



Comparative Assessment of Parliaments (CAP) Note

Representation and Constituency Relations

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the complex relationship between representatives and their constituents from normative, empirical, and cross-national perspectives. Among the issues considered are the extent to which representatives are obligated to take into consideration the opinions of their constituents as they make public policy decisions, and the potential tension between the representative's obligations to constituency interests and to the national interest. Empirically, the difficulties that representatives encounter as they seek to determine the views of their constituents are considered as well as his or her efforts to shape constituency opinion. The service activities of legislators and their efforts to deliver public resources to their constituents are explored from a comparative perspective. Cross-national variation in the manner in which legislators perform their various representational roles is traced to variations in electoral and party systems. Finally, lessons for legislative development are identified with particular emphasis on the tension between the representational activities of legislators and their capacity to both build public support for the institution and make effective public policy.



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Representation and Constituency Relations

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Legislatures are by definition representative institutions. Formally and minimally, this means that their members are elected by the citizens of the nation and are accountable to them for their behavior in office. Typically, representatives are elected by a geographically defined group of voters referred to as a constituency, although in a few small countries (Israel, the Netherlands) all legislators are elected at large by all of the country's voters. The mechanics of selecting representatives are relatively easy to understand; a simple reading of a country's constitution and electoral laws should suffice. But it is a much more complicated undertaking to describe and explain the nature of the relationship between representatives and their constituents – that is, what the responsibilities of the representative are to those whom he represents. Such a discussion raises a number of normative and empirical questions for which there are no easy answers.

Among these questions are the following:

- When it comes to making policy decisions, to what extent is the representative obligated to do as his constituents wish, even it means ignoring his own judgment?
- If the representative determines that the objective interests of the constituency conflict with constituency opinion on an issue, which should take precedence – what the representative believes to be in the interests of her constituents, or what her constituents believe to be in their interests?
- Should the representative act in the best interest of his constituency or in the best interest of his country as a whole, if these two interests conflict?

- How can the representative know with any degree of precision what the opinions of her constituents are, especially on complex policy matters?
- Does the representative's responsibility to his constituents extend beyond the consideration of their views and interests on policy questions? For example, are representatives responsible for providing assistance to individual constituents who are experiencing problems with government institutions, or for lobbying their colleagues or members of the executive on behalf of local constituency interests?
- How do political parties affect the relationship between representatives and their constituents?
- How does the manner in which representatives are nominated and elected influence the way that they view their responsibilities toward their constituents?
- How do the activities of organized interest groups affect the relationship between representatives and their constituents?

These are questions with which all representatives, no matter their country, need to contend as they attempt to understand their responsibilities to their nation and to those who elect them.

These questions have long occupied the attention of political theorists as well as political practitioners, and of observers, both academic and casual, of legislative behavior. The answers to these questions are often contradictory. For example, citizens regularly complain that representatives do not respond to the will of the people and just as regularly complain that representatives do what is popular rather than what is necessary. Even the answers that legislators themselves provide when asked about how they view their representational responsibilities are ambiguous, often at odds with their behavior, and heavily dependent on the issue at hand. There also will be a significant level of cross-national variation, depending upon the rules and practices that govern the manner in which representatives are selected and the strength and role of the nation's political parties.

In the pages that follow, we will explore the complicated theoretical issues that are implicated by the concept of representation, including the distinction between democracy and representation, and the relative influence that such factors as the representative's own views, the opinions and interests of his constituents, and the national interest should have on the decisions that he takes. These are questions with which all representatives, no matter their country, need to contend as they attempt to understand their responsibilities to their nation and to those who elect them. Next we will consider the factors that account for the cross-national variation in the representative's relationship with his constituents, particularly the role of

The one behavioral constant across all nations seems to be the responsiveness and attentiveness of representatives to the problems and concerns that their constituents encounter in their dealings with government officials.

interest groups, and the nature of a country's party and electoral system. Although these factors create different patterns of constituent – representative relationships when it comes to policy questions, the one behavioral constant across all nations seems to be the responsiveness and attentiveness of representatives to the problems and concerns that their constituents encounter in their dealings with government officials. Finally, we will identify some general lessons and conclusions that may be of use to those who are dealing with the creation of new legislative institutions and the strengthening and/or reforming of existing legislative institutions.

Representation and Democracy

Any discussion of the responsibilities that representatives have to their constituents must begin with the concept of democracy. It is to democracy as a form of governance that most nations in the world are at least rhetorically committed. At its core, both etymologically and philosophically, democracy means government by the people; that is, in a democracy, citizens should decide directly upon the policies under which they will live. The most frequently cited models of “direct democracy” of this sort are the Athenian city state of ancient times, the New England town meetings that still exist today, private organizations, such as clubs or civic associations where all members participate in decision-making, and the initiative and referendum process that functions in some parts of the United States as well as in other countries. In all of these arrangements, decisions are turned over to all adult members of the group, community or nation involved.

Despite the existence of these purely democratic models, most nations that we think of as democracies do not operate in this manner. Instead, these nations are more accurately defined as republics, or representative democracies. In these systems, citizens select a small number of representatives to whom they delegate the authority to make policy decisions. There are numerous practical reasons for substituting republics for democracies. First, of course, is the size of the modern nation state. While a few score adults in a small New England town can easily assemble to reach public policy decisions affecting their community, it is not possible for the millions of citizens who typically constitute the modern nation state to assemble in one place and make decisions that affect the entire country. Second, in our modern age of expanded information and specialized knowledge, public policy questions have become increasingly complex; it is unrealistic to expect that average citizens, consumed as they are with the responsibilities, joys, and challenges of their own daily lives,

will have the expertise or the time to thoroughly review and understand the issues that need to be decided on a daily basis. And even if they did have the time, through what means would deliberation among different policy options proceed? Making public policy decisions after all presumes a process in which various alternatives are placed before those with the authority to decide, detailed information is shared, the comparative merits and demerits of these proposals fully discussed, compromises among contested provisions entered into, and only then final decisions taken.

In addition to these practical considerations that militate against pure democratic forms, there always have been those who are philosophically skeptical of popular decision-making. Many of the Founders of the American political system, for example, argued that the policy preferences of average citizens would be motivated entirely by self interest and therefore the policy outcomes that would be reached in a democracy rather than speaking to the collective good would instead be expressions of a self-interested majority. Other Founders argued that the decisions of mass publics would unfairly undermine the positions and interests of those with wealth and power, those with a “stake in society” as they sometimes phrased it. They argued as well that the views and decisions of generally uninformed citizens could be manipulated by demagogues who appealed more to emotion than to reason, and by powerful interests with significant financial resources. And finally, it can be argued that those for whom public policy and public service are a vocation will make better, wiser, and more informed decisions than a generally uninformed public for whom politics and public policy are at best an avocation.

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These arguments against pure democracy did not die with the Founders of the American republic or with many of the 19th century commentators who shared these views. Put most generally, the critique here is timeless: there is a difference between simply choosing a policy alternative and making a wise and informed choice that solves the problem at hand and pursues justice and the greater good. Average citizens, through a referendum process or some other form of direct democracy, certainly can do the former but are ill equipped to do the latter. It is better, therefore, to rely on the expertise and perspectives of professional politicians rather than on the population in general.

Firm believers in democracy will argue in response that representative arrangements, no matter how practical, efficient, or inevitable they might be, are inherently undemocratic; their argument is that either the people decide or someone else decides, and in a democracy the voice of the people, no matter how uninformed or self-interested it might be, should be the final say. Others argue that representatives always will drift away from the opinions and even the interests of those whom they are supposed to repre-

sent. The inevitable result will be government by an elite (albeit an elected elite) and not government by the people. Such an arrangement reduces the concept of democratic citizenship to voting rather than deciding.

Nonetheless, in our modern world the notion of direct democracy is rarely put forth as a serious governing alternative to representative democracy. However, democracy is often taken as the implicit standard against which the performance of representative democracies should be assessed. That is, we often judge a representative system by how closely it achieves or approximates democratic principles. The conceptual device here is to substitute the term “popular sovereignty” for democracy, a term that suggests that although the people may not be decision-makers, in the end they are the ones who control those who do make the decisions. The question then becomes to what extent a representative system achieves the goal of popular sovereignty.

Thus, a representative system in which decisions are made by some who are not elected by the people (for example, the United Kingdom where non-elected members comprise a weak but still influential upper chamber) is less democratic than New Zealand where all decisions are made by elected representatives in a unicameral legislature. Similarly, countries in which all adults are permitted to vote for representatives are more democratic than those countries where the franchise is restricted. And systems where legislators represent roughly the same number of constituents (such as the U.S. House of Representatives) are more democratic than extremely mal-apportioned bodies such as the United States Senate where the 35 million citizens of California are represented by two senators and the 650,000 citizens of Alaska are also represented by two senators.

Criteria like these are relatively easy to assess, relying simply on an inspection of constitutional provisions. It is more difficult to assess the degree to which particular representative arrangements in practice achieve the goal of popular sovereignty. For example, how much authority does a representative chamber, fully elected by all of its citizens and fairly apportioned, actually have? Although both bodies are popularly elected, the British House of Commons has a great deal more authority than the Russian Duma. Or to what extent can the decisions of representative bodies be modified or overruled by non-elected judges (as they sometimes are in the United States) or by military or civilian bureaucrats, as they are to some extent in virtually every modern nation state? Or to what extent can unelected members of the executive branch of government make unilateral decisions without the approval of the elected representatives of the people?

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Trustees or Delegates

But even assuming that all representatives are elected, that all citizens have access to the franchise, that citizens are equitably represented in these bodies, and that all decisions of import are made by these representatives, the fundamental democratic question still remains: to what extent do the decisions of representatives reflect the opinions and/or the interests of those who elect them? In the extreme, if there is little or no correlation between the views of the people and the actions of their representatives, it is difficult to view such a representative arrangement as democratic.

“Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”

— Edmund Burke

So the question is whether or not the policy positions that a representative takes should conform to the wishes of his constituents, or should he base his decisions on his own judgment of what is in the best interests of his constituents, their opinions notwithstanding? A literal reading of democratic theory suggests that the views of the citizens should prevail. However, Edmund Burke, the great British parliamentarian and political thinker, developed an alternative view most clearly stated in his widely cited speech to the electors of Bristol. There, he asserted that he certainly owed his constituents his diligence, that their interests would be always foremost in his mind, and that their opinions were always worthy of his consideration; but in the end, he stated, “your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.” Burke’s view has been characterized by modern political scientists as the “trustee” conception of the role of the representative. That is, the representative has the same responsibility to his constituents as, for example, someone named as a trustee of an estate that has been bequeathed to minor children has toward the children. Such a trustee must act in the interests of the children, but she is not expected to consult with the children or to take their views into consideration as she manages the assets of the estate.

Democrats reject this approach, arguing that the concept of popular sovereignty requires the representative to do as his constituents wish, regardless of his own policy preferences or judgments. This approach, sometimes referred to as the delegate view of representation, argues that the representative is simply an agent of his constituents, someone who governs in place of those who elect him (because the latter cannot be present or doesn’t wish to be present, his job is to “re-present” them, or make them present again) and therefore he is bound to adhere as closely as he can to their opinions. The representative role so conceived is similar to the one played by a country’s delegate to the United Nations. She is not expected to use her independent judgment when deciding how to vote in that body, or what positions to take when negotiating with delegates

from other countries. Rather she is bound to consult with the leaders of her government and to follow their instructions.

Although the delegate view of the representative's responsibilities appears to be more congruent with the notion of popular sovereignty than the trustee view, there are numerous problems with implementing such an approach. Because a representative typically will represent hundreds of thousands of constituents, the opinions of these citizens on each issue that comes before the legislature may not be clear or even ascertainable, especially when it comes to more arcane or complex matters. It is also likely that many constituents will have no opinion on many issues and that many others will have opinions that are ill informed, especially when it comes to more complex public policies or to those policy decisions that have no direct effect on the lives of the constituents.

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And if somehow the representative did have an accurate view of the division of opinion on an issue among his constituents should he always be guided by the majority view? If, for example, a majority of the citizens believe that the representative should support a particular policy option but they do not feel very strongly about the issue, while a sizable minority take the opposite view and feel intensely about the issue, what should the representative do? Should the representative support the view of the apathetic majority or the intense minority? Democratic theory, with its commitment to majority rule suggests the former, but the latter may produce the wiser, and some would argue the more representative policy decision.

When political scientists have asked legislators about the impact of constituency opinion on their policy decisions, something of a paradox has emerged. On the one hand, representatives are aware that most citizens do not follow what their representatives are doing in the legislature, that many do not even know the name of their representative, that only a small number have very much information about public policy, that there are few reliable methods for assessing constituency opinion, especially on the broad range of issues with which a legislature must deal, and that constituency opinion on most issues is often vague and subject to change. Nonetheless, representatives consistently say that the views of their constituents are important to them when they make their policy decisions, that they use whatever means they can to ascertain constituency opinion, and that they always assess the implications of a particular policy proposal for the welfare of their constituents when they decide whether to support or oppose it.

One way to understand this paradox is to recognize that in many instances the representative is less interested in using constituency opinion as a guide to how he should vote and more interested in predicting how his

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constituents will react to his vote after he casts it. In other words, the representative is probably not concerned with the normative question of how democratic principles should affect his decision; rather, he is concerned with the political consequences if his actions turn out to disappoint the expectations of his constituents. From this perspective, the driving force for representatives is their interest in continuing in office and their concern is that when they run for reelection voters will ask them to account for their behavior in the legislature and find them wanting. The representative can assume that his opponent in that reelection campaign will highlight those instances in which the member has cast votes or made decisions that may appear contrary to the wishes or interests of the constituency. In other words, the representative's effort to assess constituency opinion is aimed at anticipating how the constituency will react to his vote after it is cast and after it is brought to the attention of the voters, and not at eliciting instructions from the constituents about how he should in fact vote.

Citizens themselves seem to have mixed views on how important their opinions should be to their representatives, although they tend toward the delegate view. When a sample of the British electorate was asked how their MP should resolve a conflict between what the MP thinks is best and what he thinks the constituency wants, 53% said that the MP should follow the constituency; only 11% said that the MP should follow his own conscience and 34% said that it depended upon the issue. When the "depends upon the issue" option is not offered, 76% opt for the constituents' preferences as the deciding factor. When the respondents were given the hypothetical choice between the MP following the views of his party leadership or the views of the constituency, 83% said that the constituency's view should be the determining factor. (Carman, 2006:111) Although these exact questions have not been asked of U.S. respondents, one proximate question suggests a somewhat different result. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement that "Members of Congress should do what their district wants them to do even if they think it is a bad idea," 49% agreed and 41% disagreed. It is possible that the large number of disagrees is explained by the use of the strong phrase "bad idea" in the question. (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995:64)

Opinion vs. Interest (And Whose Interest?)

If and when the representative is asked to account for his vote –to explain to his constituents why he voted as he did and why he may have voted contrary to the preferences of his constituency – he has two strong explanations to offer. One is to say that his vote, though perhaps contrary to

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the opinions of many of his constituents, was in their best interest. Because he had more information and therefore understood the issue better than they, and because he was in the assembly when the issue was debated, he was in a better position to understand where the true interests of the constituency lay than the constituents themselves. A second approach is to say that his vote, while apparently contrary to their wishes and perhaps to their own narrow interests, was in the best interests of the nation as a whole, and that as citizens of not just their own community but of the country, their interests were connected with the national interest. For example, a vote to raise taxes is unlikely to be popular among a member's constituency, but could be justified as necessary for the budgetary and fiscal health of the nation. Or a vote for a free trade agreement that might jeopardize some industries in his constituency might nonetheless be in the best interest of the nation's economic health.

Both of these explanations, as intellectually strong as they may be, create a certain distance between the representative and the voters, a distance that to some extent undermines the idea of popular sovereignty. The first explanation says to the voter that the representative is a better judge of what is in the voters' interest than the voter himself. Although that may be so, the idea of popular sovereignty is that the voter's decision about what is in his best interest, no matter how misguided or ill-informed it might be, must prevail. The second explanation says to the voter that they are motivated by narrow self-interest rather than a concern for the greater good and that the representative is there to protect the collective good from the voters' selfishness. Once again, that argument vitiates the principle of popular sovereignty which suggests that the voters themselves are the best judges not only of what is good for them but also of what is good for the nation as a whole. Both explanations are, in somewhat different ways, elitist, in the sense that popular views are discounted, and suggest a top down type of decision-making rather than the bottom up approach that one normally associates with democratic arrangements.

Advocates of representative democracy will respond to this critique by pointing out that the voters are still sovereign because at the next election they can reject these explanations and vote the representative who has ignored their opinions and their interests out of office. This view that elections are the occasion for accountability and therefore the exercise of popular sovereignty although reasonable in many ways, alters – some would say reduces – the role of the democratic citizen from sovereign (someone in charge of his own fate) to voter (someone who can punish or reward his representative only after the decision is made). If, for example, a constituency is opposed to a president's proposal to re-

form health care, but the representative ignores the constituency, votes for the president's proposal, and it becomes law, what good does it do to remove the representative from office after the fact. At its extreme, it argues that the only role for the citizen is to vote for those who will make policy decisions and that the citizen has no role in the formulation of the policies themselves.

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Local vs. National Interests

The possible and in some sense inevitable conflict between what is good for the constituency and what is good for the nation presents a more difficult challenge than the question of the impact of constituency opinion on what a representative does. The issue of constituency vs. nation eliminates the problem of the uninformed citizen; here the legislator has made his own presumably informed evaluation and come to the conclusion that objectively speaking there is a tension between the local interests that he ostensibly represents and the national interest. When, for example, a decrease or end to agriculture subsidies will cause pain for the constituents of a rural representative, but will clearly produce trade and budgetary benefits for the nation as a whole, what should that representative do?

Burke's answer to this question was unequivocal. "Parliament," he wrote, "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 advices; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole. ... You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament. If the local constituent should have an interest, or should form an hasty opinion, evidently opposite to the real good of the rest of the community, the member for that place ought to be as far, as any other, from any endeavor to give it effect."

Burke's position seems to command the philosophical (if not the democratic) high ground and in various studies, representatives themselves articulate a trustee view, at least in regard to the role of constituency opinion, although they are more ambiguous when it comes to possible conflicts between the interests of the nation and the interests of the constituency. Responses are also hedged with the qualifier that the nature of the issue itself will affect the role that the constituency will play in the decisions of the representative. Certainly, there are many representatives for whom on a range of issues the Burkean view will be unpersuasive. Especially in a large nation with diverse local and regional interests, representatives may well see it as their duty to put their constituents first. Or more

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subtly and perhaps unconsciously, they will view most issues through a local lens. After all, representatives are usually products of their local environment and come to office with a keen sense of what their constituents want and need. They are accustomed to viewing the good of the constituency and the good of the nation as coinciding. What is good for Montana, a United States Senator from that state might say, is good for America, or what is good for the Western Cape Province is good for South Africa, an MP from Capetown might say.

Interestingly enough, the views of the public on this question appear to support the primacy of national over local interests. In the United States, 85% of the respondents to one questionnaire agreed that “Members of Congress should do what is best for the entire country, not just for their districts.” (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995:64) And when French citizens were asked whether their deputies should be representatives of the nation or representatives of the district, more than 50% said the nation, with only one-third indicating that the district comes first. (Dogan, 2007:435)

Just as the case with representatives, such answers may mask an implicit albeit naive public view that it would be unlikely for the interests of the constituency and the interests of the nation to diverge. When phrased in the abstract, citizens may not envision that what might be good for the country might not be good for them and their responses could well be different if they were presented with a concrete issue where constituency and national interests conflicted. Certainly, there is ample evidence from both the behavior of representatives and the electoral fate of members who have strayed from the opinions and interests of their constituents that citizens may not be quite as altruistic about the primacy of national over local interests as their survey responses indicate. The fierceness with which American representatives fight for the local interests of constituents when it comes to the distribution of federal funds for infrastructure improvements, or farm and mass transit subsidies, or tax breaks for locally or regionally important industries is well documented. And the chances for electoral survival are likely to be very slim for the rural legislator who calls for the end of farm subsidies, or the representative from a district where the auto industry is strong who calls for tougher air pollution standards, or the representative from a district with large defense contractors who calls for reductions in weapons procurement expenditures.

The political theorist Hanna Pitkin has attempted to resolve the issue of the representative’s responsibilities with the broader and more inclusive concept of “responsiveness.” Her view is that representation “means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently; his action must involve discretion and judgment; he must be the one who acts. ... He must not be

found persistently at odds with the wishes of the represented without good reason in terms of their interests, without a good explanation of why their wishes are not in accord with their interest.” (Pitkin, 1967:209-10)

Pitkin’s formulation honors, as Burke does, the independence of the representative by recognizing that he must use his discretion and judgment when he acts. It recognizes as well that at various times the representative’s position may differ from the wishes of his constituents and that in such instances he must be prepared to account for his actions, but in terms that make clear that although he may be acting against their opinions, he is acting in their interest. Left open is how that interest should be defined: in terms of the specific interests of the constituency or the general national interest. Clearly the representative’s “good explanation” might be phrased in terms of either. Also left open is how frequently the representative may wander from the wishes of his constituency; Pitkin says that he must not be found to be “persistently at odds” with his constituents, but how many instances does it take to turn “occasional” into “persistent”? Finally, because it isn’t always obvious what or who the representative views as his constituency, the question of exactly with whom he should avoid being persistently at odds is also left open. For example, is the representative “at odds” with his constituency if his position agrees with only 40% of all the citizens in his constituency but agrees with the views of 60% of those who actually voted in the last election and an even larger percentage of those who voted for him?

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The Role of Interest Groups

This last point raises the issue of the role of organized interests as mediators in the relationship between citizens and their representatives. From one perspective, such groups serve the democratic function of providing a vehicle for individual citizens to aggregate their policy preferences, pool their resources, and thereby amplify the impact of their voices on the decisions that their representatives make. When one considers the fact that most citizens have little time or expertise to make their voices heard on key policy issues, institutions that facilitate interest articulation are essential. Just as trade unions amplified the voice of individually powerless workers as they dealt with government officials as well as those who controlled their industries, interest groups amplify the voices of individual citizens as they seek to influence public policy.

Interest groups also make it easier for the representative to ascertain constituency opinion. It is impossible for the representative to talk with more than a small number of constituents and rarely is reliable constituency

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based opinion polling available or very informative on most issues. It is easier to talk with a small number of interest group leaders whose views ostensibly represent those of significant portions of the constituency. So as the representative tries to ascertain the opinions and interests of his constituents and decide how much weight to attribute to these factors as he makes policy decisions, in fact he may be relying on the information and views of organized interests. The representative who is considering budgetary requests from the Defense Department will be dealing with the businesses, unions, and other local leaders (or elites) about how these decisions will affect the constituency. Such elites probably will have a better understanding of this issue and of the likely consequences of various policy options than the average voter, and their views, advocates of interest group power argue, are likely to match the interests of these voters.

From a democratic perspective, a more negative view of the role of interest groups arises when a highly organized and well funded group represents a minority opinion or interest in opposition to a disorganized and unfunded majority interest. For example, a small number of constituents may be opposed to laws that will tighten the regulation of banks and they will have a strong and well funded interest group to advocate their point of view. A much larger majority of voters may favor such legislation, but they are disorganized and have few resources to devote to this issue. Supporting the majority view in such an instance may be more democratic and may well be in the interests of most of the constituency, but in such a scenario, a representative may well be more responsive to the highly organized minority than to the disorganized majority, in part because he may think that the concerns of those who care intensely about an issue should take primacy over those who are less concerned, and in part because the electoral consequences of ignoring an intense and well funded minority may be more significant than ignoring an apathetic majority.

Of even greater concern to those who are skeptical about the democratic nature of the interest group system are situations when an issue does not arouse the concern of locally based interest groups and their leaders but groups from outside the constituency are very concerned about the issue and seek to influence the decisions of representatives. For example, a large defense contractor may be interested in a military budget that contains funds for the weapons system that the contractor will be building. Representatives from the constituency where the work on the contract will be done will have an understandable interest in supporting the legislation, but what of members whose constituencies have no direct connection with the project? If the contractor makes campaign contributions to these representatives or otherwise tries to influence his vote, what are the representative's responsibilities in that situation? Burke would say that the representative must ask himself whether or not the proposed weapons

system is good for the nation, but skeptics (or cynics) may argue that the representative will tend to see his own political and financial interests as coinciding with the interests of the nation, especially in those systems where representatives must raise a great deal of money to run for reelection.

Electoral systems divide into two main categories – single member district systems and proportional representation systems – with a number of sub-categories to each.

Parties and Electoral Systems

The influence of interest groups, either from within or outside the constituency as well as the influence of constituent opinion on the decisions of representatives is affected to a significant degree by the nature of a nation's electoral system and the strength of its political party system. Electoral systems divide into two main categories – single member district systems and proportional representation systems – with a number of sub-categories to each. Single member district systems, as the name implies, are those in which one representative, elected from each constituency is the sole representative of that constituency in the legislature. The candidate who wins the seat is the one who obtains the most votes, usually a plurality, or a majority in some systems that provide a second run-off election between the candidates who finish first and second on the initial ballot. In proportional representation systems, each constituency is represented by several members in the legislature with the seats in each constituency apportioned to political parties according to the percentage of the vote that they received. Thus, if a constituency has six representatives and three political parties evenly split the vote, each party would be allotted two representatives.

As for party strength, strong political parties are those that control which candidates get to run for office under the party label and that take primary responsibility for organizing and funding legislative elections. In most countries with proportional representation systems, a large number of voters maintain strong allegiances to a political party and are inclined to vote for the party's candidate regardless of the personal qualities of the candidate. Representatives in such systems are likely to view themselves as obligated to support the platform of their political party and, when it comes to voting in the legislature, the decisions of their party leaders.

With these distinctions in electoral systems and party strength in mind, constituency opinions and interests should have the greatest effect on legislators elected in single member district systems with weak political parties, such as the United States. The effect of constituency concerns will be somewhat attenuated in countries such as the United Kingdom, with single member district systems but stronger political parties than is

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the case in the United States. And constituency concerns should have the least effect on the behavior of representatives elected from multi-member proportional representation systems with strong political parties, such as Norway. The situation in proportional representation systems with relatively weak political parties, such as is the case with Poland and many of the other new democracies of Central Europe, is a bit more complex. Where weak parties are regionally based, one would expect a closer connection between their representatives and their constituents. When such parties are more national in scope, perhaps the vehicle of an individual political leader or the expression of a particular political ideology, constituency connections may be less important.

Because single member district systems provide only one representative for each geographically defined constituency, such systems have a bias toward a delegate view of representation. The representative tends to be seen as the deputy from that particular portion of the country to the national government and is assumed to have an implicit obligation to attend to the opinions and concerns of his constituents and advocate for the interests of that district. This may be particularly the case in a large and geographically diverse country such as the United States, where citizens are likely to view the representative as *their* legislator, as someone with a specific set of obligations to them.

In those single member districts with weak political party systems, the local focus of representatives is likely to be even more pronounced. Representatives are nominated and elected based upon their personal reputation in their constituency and their ability to finance their campaigns with money that they raise in the constituency as well as from local and national interest groups. Although national parties may play some role in financing such campaigns and the electoral choices of some voters certainly will be dictated more by their party identification than by their appraisal of the candidate, the candidate's personal reputation in the constituency is likely to be the key element in the election campaign. Such representatives therefore have a stronger incentive to be responsive to the opinions and interests of their constituency should they wish to continue their careers in public office and they will be loath to support their party leaders in the face of strong contrary expectations from the constituency. Of course, party leaders will not be totally without influence on such members, especially on those issues on which constituency opinion is ambiguous and direct constituency interests are not implicated. This set of expectations will become more complex in single member district systems with strong political parties. In such an environment, many voters will view their primary allegiance to the political party with which they identify, and their votes for representatives will be heavily influenced by partisan considerations. Representatives, in turn, will

need the support of party leaders in order to get reelected and to continue their careers in public office because strong political parties play an important role in deciding who runs under their party label and they organize and finance the election campaigns of their candidates. Representatives are likely to see their political career as intertwined with their party, with future promotions and higher positions in government coming through the good graces of the party leadership. And even if the candidate for office is unsuccessful in getting reelected, or if he does not stand for reelection, he may rely upon party leaders for alternative employment. In Mexico, for example, representatives are ineligible to run for reelection, but as a reward for loyalty to the party, they usually find their way into government positions provided by the party or private positions in organizations or companies connected with the party. For all of these reasons, in countries with strong political parties and single member district systems, when the views of party leaders and the views of constituents come into conflict, members will have strong incentives to support their party leaders despite the contrary expectations of some of their constituents.

Much of this changes, however, in proportional representation systems. First, of course, because proportional representation systems require multi-member districts, it is difficult for the constituency to think of one legislator as *their* representative with a specific obligation to reflect their opinions and defend their interests. Secondly, in proportional representation systems, parties typically place the same number of candidates on the ballot as the constituency is eligible to elect. But it is highly unlikely that all of the party's candidates will be elected; the party would have to poll nearly all of the votes in the constituency for that to occur. So as the seats in the district are apportioned, the question is which of the party's candidates will be elected.

In so-called closed list systems such as Austria's, the parties establish their lists and the voter simply votes for the party of his or her choice.

In so-called closed list systems such as Austria's, the parties establish their lists and the voter simply votes for the party of his or her choice. The seats to which the party is entitled are awarded to the candidates at the head of the list. The party, by ordering its candidates in a particular way, can make it all but certain that some will be elected (those at the top of the list) and all but certain that others will not be (those at the bottom of the list). Candidates are thus highly dependent upon the party for election and are therefore very likely to support the party's view on most issues. Other proportional representation systems, such as Norway's, are "open list," which means that the party establishes the list, but voters get to choose candidates from the various party lists, with the seats that the party earns going to those candidates on the party list who receive the highest number of personal votes. This, of course, encourages candidates to increase their visibility in the constituency and may encourage greater

attentiveness to local constituency views and interests. On the other hand, the party's domination of the electoral process as well as the allocation of positions of responsibility within the party will create strong countervailing pressures to support the party leadership. And, again, because such systems have a history and tradition of strong, disciplined political parties, citizens vote for candidates with the expectation that if elected they will for the most part support the leaders of their party.

Constituency Service

Representatives are asked to serve as intermediaries between citizens and the government agencies that among other things dispense retirement benefits, educational grants and opportunities, and in some instances, jobs.

Although the electoral and party system of a nation will have a significant impact on how legislators view their obligations to the policy preferences and interests of their constituents, there are other representational activities that are more universal and less subject to the influence of such systemic factors. Specifically, there is evidence that in virtually all countries, representatives devote a significant portion of their time to being present in their community and helping constituents with individual problems that they might be having with various branches of government. Representatives are asked to serve as intermediaries between citizens and the government agencies that among other things dispense retirement benefits, educational grants and opportunities, and in some instances, jobs, and that regulate how people conduct their economic activities. As the responsibilities of governments around the world have expanded, and as the actions of government agencies have come to have a direct effect on so many aspects of the lives of individual citizens, it is not surprising that citizens encounter problems. If an agency has been late in sending out a needed check or if it has denied eligibility for a program to a constituent who believes that she is eligible, the average citizen may not be in a position to challenge or question these decisions, either because of literacy or other educational impediments, or simply because of a lack of knowledge about how to proceed.

Often, these constituents turn to their representative in the legislature for assistance, and legislators in turn devote significant time and energy to dealing with these issues. In Britain, Members of Parliament hold "surgeries" in their constituency – meetings that provide opportunities for constituents to ask them directly for help with problems that they may be having. One survey of backbench MPs found that 91 percent held such meetings and that MPs devoted about 40% of their time during parliamentary sessions and 60% during recesses to dealing with the problems of individual constituents. (Rush, 2001: 207-211) In the United States, members of Congress provide themselves with significant resources that they deploy to respond to constituency service demands. They have offic-

In one cross-national survey of citizen expectations of their representatives in Korea, Turkey, and Kenya, respondents indicated that their primary expectation was that their representatives tell the government what they think.

es in their constituencies to which they assign staff whose primary purpose is to hear and respond to constituency requests for assistance. They send newsletters to their constituents advertising their availability and willingness to provide assistance. Members of the House of Representatives typically base about one half of their staff members in their district offices and Senators about one-third. (Rosenthal, et. al., 2003:100) And Washington based staff also spend a significant portion of their time on constituency matters.

British MPs seek redress for the problems that constituents bring to their attention by contacting responsible government ministers who invariably respond. Although such responses do not always solve the constituent's problem, they leave the voter with the impression that the legislator has made an effort to help. An examination of the records of the House of Commons shows that during the 1994-1995 session 87% of the backbenchers raised constituency concerns during floor debates in the House or during the Question period when members of the government respond to questions from the opposition and from their own backbenchers. And there is evidence that in recent years the amount of time that British MPs have been putting into constituency work has been increasing. (Rush, 2001:206)

Representatives also view it as part of their responsibilities to lobby government agencies for distributive benefits for their constituents. French deputies report that they receive "numerous demands from local councils on matters like road maintenance, school building, water supply, or flood damage." (Frears, 1990:46-7) In one cross-national survey of citizen expectations of their representatives in Korea, Turkey, and Kenya, respondents indicated that their primary expectation was that their representatives tell the government what they think, but the second most frequently mentioned response was they expected the representative to work to obtain projects and benefits for the district. Third was that the representative help them with problems that they were having with the government. (Kim, et. al., 1984:102)

In the United States, representatives have placed earmarks in appropriations bills specifying that government funds be spent on specific projects in their constituency. By some counts, in some years such earmarks have totaled nearly 20 billion dollars. In recent years, however, earmarks have come under sharp criticism, with critics arguing that many projects so funded were frivolous or unnecessary, that such funds did not always go where they were most needed, and that the primary purpose of these earmarks was to help members of Congress to get reelected. Toward the end of the first decade of the 21st century, such critiques led to temporary moratoriums on earmarks and other restraints on the process. Nonethe-

In those systems with strong governing parties, members of the majority party may not have the ability to vote against the wishes of their leaders, but they can communicate the needs and concerns of their constituents to them.

less, they continue to be an important part of the congressional process, albeit less formally, as representatives lobby government bureaucrats for allocation decisions that will work to the benefit of their constituents and as they more artfully draft legislation to make it all but certain that funds flow to particular constituency projects.

As indicated, these types of activities are nearly universal across all representative systems, but there are some variations depending upon the nature of the party and the electoral system. In the case of the United States, some see the vast resources and great efforts that members of the Congress invest in constituency service as the product of a weak political party system. To get reelected, representatives need to rely upon the good will of their local constituents and they also are personally responsible for raising most of the large sums of money required to finance their campaigns. Running errands for constituents and, even more importantly, advertising their willingness to do so, and seeing to it that one's constituency gets its share of the federal government budget are important factors in assuring their reelection.

In countries with strong and highly disciplined political parties, individual legislators will have little to do with designing major public policies, a task that will be left largely to party leaders. In that case, responding to the individual concerns of their constituents may well be their primary function. During the 5th Republic, with the emergence of a strong presidency and the continued strength of political parties, individual French deputies became much less important players in the policy-making process. Because so many deputies concurrently hold positions as local government officials, their main role now appears to be seeking favors and resources for their constituents from the central government.

In those systems with strong governing parties, members of the majority party may not have the ability to vote against the wishes of their leaders, but they can communicate the needs and concerns of their constituents to them. The party leadership may be responsive to these requests as they plan public expenditures in order to maintain intra-party harmony and solidify the party's electoral position. In Australia, one study found that pork barrel activities were "a partisan phenomenon," with "benefits disproportionately accruing to the governing party's own incumbents" and a particular emphasis on supporting the governing party's "most vulnerable colleagues in marginal seats." (Denemark, 2000:909) In the United States, earmarks have been a more bipartisan affair, but each party has distributed these funds in a manner designed, at least in part, to bolster the reelection prospects of its members.

In France, “the new deputy quickly realizes that local obligations occupy a significant portion of his time and take most of his energy” and voters “show their gratitude to their deputy for services rendered to the local community” as well as “the personal services” that the deputy has provided.

Although the conventional wisdom is that pork barrel politics is “an alien feature” to British parliamentary life, a strengthened committee system has provided MPs with a venue to “pursue inquiries and issue reports to influence government policies that affect members’ constituencies.” One MP reports that his position on the Defense Committee enabled him “to make contacts” which were useful in getting contracts for a company in his constituency. (Jogerst, 1993: 160-1) It is also important to note that in Great Britain, maintaining party discipline involves more than simply cracking the whip; the task requires some degree of responsiveness on the part of party leaders to the concerns of backbench MPs, and it seems reasonable that assisting MPs with local concerns is one way for the leadership to respond.

Some argue that these trends toward more constituency based efforts are a product of a weakening party system in Great Britain, and are aimed at securing a “personal vote” for the MP – that is, a vote that is not determined solely by the MP’s party affiliation but also as a reward for the services that he performs for constituents who do not necessarily support his political party. There is some question about the size and importance (though not the existence) of such a personal vote for members of the United States Congress, and in Great Britain, researchers are not convinced that such a personal vote actually exists. Nonetheless, MPs, both in Britain and in other strong party systems, seem to be convinced that there are at least some personal votes to be had, and there is no dispute that MPs do work on behalf of individual constituents that is quite similar to that in which their American counterparts engage. (Heitshusen, et. al., 2005:32-45) And given the modest staff support afforded MPs, many spend as much, perhaps even more of their own time on this work than members of the extremely well-staffed United States Congress do.

Similarly, in France, “the new deputy quickly realizes that local obligations occupy a significant portion of his time and take most of his energy” and voters “show their gratitude to their deputy for services rendered to the local community” as well as “the personal services” that the deputy has provided. Like their American counterparts, French deputies advertise their success in bringing local projects home to their constituencies, and although citizens in France vote primarily for the party, one of the reasons that they do so is because of the reputation and attention of their local deputy. (Dogan, 2007:438, 447)

Thus, in strong party systems, even if constituency work yields few personal votes for the representative, it can enhance the reputation of the political party in the constituency and in that way redound to the member’s electoral benefit. In other words, the electoral connection in strong party systems may be indirect; constituency service helps the party and

therefore the representatives, rather than helping the representative directly or compensating for the weakness of political parties as is the case in the United States.

The notion that representatives engage in constituency work primarily because they wish to be reelected assumes that reelection is their major career goal. And for many representatives, reelection is indeed an important and in some instances overriding goal. But there are other ways to continue one's political career, and in some countries, remaining in the good graces of party leaders is the best approach. In Costa Rica and Mexico, legislators are legally prohibited from running for immediate reelection; nonetheless, they engage in constituency service to the same extent as their reelection obsessed counterparts in the United States. Although the individual may not be running again, the party does run, and if the voters feel well served by the legislator's activities his party presumably will benefit. The party, in turn, will be able to provide career assistance to the legislator after his assembly term is over, perhaps through a job in a government ministry or assistance in obtaining a private sector post. In Brazil, providing funds for local projects is a major activity of representatives even though, or perhaps because there is very high turn-over among members of Congress. They leave the Congress because political or bureaucratic positions at the local and state levels are more financially rewarding and of greater status than a legislative career. One close observer of Brazilian politics concludes that "expectations of short careers discourage investment in legislative expertise and encourage concentration on pork" as members seek short term gains rather than worrying about long term policies. (Ames, 1995:331)

In Brazil, providing funds for local projects is a major activity of representatives even though, or perhaps because there is very high turnover among members of Congress.

In Colombia, fierce competition for parliamentary seats provided a major incentive for members to focus their activities "on extracting resources to reward supporters with jobs and other private goods." Their involvement in policy issues only occurs if the policy proposal at hand "furthers their primary interest in converting public funds into private payoffs." Rather than being accountable for public policy, members of the Colombian parliament are concerned primarily with how public policy can provide them with the opportunity to bring resources to their constituents. Colombian presidents, aware of this situation, make deals with representatives, trading support for the president's agenda for resources for the constituency. (Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997:117,138) These activities are designed to build the reputation of legislators, many of whom are less interested in reelection to the legislature or a long career in that body (there is a high level of turnover among members of this Parliament) and more interested in lucrative, long term positions in a regional or state office or in the federal bureaucracy.

This also seems to be the case in Brazil. One member of the Brazilian Congress indicated that “a political career in Brazil is closely connected to success in bringing home material benefits. ... Especially in the poorest regions, communities judge their deputies on what they bring home.” Another deputy said the legislator’s “reason for being in Brasilia [the capital of Brazil] is to bring home resources. Otherwise, he’s not doing his job.” A member of the upper house, the Senate, added that “both Deputies and Senators have an obligation to seek funds to solve the problems of their region. Those who fail to do so are remiss.” Local officials, community and business leaders, and interest group leaders “depend on deputies to get federal resources” and deputies in turn depend on the electoral support of these local elites. (Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997:85) It has been reported that Brazilian legislators have promised work on infrastructure improvements to specific firms in return for the votes of the firm’s employees. And as was the case in Colombia, Brazilian presidents build coalitions “by coupling deputies’ disinterest in broad policy with their desire for pork.” (Ames, 1995:342)

The pork barrel success of members of the United States Congress is attributable to their key role in designing and funding the programs that government agencies are responsible for implementing.

It is notable, in this connection, that in authoritarian systems that one would be hard pressed to call democratic or even representative, legislators who have no policy-making influence at all may be encouraged to concentrate on constituency work as a way to convey to citizens the sense (if not always the reality) that the government cares about their problems, thereby helping to maintain popular support for the regime or the hegemonic governing party. In the old Soviet Union, Russian deputies did such work on a regular basis. But pork barrel activities involving the distribution of public funds may not be quite as big a component of their job because such work depends in part upon the ability of the legislator to have some impact on public policy. The pork barrel success of members of the United States Congress is attributable to their key role in designing and funding the programs that government agencies are responsible for implementing. If individual legislators cannot shape government policy and if party discipline guarantees their support for the policy initiatives of the executive branch, they will have little leverage with government officials if they seek to gain funds for local projects. Russian deputies, for example, were reminded by those in power that the interests of their constituencies in terms of public works projects were secondary to the higher priority projects that had been identified by the country’s leadership.

This attitude on the part of centralized bureaucracies – an attitude not restricted to nations with authoritarian systems – has led to the creation in some countries of Constituency Development Funds. Such schemes typically involve the allocation of a certain sum of money to each constituency with decisions about how these funds should be spent made at the local level by bodies involving the MP and local leaders. Such an approach allows individual citizens to have a role in deciding what projects

are supported in their area and, if the process works as its advocates suggest, creates greater responsiveness to local needs than expenditures that are centrally determined at the national level. Also, by guaranteeing a certain amount of money to each constituency, it can reduce the pressures on individual representatives to lobby on behalf of their constituents, freeing them to devote more time to dealing with the national policy challenges that the nation confronts. On the other hand, in some cases, such arrangements can become thinly disguised patronage systems, manipulated by representatives to generate voter support for themselves by punishing their opponents and rewarding their supporters.

Electoral systems also may be a factor in the extent to which representatives engage in constituency service. It would seem at first glance that such activities would be most likely to occur in single member district systems where constituents know exactly who their representative is and expect him to perform the role of patron with them as the clients. Indeed, a cross-national study of representatives in Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, Canada and the United Kingdom found that 78% of the representatives elected from single member districts had a high or medium constituency focus, meaning that they ranked constituency activity as either their top focus or tied with another aspect of their work. In contrast, only 42% of the representatives from multi-member districts ranked constituency work in that manner. Among the single member district representatives, those who were classified as marginal from an electoral standpoint had a stronger commitment to constituency service than their colleagues from safer districts. (Heitshusen, et. al., 2005) It also appears that when France moved from proportional representation under the 4th Republic to single member districts under the 5th Republic, the constituency activities of representatives increased.

One study comparing the constituency activity of MPs in Britain and Ireland finds that Irish legislators were more active on every dimension of constituency work than their British counterparts.

One study comparing the constituency activity of MPs in Britain and Ireland finds that Irish legislators were more active on every dimension of constituency work than their British counterparts. Although some of this is attributable to cultural differences between Ireland and Great Britain, the most significant factor appeared to be the single transferable vote electoral system used in Ireland. Under this system, voters list second and third choices when they vote, and excess votes captured by winning candidates as well as those votes won by minor candidates are transferred to these second and third choices. This arrangement seems to motivate Irish legislators to engage in constituency service activities as a way to bolster their visibility and therefore their reelection chances.

However, such constituency activities also occur in proportional representation systems where there are multi-member districts. This is particularly so in open list systems. One comparative study of several Latin American nations concludes that in every instance when a system other than a

In developing countries with weaker political parties, the pork barrel system resembles the situation in the United States to the extent that its goal is to support the careers of individual parliamentarians.

closed list is used, there is an electoral incentive for candidates of the same party to differentiate themselves from each other by “building a reputation among a set of followers for being able to provide jobs, public works projects, or outright graft to their followers.” (Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997: 426-427) However, in those proportional representation systems where the national party leadership exercises control over the nomination and election process, members are more likely to concentrate on national issues and less likely to be concerned with legislation that targets their constituencies for special benefits. In pre-Chavez Venezuela, for example, there was little evidence that members devoted much effort to getting pork barrel projects for their districts or that they initiated legislation with a specific local focus, because voters selected political parties and had little knowledge of or attachment to individual legislators.

In many countries, some members are elected from single member districts while others are elected from party lists. In Germany, which has such a system, a survey of members found that those who were elected from single member districts had a greater interest in pork barrel projects than those elected from party lists. New Zealand also elects some members from districts and some from party lists, but the parties assign “duty electorates” to members elected from the party list to serve as the party’s designated representative in that geographic constituency (usually a constituency that has elected a member of the other party) to deal with casework and other constituency concerns.

In developing countries with weaker political parties, the pork barrel system resembles the situation in the United States to the extent that its goal is to support the careers of individual parliamentarians. It differs from the American system in the sense that individual legislators have relatively little to do with the design of major public policies and therefore spend most of their time importuning government officials to fund projects in their constituencies. In sub-Saharan Africa, these undertakings include such projects as school and health center construction, irrigation projects, and road construction to name but a few examples. Despite their limited size, projects of this type have an immediate tangible effect on the lives of the rural population, are highly visible, and constitute the substance of most demands for government assistance. Because there are often limited sources of private capital in these nations, virtually all funds for economic development need to come from the central government, and the representative’s role in procuring these funds is a key expectation of constituents and crucial for the legislator’s political survival. It is so crucial, in fact, that presidents or prime ministers who cannot rely on disciplined political parties to support their agendas use their control or influence over the federal budget as a way to solidify support among members of the legislature, explicitly trading local projects for legislative support. It is

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also in this context that the establishment of constituency development funds can be used to reduce the discretionary power of executive leaders.

These examples as well as those previously mentioned from Latin America have some obvious parallels to the United States. One of the classic tools that American presidents have used to gain congressional support for their proposals is promising support for a representative's pet project. Such trades are one of the ways that things get done in Washington, both in terms of presidential-congressional relations, and also in terms of gaining majorities in the Congress. During the George W. Bush Administration, Republican leaders in Congress used earmarks as a way to gather support for the President's agenda among some of their more recalcitrant members. And certainly, as in Brazil, if American representatives disappoint local elites, such as constituency based interest groups, major industries, or local government leaders, by failing to produce resources that they need, then in many cases their electoral prospects are likely to be at risk.

Finally, it is important to understand that the constituency activities of representatives do not always involve dealing with specific problems or with generating funds for the constituency. Representatives who visit their constituency on a regular basis are able to stay in touch with the concerns of their constituents, are able to communicate these concerns to leaders in the capitol, and are able, when asked, to provide citizens with a rationale for the actions that the government has taken. Thus, by their mere presence in the constituency and their accessibility to citizens, representatives have the potential to provide citizens with the sense that their concerns are being heard by government officials. In doing so, they can enhance the level of public support for the regime in general as well as for the legislature.

Lessons and Conclusions

What lessons can be drawn from this discussion that would serve to strengthen legislative institutions? Perhaps one place to begin is with a question first asked by the American political scientist Richard Fenno: why do people love their representative more than they love the Congress itself? His answer was that citizens have different expectations for their representative than they have for the legislature as a whole. They expect their representative to be responsive to their individual and collective needs, but they expect the legislature to be responsive to the needs of the nation and to deal efficiently and effectively with the nation's problems.

In an ideal world, citizens hope for a legislature that makes public policy in an expeditious manner, that does so with a level of decorum, and that is not always focused on the implications of public policy decisions for the next election.

The low esteem in which Americans hold their Congress is well documented and is replicated in many other countries. Some view their legislatures as places where people simply talk at length, but where little action takes place. Others are appalled by the level of ideological and sometimes personal hostility that characterizes legislative deliberations. Some think of legislators as being overly focused on their own political careers and their prospects for reelection, and less interested in dealing with the problems that the nation confronts. In brief, in an ideal world, citizens hope for a legislature that makes public policy in an expeditious manner, that does so with a level of decorum, and that is not always focused on the implications of public policy decisions for the next election.

On the other hand, citizens also expect that the representatives whom they elect will speak out on behalf of their interests and views and see to it that those interests are reflected in the policy decisions that the government takes. They expect representatives to devote time to the concerns of constituents – to be present in the constituency, to be accessible to ordinary citizens and local elites, to listen and deal with the individual problems that they may be having with government bureaucracies, to satisfy their desire for increased funding for local projects, and to make certain that local interests are protected and advanced by national policy makers. And citizens have a record of rewarding those members who meet these expectations at the ballot box and punishing those who fall short.

As representatives attempt to respond to the locally oriented expectations of their constituents, they may well exhibit the tendency toward stalemate and conflict that plays a role in lowering the level of esteem in which the public holds the institution as a whole. Stalemate can result when representatives are unwilling to compromise the local priorities of their constituents. Costly and ineffective public policies may result when legislation is tailored so that every local interest is satisfied rather than designed to deal with the nation's most important problems. Significant partisan and regional divides can provoke the hostile tone in legislative discussions that cause the institution to lose the support and respect of citizens. And when legislators devote a large amount of their own and their staff's time to satisfying constituency demands, when they spend more time in their constituency than they do in the capitol, they necessarily devote less time to the challenges and intricacies of national public policy. Even representatives who understand this tradeoff between time devoted to constituency responsibilities and time devoted to policy making may opt for the former because they fear the electoral and personal consequences of disappointing local needs, interests, and opinions.

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In sum, citizens expect close and intimate ties between themselves and their representatives and they also expect that the legislature will work efficiently and effectively to solve national problems.

efficiently and effectively to solve national problems. The problem is that these expectations may be in tension with each other. To the extent that individual legislators meet the expectations of their constituents, the institution as a whole may fail to meet the expectations of the citizens of the nation. There are several ways to ameliorate this tension.

Systemic

Although the relationship is not a perfect one, single member district systems appear to exacerbate the tension between serving the constituency and effective policy-making because of the strong expectation that the one representative from a particular geographical area has a special responsibility to that area. In multimember proportional representation systems, constituencies are larger and there isn't a single representative who citizens think of when they have demands to make or concerns that need to be reflected. To some extent, such an electoral system will reduce the pressures on representatives to be responsive to local concerns and presumably increase their ability to deal effectively with national policy issues.

Another systemic factor is the length of legislative terms. Short terms such as the two year term served by members of the United States House of Representatives, combined with the single member district system, encourage an even more intimate tie between representatives and their constituents because the former are constantly running for reelection. Longer terms, such as the six year term that members of the United States Senate serve, may encourage somewhat more independence from local constituency pressures and consequently a greater focus on national level policy-making.

Finally, political party strength is an important factor. When political parties can control who is nominated and who is elected to legislative seats, their national priorities can provide a counterweight to constituency concerns. This is especially the case to the extent that the electoral decisions of voters are dictated as much or even more by partisan concerns than by the personal characteristics and accomplishments of the candidate. In such a context, even in single member district systems, members will be more likely to seek a balance between attending to constituency concerns and dealing with public policy issues. This will be especially the case when strong parties provide most of the financing for election campaigns and therefore candidates are not overly dependent upon doing the sorts of things that will be necessary to raise the money that they need to be reelected.

In sum, single member district systems, weak political parties, and short terms are a nearly perfect recipe for a locally oriented legislative body that is likely to fail in its role as a national policy maker.

In sum, single member district systems, weak political parties, and short terms are a nearly perfect recipe for a locally oriented legislative body that is likely to fail in its role as a national policy maker. The United States House of Representatives is the prototype of such an institution. In contrast, multi-member constituencies, with strong political parties, and relatively long terms will encourage a greater focus on the part of representatives on national policy issues. The Norwegian Storting is an example of such an institution.

Procedures

More institutionalized means need to be identified to involve representatives in decisions concerning the distribution of public funds. The constituency development funds now operational in several nations can provide a way for the representative to address constituency needs while freeing him to deal with national challenges in a more concerted way. Such a process, when carefully designed, could supplement and perhaps supplant the current arrangements whereby representatives must spend a great deal of their time lobbying executive agencies for funds for their constituents, or where good public policy is compromised by the need to incorporate local projects into national legislation.

The larger point is that the task of strengthening public support for legislative institutions may have more to do with what representatives do in their constituencies than with how they vote in the legislative chamber. As legislators work to attend to the local needs of their constituents – helping with problems that people may be having with the bureaucracy, being present in their community to hear and respond to constituency complaints, seeing to it that government funds are used to address what constituents view as priority projects rather than what administrators based in the capitol view as priorities – they will do more to raise the reputation of the legislature than attempting to match their votes on public policy with shifting and often unascertainable constituency opinions. This is especially so in those countries where individual representatives have relatively little say in designing national policies.

Cultural

As Edmund Burke did more than 225 years ago, the modern representative needs to make the case – to himself as well as to his constituents – that although their interests are important to him, the interests of the nation and the demands of good public policy often need to take precedence.

dence. Doing so might not be as difficult as it sounds. There is reason to believe that voters, at least in theory, value the interests of the nation as a whole, even if pursuing that interest might come at the expense of local interests. There is also evidence that voters care less about the content of public policy than they do about the process of public policy-making. Citizens seem to be most appalled by the hostile tone of legislative deliberations and by the inability of the legislature to get things done, and, within limits, less upset about the specifics of what the legislature actually does. In such a context, it may not be quixotic for a representative seeking reelection to say that he has used his own judgment to do what is good for the country rather than what might be more immediately popular among those whom he represents.

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