very fact that in both cases the left-right position is much more important than the position on specific issues another indication of the overriding importance of national conflict dimensions instead of district-specific factors? Does not the dominant influence of the left-right dimension simply mean that left-oriented people vote for candidates of left parties and that, therefore, districts with a majority of left-oriented voters will elect a candidate of a left party?

Farah finally finds that, as far as there is any congruence between district sentiments and roll call behavior, it is between partisan supporters and the roll call behavior of their party. She then concludes that this congruence is primarily caused by the fact that citizens are inclined to identify with a party label and, by their votes, exert some control over the actions of the political parties. Finally, she rightly concludes that, in this instance, the representational relationship is not linked to a particular geographical area, but is defined in terms of a national constituency (Farah 1980, 212).

This is precisely the point. Once one takes the high level of party discipline as given, a completely different kind of model, the responsible party model, in which, not trusteeship, but rather a delegate role with respect to party, is an essential characteristic, seems to be more indicated. This is not to say that the Responsible Party Model is a valid model of political representation. This is still to be seen, but at least in the context of the Western European parliamentary democracies, with their high degree of party discipline, it has more a priori validity than any model that is based on the relationship between individual deputies and their districts.

### **The Problem of Role Conceptions**

A second reason to be somewhat skeptical about the fruitfulness of the Miller-Stokes model is the available empirical evidence with respect to role conceptions of members of parliament. The lower path of the Miller-Stokes model assumes an influence of constituencies on deputies' roll call behavior by way of their perception of the district's will. Two conditions have to be met for this

part of the model to work. First, deputies must behave in accordance with their perception of the district's will, and second, this perception must be correct. If both conditions are met, at least the data are consistent with an instructed delegate model. However, the explanation of the correspondence between a deputy's behavior and his district's sentiment is by way of his role conception, the conception of an instructed delegate. If such a role conception is not present, it is hard to see how this explanation can be maintained.<sup>2</sup>

The conclusion of all empirical research of role conceptions that I know of is unambiguous. Members of parliament who consider themselves as instructed delegates of their constituents or voters are a small minority. The verdict of Converse and Pierce, after having compared data from France, the United States, and the Netherlands, is perfectly clear: "The only thing the three legislatures have in common is that their members appear to give rather short shrift in their legislative decision making to the majority opinion of voters in their districts" (Converse and Pierce 1986, 675). In Germany, only 3 percent of the members of the Bundestag regarded themselves as instructed delegates (Farah 1980, 238). Above, it has been argued that in a European context, these results are not surprising. In most continental European countries, a Burkean role conception is demanded by the constitution. But the essential message is that the available empirical evidence does not support the hypothesis that role conceptions belong to the "means by which political leaders act in accordance with the wants, needs and demands of the public in making government policy" (Luttbeg 1974, 3).

However, the poor explanatory power of the Miller-Stokes model, and of the delegate model in particular, is not a sufficient reason to argue that it is not a fruitful approach to study the process of political representation. The explicit objective of the model is to assess to what extent political reality is consistent with the normative theory of political representation. If it is not consistent, the explanation might be that the process of political representation is less democratic than it should be. However, such a conclusion is only justified if the normative theory of political representation on which the model is based is beyond dispute. I have argued that it is not. The instructed delegate model can hardly be regarded as a viable theory of representative democracy in the context of the parliamentary democracies in Western Europe. In the United States, the mandate-independence controversy is not irrelevant. In a presidential system, the president has his own electoral mandate. It is not vitally important that he is supported by a majority in parliament. Therefore, party discipline can be lenient and individual members of Congress can be more sensitive to the feelings of their home district. However, in a parliamentary system, the executive has no other basis than its majority in parliament. This makes party discipline essential for the survival of the government. In this situation, political parties, and not individual members of parliament, are the

key actors in the system of political representation. Therefore, models of political representation, like the responsible party model, that take the key position of political parties into account have a higher *prima facie* validity than any model that is based on the relationship between an individual member of parliament and his constituency. However, it still remains to be seen to what extent the political parties model is based on a viable normative theory of democracy that can be translated into a model that is consistent with political reality.

### **The Political Parties Model**

Originally, political parties, in addition to regional interests, were considered inimical to democracy. Theories of political representation had difficulty in dealing with political parties. No doubt, this is partly because the major theories of political parties were formulated and established before modern political parties came to exist. But even the much-praised book of Hannah Pitkin (1967) comes close to neglecting the existence of political parties. Parties, for a long time, had a negative image. They were seen as threatening the common interest of the one nation. Also, party discipline was hard to reconcile with the prevailing theories of political representation.

It seems to be a strange paradox that it was Burke, again, who recognized the function of political parties, not as evil factions which threatened the unity of the nation, but as instruments to model modern government where traditional concepts were no longer satisfying. Again, this breakthrough was related to the changing relationship between king and parliament. With the increasing power of parliament, the opposition between king and parliament as an institution lost much of its relevance, yielding to the different outlooks within parliament with respect to government policy (Sartori 1976, 10). Burke defined a political party as "a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed" (as quoted in Sartori 1976, 9). By recognizing a particular principle as the basis for a political party, Burke seems to recognize ideology as the basis of a political party. But, of course, Burke was all but a populist, and it is most unlikely he would be flattered to be considered as the inventor of the political parties model in the sense of a model of linkage. It was not before the twentieth century that the essential function of political parties in the political representation process was recognized.

Once more, it was the development of political reality, rather than the development of political thinking, as such, that forced the recognition of political parties. The extension of the suffrage forced members of parliament to compete for electoral votes. To do so effectively, a certain organization was

needed. This organization could be provided by political parties. It has been argued time and again that political parties are the only modern possibility to give any real meaning to the traditional concept of popular government.

A radical view on the democratic function of political parties can be found in the writings of Leibholz (1966, 226). In his opinion, liberal representative democracy has yielded to the *Parteienstaat*. He considers these two forms of government incompatible. This, however, is no reason to reject the role of political parties. Quite the contrary, in his view the existence of political parties can solve the classic contrast between representation and identity. He considers the *Parteienstaat* as a modern version of populist democracy, in which the will of the majority of the political parties is identical with the will of the people. Parliament is no longer a place of deliberation. Its only function is to register decisions that are taken outside parliament by the political parties.

Certainly, in its original form, the Anglo-Saxon concept of *party government* was based on a less radical democratic view. Precisely by dismissing the existence of a *volonté générale*, Schumpeter gave the initial impetus to the theory of party government. In his view, the competition between political parties for the votes of the electorate is the essential characteristic of modern democracy. Accordingly, he defines a political party as “a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power” (Schumpeter 1976, 83).

Schumpeter’s theory of democracy is far removed from a model of linkage. For the very reason that he didn’t think much of public opinion, he considered the concept of populist democracy as purely utopian. Therefore, it is remarkable that the basic idea of a competition between political parties was gradually transformed into a populist model of linkage. This model was systematically expounded in the report *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* (American Political Science Association 1950; see also Birch 1972; Dahl 1956; Downs 1957; Kirkpatrick 1971; Schattschneider 1942). The essential characteristic of the model is that there are only two relevant actors in the process of political representation: voters and political parties. Political parties are seen as unitary actors. Party discipline within and outside parliament is such that individual politicians play second fiddle, at most.

The more specific requirements of the model are all logical deductions from the assumption that the popular will must be reflected in government policy. These requirements are:

1. Political parties must present different policy alternatives to the voters. In other words, there must be different parties with different programs.
2. The internal cohesion, or party discipline, of political parties must be sufficient to enable them to implement their policy program.

3. Voters must vote rationally, that is to say, they must vote for the party whose program is closest to their own policy preferences. This last requirement implies two other ones:
  - a. Voters must have policy preferences.
  - b. Voters must know the difference between the policy programs of different political parties.

The criticism of this model has been no less than that devoted to the delegate model. There are at least three kinds of arguments that can be distinguished within the extensive literature on the subject. First, there is the *normative* argument, usually dismissing the populist philosophy of the model; second there is the argument—mainly from the public choice literature—that a policy mandate from the electorate via the mechanism of the political parties model is a *logical* impossibility. And, last but not least, there is the persistent argument that the model is *empirically invalid*, because neither political parties nor voters are behaving according to the assumptions of the model.

In most writings, there is no clear distinction between these three basic arguments. The rejection of the political parties model as a viable normative theory is very often based on empirical and logical arguments. I will follow the same procedure. I will go into the empirical and logical merits of the model in order to assess the viability of the normative theory on which the political parties model is based.

Of the requirements of the responsible party model, those referring to political parties seem to be least troublesome, certainly in the parliamentary systems of Western Europe. It has already been observed that party discipline, in general, is extremely high and also the requirement that voters should have a choice between different political parties with different platforms is easily met. But the model can only operate when all requirements are met, because “the logical structure of the model is such as to suggest that if one of its several requirements is not met, then the whole structure collapses as a rationale; the chain is no stronger than its weakest link” (Converse and Pierce 1986, 698).

That weakest link is obviously the requirement that voters should vote according to their policy preferences. The results of the relevant empirical research seem to be unequivocal. Stokes and Miller were among the first to test to what extent American voters met the requirements of the model. They found that American party voting does not fit the model. The electorate’s perceptions of the parties betrayed very little information about current policy issues (Stokes and Miller 1962, 198). Perhaps even more striking is the fact that only 47 percent correctly attributed control of the Eighty-fifth Congress to the Republicans (Stokes and Miller 1962, 199). Under these conditions, it becomes impossible to vote according to one’s issue positions or one’s evaluation of the parties’ legislative record. Kirkpatrick, in a long comment on the report of the



Committee on Political Parties, of which he himself had been a member, gives short shrift to the empirical validity of the model: "The cumulative impact of voting studies on the committee model of the responsible party doctrine is, quite simply, devastating" (1971, 972). This conclusion seems to be well established by empirical research in several countries. Converse and Pierce, for instance, after having tested to what extent the French electorate met the requirements of the model, concluded that "our findings on the mass side of the interaction certainly cast the most severe doubt on the truth and utility of characterizing representation in France in such terms" (Converse and Pierce 1986, 705).

And yet, time and again, it has been argued that such a verdict might be too harsh. More recently, it has been observed that in the advanced industrial democracies, a process of *cognitive mobilization* has occurred (Dalton 1988; Inglehart 1990). As a consequence, more citizens than ever are said to be capable of behaving according to the requirements of classic democratic theory. It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate the extensive literature on the subject of (the increase of) issue voting. In fact, we don't have to in order to assess the empirical validity of the Responsible Party Model.

Bearing in mind that the validity of the model will be made or broken by its weakest chain, and for the sake of the argument, let us start from the most optimistic position to be found in the literature, with respect to the extent to which voters meet the requirements of the Responsible Party Model. If that position still cannot save the model, there is no reason to take less optimistic views into consideration.

A more or less random example of the optimistic view is Dalton's statement that

"More citizens now possess the political resources to follow the complexities of politics; they have the potential to act as the independent issue voters described in classic democratic theory but seldom observed in practice. . . . Greater issue voting may make candidates and parties more responsive to public opinion. Thus the democratic process may move closer to the democratic ideal." (Dalton 1988, 200–201)

Do independent issue voters indeed move the democratic process closer to the democratic ideal? If the democratic ideal is populist democracy, this conclusion might be founded on quicksand. Even when all voters vote according to their issue positions, the election outcome does not necessarily convey an electoral mandate on whatever policy position. Without further assumptions, a single vote does not convey a mandate with respect to any policy domain at all. Political parties offer a package deal to the voter. By voting for a particular party, voters are forced to vote for the whole package. The voter who

is in favor of party A with respect to policy domain 1, but of party B with respect to domain 2, has no alternative but to choose for one of the two on the basis of his own idiosyncratic weights given to the different policy domains.

This may be an acceptable solution for the individual voter, but for the political system, it means that there is no logical relationship between the electoral majority and the policy majority on any specific issue. This phenomenon is known as the Ostrogorski paradox (Rae and Daudt 1976). As a consequence, as Dahl puts it, "all an election reveals is the first preferences of some citizens among the candidates standing for office," for "we can rarely interpret a majority of first choices among candidates in a national election as being equivalent to a majority of first choices for a specific policy" (Dahl 1956, 125–27).

The only solution to this paradox that I can think of is the assumption that both political parties, in the composition of their programs, and voters, when they decide which party they will vote for, are constrained by the same unidimensional ideology—that is, conforming the basic elements of the Downsian model.<sup>3</sup> Only then it is absolutely clear where the electoral majority stands in policy matters.

This, however, is a very severe requirement. Thanks to the pioneering work by Converse in the early sixties, it is common knowledge that the ideological constraint of issue positions among the mass public is limited, if existent at all (Converse 1964). However, more recent work with respect to the electorate in West European countries might lead to a difference in nuance. Granberg and Holmberg (1988, 67) argue that it is to be expected that in a country with a strong, disciplined party system, such as that in Sweden, issue positions will be more constrained than in a more loosely structured system, such as the United States. They demonstrate that this is indeed the case. Also, the relationship between issue positions and the position on a left-right continuum is stronger in Sweden than in the United States (Granberg and Holmberg 1988, 67–71). Fuchs and Klingemann (1990) report that a great majority of the Dutch and German electorates are capable of attributing a substantive meaning to the concepts of "Left" and "Right." The electorates in the West European democracies seem to be well aware of the relative positions of the political parties on the left-right continuum (Converse and Pierce 1986; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Thomassen and Jennings 1989).<sup>4</sup> A majority of the voters in both the Netherlands and Sweden were found to behave according to Downsian theory by voting for the party that was closest to their own position on a left-right scale (Van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983, 278; Granberg and Holmberg 1988, chapter 6).

If voters' issue positions are defined by a single ideological dimension, and if they vote according to their position on that dimension, the conditions for a coercive system of representation are met. Hence, one should expect a

high level of congruence between parties' policy positions and the policy preferences of their voters. To assess to what extent this is the case was one of the explicit objectives of all the studies of political representation mentioned above.

With respect to left-right positions, an interesting phenomenon seems to occur in many European countries. Political elites tend to place themselves more to the left than the voters of their parties (Barnes 1977; Converse and Pierce 1986; Dalton 1985; Holmberg 1989; Thomassen and Zielonka 1992). It is hard to explain this discrepancy. The most likely explanation is a cultural one: for a long time, being a conservative was not very fashionable in Europe. Even people with outright conservative policy views would not easily call themselves conservative. Whatever the cause of this phenomenon, the consequence of it is that the *absolute* congruence between the political elite and the rank and file is low, whereas the *relative* congruence is high, which is to say that the rank order of the parties is about the same on both levels. Whether one wants to consider this combination of a low absolute and a high relative congruence good or bad depends on the view of political representation one prefers to take (see Achen 1977, 1978; Converse and Pierce 1986, 599). In the case of the left-right scale, it might be argued that positions on the scale have only a relative meaning, and therefore cannot be used to establish an absolute substantive difference between the political parties and their voters. Therefore, one might conclude that, in general, the congruence between representatives and their voters, in this respect, is not bad at all.

For at least two reasons, it is hard to draw general conclusions with respect to the congruence on specific issues. First, the variety of measurement techniques and policy domains is such that comparisons between different studies are hardly possible. Second, conclusions are usually drawn in terms of absolute congruence, which leads to the problem that it is a matter of interpretation whether or not a difference of .50 on a five-point scale is really small (Dalton 1985, 277) or whether an average difference between percent distributions of fifteen percentage points is really large (Holmberg 1989, 14). For the purpose of this paper, it is sufficient to know that the degree of congruence seems to be different for different issues. In general, political parties' elites seem to be fairly representative of their voters on social-economic issues, such as income policy, codetermination of workers, and the relationship between the public and private sector, and on moral issues, like abortion. Representativeness is less on foreign policy, and nonexistent on issues like aid to third world countries and law and order. With respect to these kind of issues, and, in general, with respect to libertarian values, there is a world of difference between party elites and their rank and file, certainly within the traditional parties on the left (Dalton 1985; Hoffmann-Lange 1987; Holmberg 1989; Thomassen 1976).

These results should raise suspicion against the claim that left-right placement acts as a summary of the contemporary issues orientations of both the elites and the mass public (Dalton 1985, 283; Inglehart 1984). The differences in the level of congruence between different issue domains suggest that among the political elite, the left-right dimension has a more abstract meaning than among the mass, and can, therefore, encompass a greater variety of issues. This would explain that with respect to those issues that fall outside the limited left-right framework that is shared by mass and elite, a mechanism of political representation tends to be weak, or even absent.

The results of a more detailed analysis of the constraint of issues among members of parliament and voters in several countries are consistent with this explanation. The difference in constraint between the two groups is tremendous (Converse and Pierce 1986, chapter 7; Granberg and Holmberg 1988, 73; Thomassen 1976, 166). The correlation between issue positions and left-right position among the electorate is, in general, dramatically low (Converse and Pierce 1986, 236–37).

As far as traces of issue constraints can be found, these seem to be limited to those issues that are related to the traditional cleavage structure, in which religion and class played a dominant role. The less related an issue is to this cleavage structure, the less constrained it will be among the mass public by the ideological dimensions that are related to these cleavages, and the lower the consensus between the political elites and the mass public on that issue will be.

If this is a valid interpretation, one might argue that the process of *cognitive mobilization* will increase the level of conceptualization of the mass public and, hence, make policy representativeness easier. This prospect might turn out to be poor comfort. Although it is true that the constraints among the better educated and involved part of the electorate are higher than among the electorate at large, even among this group, the constraints are much lower than among members of parliament, certainly when it comes to the relationship between issue domains (Thomassen 1976, chapter 8). Converse and Pierce found that, at the most, among 15 percent of the French electorate, a leftist vote could be interpreted in terms of specific issues.

This, however, is still the most benign interpretation of the future validity of the responsible party model. According to a different scenario, we might as well be faced with a devilish paradox. How certain can one be that the decline of the traditional cleavage structure will be succeeded by alternative coherent ideological and value systems that may serve to constrain both party and voting behavior (Van der Eijk et al. 1992, 427)? Is it not just as likely that the new citizen that is so enthusiastically welcomed by Dalton will be competent enough to vote according to his most individual mix of policy preferences? In that case, the more citizens “act as the independent issue voters described in

classic democratic theory” (Dalton 1988, 200), the less likely it is that the election outcome conveys a clear policy mandate.

Above, it was argued that the complicated chain of the responsible party model is no stronger than its weakest link. That weakest link is, without any doubt, the requirement that the election outcome be interpreted as a policy mandate. It is quite obvious that, for logical and empirical reasons, such a mandate is hardly possible.

Riker takes even one more step by arguing that the decision-making process that is assumed by the model is essentially not democratic at all. According to his judgment, the notion of responsible parties might make sense if policy decisions can be reduced to binary decisions. But because in the real world there are almost always more than two alternatives, the most that responsible parties can do is select two of them. Reducing policy alternatives to binary alternatives “requires some social embodiment of Procrustes, who chopped off the legs of his guests to fit them into the bed in his inn” (Riker 1982, 65). In order to reduce the number of alternatives to exactly two, some Procrustean leader or elite is needed to do the chopping. Once this is recognized, it should be obvious that any populist theory of democracy, assuming that policy decisions are backed by an electoral majority, is not feasible, because there is no particular decision method for three or more alternatives that is unequivocally consistent with the idea of democratic government (Riker 1982, 60–65).

### **Political Representation: A Research Agenda**

The argument so far leads to the conclusion that neither the instructed delegate model nor the political parties model is based upon a viable theory of democracy. Nor is either one of them very successful as an empirical model. Does this mean that we should give up empirical research along these lines? It most certainly does not. It only means that these two models, in their present form, should get less emphasis in future research. Miller and Stokes, in their seminal article on political representation in America, observed that “no single tradition of representation fully accords with the realities of American legislative politics.” Instead “the American system is a mixture, to which the Burkean, instructed delegate, and responsible party models all can be said to have contributed elements” (Miller and Stokes 1963, 56).

It seems to me that it is still a wise policy not to get caught in the idea that either this or that model should be alone and fully applicable. Different models can be applicable in different circumstances.

Both the instructed delegate and the political parties model are rather rigid models. Both models reflect a populist view on political representation, accord-

ing to which the ideal of a representative democracy is the identity between the will of the people and government policy. However, as has been argued in the introduction to this chapter, one should be aware of the fact that this view on representative democracy is not the only legitimate one. According to a less rigid view, representatives and political parties should not necessarily reflect the will of the majority of the electorate on each and every single issue, but should at least be responsive, that is to say, should take the opinions and interests of the people into account. Such a more relaxed view on political representation is less demanding and will yield partly different research questions that might be more relevant for the real world of politics.

Above, it has been argued that the instructed delegate model does not reflect a viable theory of democracy because it is based on an old-fashioned view of representation. The task of members of parliament to defend local interests has become marginal, compared to their role in general policy making. And, because electoral districts tend to be heterogeneous with respect to matters of general policy, it is difficult to see how a single deputy would be able to act according to *the* district sentiment. In addition to this a priori argument, it was argued that because of both the extent of party discipline and the role conceptions of members of parliament in the parliamentary systems of Western Europe, the delegate model was doomed to fail as an empirical model.

However, this is not to say that the relationship between an individual member of parliament and his or her constituency is irrelevant for the process of political representation. First, the relevance of the relationship depends on the constitutional setting. In the American presidential system, a strict party discipline is less essential for the survival of the incumbent government than in the parliamentary systems of Europe. Therefore, it can be more lenient. The civil rights domain in the Miller-Stokes study is a perfect illustration of the fact that, at least in the United States, the electorate is quite capable of imposing its will on representatives, once it takes a passionate position on a particular issue. But even in parliamentary systems, there might be some variation in the extent of party discipline. The larger the majority of the governing party or coalition, the more lenient it can be with deviations from the party line (see Converse and Pierce 1986, 558). In that case, there might be more room for individual members of parliament to respond to the opinions on particular issues in their home districts. To what extent this is the case is a question that deserves more comparative research.

Secondly, studies of political representation tend to underestimate the importance of the relationship between an individual member of parliament and his constituency by focusing almost exclusively on *policy responsiveness* and roll call behavior. But the representative role of a member of parliament implies more than representing policy views. *Service responsiveness*, or ombudsman activities, and *allocation responsiveness* are also important aspects of

the role of the representative (Eulau and Karps 1977; Cain et al. 1987; Weissberg 1978). A high level of party discipline is not necessarily prohibitive to such activities.

Although Converse and Pierce found very few defections from party discipline in the French Assembly, a disproportional number of the defections that did occur referred to a single issue where the interest of the Paris region was involved, and delegates from this region decided to put the region's interest before the party line (Converse and Pierce 1986, 560). However, these activities seldom result in direct legislative action. Therefore, to trace such activities on the side of the MP, studying the issues raised during the question hour and the extent to which officials are directly approached by MPs on behalf of their constituents might be more appropriate.

The relationship between an individual member of parliament and both his or her constituents and interest groups might also be underestimated because of the traditional focus on roll call behavior. In the first part of this paper, it was argued that trying to explain the roll call vote behavior of individual MPs by characteristics of their constituencies is not a very fruitful approach in West European parliamentary democracies, because there is not much left to be explained after party membership has been taken into account. Party discipline is such that very few deviating votes can be registered. But this does not necessarily mean that MPs don't take the attitudes or interests of their constituency, however defined, into account. It only means that it won't show on the floor of parliament. If one is really interested in the *process* of parliamentary decision making in a parliamentary system, with its disciplined parties, roll calls are hardly informative. The relevant processes occur behind closed doors *within* the parliamentary parties. Observing these processes might reveal much more of the possible influence of group interests—but also constituency influences—than the plenary debate and the final roll call. Therefore, the real challenge for future political representation research is to get behind those closed doors.

All these nuances, however, cannot change the conclusion that certainly in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe political parties, rather than individual members of parliament, are the principal actors in matters of general policy. Therefore, despite all possible objections, the political parties model still seems to be the most fruitful point of departure to study the process of political representation in these systems. But sticking to the exact wording of the model as presented above will obstruct, rather than stimulate, relevant research into the process of political representation.

The essential requirement of the model is that the election outcome be interpreted as a clear policy mandate. In the real world, this will hardly ever be the case, mainly because it is close to impossible for the electorate to meet the severe requirements of the model that can logically be deduced from this

essential requirement. The model expects of voters that they vote not only prospectively, but also according to an ideological position that constrains their issue positions. Therefore, if the quality of representative democracy is measured with the yardstick of this model, retrospective voting will not qualify (Fiorina 1981, 196). And whatever the conclusions of recent publications on the rationality of the mass public may be (Erikson et al. 1991; Page and Shapiro 1992; Heath et al. 1991), these cannot change the negative conclusions with respect to the political parties model, as long as different issue positions are not constrained by a single ideology. However, from a more realistic view on political representation, one of the most important challenges for future research is to explain why political parties are representative of their voters on some issues, but not on others.

#### NOTES

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1. Of course, one should avoid falling into the trap of too rigidly separated categories. Even though Burke's preference was clear, he felt at the same time that "it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents" (as quoted in Eulau et al. 1959, 747).

2. The significance of empirical research of role conceptions in this connection has been the subject of a long debate. According to Eulau and Wahlke (1978, 17), measurements of role conceptions were never meant to predict legislative behavior. But I must confess it is beyond my understanding how the role conception of an instructed delegate can explain the lower path in the Miller-Stokes model, either when this role conception is absent or when it makes no difference as far as legislative behavior is concerned (see Friesema and Hedlund 1974; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979).

3. One might object that this is not the only solution possible. In a multidimensional cleavage structure and a multiparty system, each combination of policy positions might be represented by a different party. But in almost every multiparty system, the government will consist of a coalition of political parties. The policy program of the government will be defined by negotiations among the coalition partners after the elections. This makes the translation of an electoral mandate into government policy in a multiparty system virtually impossible. On the (im)possibility of rational voting under coalition governments, see Downs 1957, 147.

4. One should realize, though, that in most studies the *aggregate* perception of the position of the parties is used as a measurement to indicate how voters perceive the parties. Converse and Pierce (1986, 114) correctly observe that these aggregate measurements can conceal individual perceptions that are all wrong.



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