Dear editors, dear reviewers,

Many thanks for the constructive comments on «The Quality of Representative Claims: Uncovering a Weakness in the Defense of the Liberal World Order». It seems clear to me that both reviewers have a different perspective on the topic of representative claims than I do, and also partially disagree with each other. My perspective appears more empirically driven, leading to the identification of different frontiers in the literature and even different understandings of what a representative claim is. In all likelihood, these different starting points make it impossible for me to revise the paper in a way that would fully meet the reviewers’ approval. I have, however, done my best to take their criticism on board in making my own perspective as clear and well-founded as possible. The reviewers’ comments have proven very helpful in this revision of the manuscript. My apologies if this letter comes across as argumentative. The argumentation is meant to highlight the different starting perspectives of theoretical and empirical analysis of representative claims and thus to contextualize the revisions to the present paper. I believe this is now a much stronger paper as a result of these revisions and sincerely hope you will agree. Please allow me to briefly sketch both major and minor revisions in response to your comments.

Major revisions

First, a difficulty arose in light of the different perspectives of reviewer 1 and 2. While reviewer 1 argued that the paper was not about representative claims and needed reframing, reviewer 2 argued that the paper had merit exactly because it spoke to the literature on representative claims from a quantitative empirical perspective. This, of course, presented me with a challenge. I opted broadly for aligning with reviewer 2’s perspective, but also made a clear effort to stress how and why – in my opinion – this paper is about representative claims. In particular, the paper now more clearly discusses the ‘public’ dimension of representative claims, most notably the relevance of media coverage and how media coverage and attempts by makers of claims to make it into the news affects representative claims.

In contrast to reviewer 1, I find a discussion on representative claims and the framing of the paper in this light necessary. Otherwise, it makes no sense to engage in a normative assessment of claims-making. Here is the essential double-edged contribution of the paper. Its primary aim is to provide a contribution to the theoretical discussion of representative claims through a quantitative empirical analysis that stimulates thinking about explicating further the normative criteria of assessment. At the same time, it contributes to the empirical political sociological literature on claims as demands in the news by providing a theoretically grounded perspective on their normativity.

While I see the two different meanings of claims as outlined by reviewer 1, I find Saward’s original work less unambigious. The difference between “X claims to stand for the preferences of a country or region” (Saward 2010: 38) and “X demands policies in accordance with the preferences of a country or region” is more often than not merely semantic. This is especially so when we take into account that the claim may have been reformulated or reframed by a journalist to improve news value or pre-emptively formulated in a way by the maker of the claim in order to get a journalist’s attention.

To make a better argument on how and why this is about representative claims, the reviewers now find a more explicit and elaborate discussion on the study of *mediated* representative claims.

Also, I agree with reviewer 2 that my original inclusion of claims may have been too ‘liberal’, in danger of concept stretching. I have now limited the analysis only to claims (in the form of policy demands) that explicitly articulate an intended constituency. While I think in principle any claim in the news is representative in the form of ‘making something present which otherwise is not’, I agree with reviewer 2 that it runs the risk of conflating representative claims-making with all mediated politics. The dataset was subsequently reduced from 11.810 claims to 6.018 and the Quality of Representative Claims index was reduced from the original 0 – 12 scale to a new 0 – 9 scale, taking the explicit articulation of a constituency out of the equation. The results, however, remain the same. Limiting the analysis to this subset does not affect the outcome or the main argument of the paper. The exclusion of implicit representative claims also removes potential problems that the findings are a result of established actors feeling less of a need to make explicit claims. This point was raised by both reviewer 1 and 2.

Both reviewers ask for clarification of the operationalization of the discursive components and reviewer 2 explicitly asks for examples of claims and their codings. I have therefore introduced several examples from the dataset as qualitative illustration of how the coding proceeded and what mediated representative claims look like.

Reviewer 2 challenges the hypotheses as grounded in the standard account of representation. I have now reformulated them to make clearer that they are grounded in a rational choice perspective that sees representative claims as strategic actions, which is not to be conflated with the standard account. As far as I’m aware of, the constructivist turn has not generated any testable empirical hypotheses that could serve as alternatives to this approach. The subsequent findings that several of these key rational choice hypotheses are not supported by the data lends further credence to the constructivist turn in representation. The importance of elections lies in my opinion not in their intrinsic normative desirability, but in the ease they create to hold representatives to account. Easy citizen judgement on representatives/representative claims is an ideal that is in my reading shared by both the standard and constructivist accounts of representation. Without the possibility of ‘feedback’ from citizens, there is no legitimate representation. From this shared normative baseline, the rational choice perspective predicts easy judgement to be positively correlated with high quality representative claims. I have tried to make clearer now that the essential benchmark is facilitation of citizen judgement of claims and that incentive structures fuel the expectations.

In point four, reviewer 2 raises exactly the kind of questions that this paper aims to raise. Clearly, existing contributions to the normative assessment of representative claims put a lot of emphasis on such systemic or contextual factors. The aim of this paper is to present a picture without such contextual factors. Partly, that is because I think the inclusion of contextual factors in the normative assessment of claims lends itself too easily to a political judgement of the claims. But that is an argument in itself, going beyond this paper. All this paper tries to do is present an analysis of what we find when we adopt the information criterion in rigorous analysis. That may be a small contribution, but an essential one in my opinion nevertheless. I’m afraid adding further discussion on context would overburden the paper.

Minor revisions

Reviewer 1’s comments on the right attribution of the ‘citizen standpoint’ between Saward and Disch have been accommodated in the paper. This was indeed a mistake in the previous version.

Reviewer 1 point argues that part of the critical appraisal of Saward and Disch is not needed. I agree and have removed or reformulated several paragraphs of this discussion.

Reviewer 1: The new version no longer lumps together several different authors on representative democracy.

Reviewer 1: I have clarified my understanding of “the liberal world order” and association with it.

Reviewer 2: the sentence on “no other study documents evidence that the fringe makes a valuable contribution to democracy through particularly informative and thus mobilizing representative claims” has been clarified to stress that the essential contribution of the claims is the new perspective rendered from assessing representative claims against the information criterion, rather than the first part of the sentence.