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Assessing Preferences for Political Representation in the US

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ABSTRACT *While much of the extant research on political representation focuses on congruence issues and elite perceptions of their representational roles, little has been done to examine how members of the* general public *think about representational relationship. Often, constituents are assumed to be passive actors in the representational process. This paper advances the argument that individuals have preferences over how tightly bound elected representatives should be to constituent policy preferences and that these preferences are contextual, varying by the degree to which constituents perceive that their representative shares characteristics similar to those of the individual. Two data sources are used to verify this argument: (1) the 1978 ANES and (2) data collected for Congress' Obey Commission, 1976–1977. These data provide evidence that public representational preferences have a systematic component. Most significantly, the study finds that members of minority groups have contextually derived preferences for political representation.*

The study of the constituent/representative representational link is necessarily one of the fundamental foci of the legislative studies field. Legislative scholars have dissected the representational relationship, tweezing apart the many aspects of the relationship to better understand its constituent links and functions. From both normative and positive perspectives, political theorists and empirical analysts have assessed the links between constituents and those they elect to represent them in state and national legislatures. Taking these studies together, scholars have built an understanding of "representation" as a system, with its inputs, outputs and outcomes.

This paper seeks to highlight one aspect of the representational system that has received less explicit attention. An important, though often implicitly stated, assumption of many of the extant representational studies is that constituent preferences over the relationship between themselves and their elected officials are generally homogeneous. There are, of course, several well-conceived studies that serve as exceptions to this characterization (as will be discussed below). However, as Manin *et al*. state, "The mandate conception of representation is widespread: scholars, journalists and ordinary citizens rely on it as if it were axiomatic" (1999: 30).

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Yet working in other national contexts scholars have demonstrated that representational preferences in the public vary in predictable ways across individuals. The focus of these studies has been on the interplay between the representation "triad" common in parliamentary systems, namely, the relationship between the citizenry, the elected officials and the political parties (see Norton & Wood, 1993; Judge, 1999; Carman, 2006, for the UK case; Mendez-Lago & Martinez, 2002, for the Spanish case). Not only do these studies serve to elucidate some of the predictors of representational preferences, but they also draw into focus the lacuna in the US representation literature.

Simply stated, this paper tests the proposition that individuals in the United States uniformly share a common preference for the representational relationship. Recognizing Zaller and Feldman's point that "individuals possess multiple and often conflicting opinions toward important issues" (1992: 420), the argument advanced here is not that citizens have highly developed, constrained and sophisticated attitudes over the representational relationship. Instead, the general argument of this paper is that individuals have preferences over how tightly bound elected representatives should be to the policy preferences of their constituents and that these preferences vary across individuals in the polity in predictable ways. Most importantly, representation preferences are contextual, varying by the degree to which constituents perceive their representative shares their own characteristics. While some of the representation literature from the 1960s and early 1970s used bivariate models to address the first two points of this argument, this paper adds to the empirical US representation literature by assessing the contextual nature of representational preferences in a multivariate framework. Stated more broadly, the general theme of this argument is that to develop fully our model of political representation we need to better understand constituent preferences for the representational relationship.

The next section of this paper places the assessment of constituent preferences over the representational relationship in the context of the extant studies on representation. The third section leverages data from two datasets (the 1978 ANES and the 1977 Obey Commission survey) to provide mutually supporting evidence that representational preferences vary in meaningful ways across members of the public and that they have a contextually derived component. The final section draws out implications of the core findings, particularly as they relate to minority representational preferences, and addresses possible future research.

Modelling Political Representation

Scholars have identified several theoretical constructs that may be used to model the constituent/legislator representational relationship. A constant theme across these perspectives is the concept of delegation, or the extent of authority constituents are willing to concede to law-makers to make decisions in their interest. Strom (2000) identifies the principal–agent relationship between constituents and parliamentarians as one of the defining institutional characteristics of parliamentary

systems. Mansbridge (2003) also uses the principal–agent relationship to frame what she terms "promissory representation" where the electorate delegates authority to their law-makers. Mansbridge notes that this form of representation may be conceptually disaggregated into the "mandate" and "trustee" versions (analogous to the classic delegate/trustee model; see also Pitkin, 1967; Davidson, 1970; Patterson *et al*., 1975; Bianco, 1994; Arnold, 2003). In discussing this framework, Mansbridge notes, "Although promissory representation has never described actual representation fully, it has been and remains today one of the most important ways in which citizens influence political outcomes through representatives" (2003: 516). Accordingly, Mansbridge argues that the question in the minds of the voters is how to keep their "hooks" in their representative in order to maintain control over the representative's actions (2003: 518).

Other scholars have sought to define empirically derived models of representation. Eulau and Karps (1977), for example, identified several components of representation: service responsiveness, allocation responsiveness, policy responsiveness, and symbolic responsiveness. Empirically based assessments of "representation" also encompass analyses of electoral systems (Cox, 1997; Powell, 2000), the translation of votes into seats in legislatures (Erikson, 1988; Powell, 2000), the congruence between legislators and constituents (Miller & Stokes, 1963; Achen, 1978; Erikson, 1978; Weissberg, 1978, 1979; Kuklinski, 1979; Stone, 1979; Hurley, 1989, 1991; Hill & Hurley, 1999; Arnold, 2003), minority representation (Canon, 1999; Tate, 2003), districting and redistricting (Canon, 1999; Cox & Katz, 2002), and the roles of representatives (Eulau *et al*., 1959; Fenno, 1978; Norton & Wood, 1993; Rosenthal, 1998; Judge, 1999; Lee & Oppenheimer, 1999), just to name a few (see also, Jewell, 1985; Thomassen, 1994; Kuklinski & Segura, 1995, for extensive literature reviews). At a broader level, the representation congruence studies are conceptually related to the studies of aggregated opinion and governmental decisions or policies (see Page & Shapiro, 1992; Erikson *et al*., 2002; Wlezien, 2004; Soroka & Wlezien, 2005) which have generally found a close relation between aggregate opinion and governmental policies.

Yet, while the broad range of representation studies have done much to shed light on the manner and extent of the translation of constituent policy demands into the policy responsiveness of legislators, few studies have actively investigated individual level *preferences* for this relationship. Further, many of these studies seem to adopt, often implicitly, the assumption that all things being equal, the public is unified in its preference for a mandate, or delegate relationship with elected officials. As previously stated, Manin *et al*. argue that citizens and scholars rely on the mandate model of representation as if it were "axiomatic" (1999: 30). Other studies model constituents as passive or semi-passive participants in the representational relationship. In these models of the representational relationship constituents respond to the cues they receive from external actors (e.g. Arnold, 2003: 410). In his 1985 review of representation research, Jewell raises the point that few existing studies have explicitly sought to assess the extent to which individuals may have preferences for the representational relationship (see Jewell, 1985: 111). Other

scholars have implicitly noted the importance of public preferences over the representational relationship. Bianco's (1994: 85) discussion of trust, as one example, takes up the idea of constituent preferences for the degree of "leeway", or delegated authority, they should grant to their representatives in making decisions.

There are several well-known studies that speak to, but do not explicitly evaluate, the question of public preferences over the representational relationship. In assessing the extent to which the American citizenry can be classified as "direct democrats" or "institutional democrats" in what they term "policy space", Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2001) show (in their Figure 2) that the mean preference of individuals is approximately midway between the direct and institutional democrat extremes.[1] They find that "People definitely want elected officials to be involved in decision making and do not want governmental institutions to go away" (2001: 149). While certainly a valuable insight, this finding, however, does not speak to the *type* of representational relationship that individuals prefer with their elected officials. Further, while Hibbing and Theiss-Morse identify "representation" as a key "process variable" they operationalize the concept of "modern styles of interest group involvement" (1995: 142). Again, though important, this is clearly distinct from individual level preferences for the degree of authority that should be delegated to elected representatives.

The studies that have directly assessed representational preferences in the US (in the delegation sense) are informative. However, as most of these studies were undertaken some time ago, they did not have access to multivariate modelling resources that are now ubiquitous (e.g. the handy Apple or PC desktop running a gig of RAM) and therefore tended to rely on bivariate analysis. Perhaps the most widely cited of these studies to take up constituent perceptions of representation is Patterson *et al*.'s (1975) study of Iowans. Here the authors found that in terms of style, Iowans preferred to have representatives act as trustees, while they also preferred a more parochial focus limited to the state or district. In contrast, Davidson (1970), using data from a 1968 national survey, addressed public "purposive role perceptions" of their members of Congress. Using an open ended question asking respondents what the "most important things" their member of Congress "should do in Washington", Davidson found that roughly two-thirds of respondents expressed a preference for a delegate role. Earlier, McMurray and Parsons (1965; cited in Lipinski, 2002) also analysed survey data to understand public preferences for representation. In short, they found that individuals with higher status occupations tend to prefer representatives to adopt a trustee role while people with lower status occupations tended to prefer a delegate role.

These previous studies provide some evidence that representational preferences do vary across individuals. Given the limited models used, the extant studies are less informative in explaining how and why representational preferences vary across members of the public. Further, these studies do little to address how representational preferences might influence other political attitudes and assessments. For this we must turn to the non-US research. Studying public preferences for the representational relationship in Spain, Mendez-Lago and Martinez (2002) propose that one

possible factor leading to the decline in public trust and confidence in governing bodies is an expectations gap formed by the difference between what the public expects from elected officials in terms of the representational relationship and the sort of representation they believe they receive. Additionally, Carman (2006) has recently found that representational preferences influence individual level evaluations of Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom. The comparative literature indicates that representational preferences matter in other political systems, leaving their role in the United States an open question.

Hypothesizing about Representational Preferences

The core proposition of this paper is that individuals have preferences over the degree of authority that (they believe) should be delegated to elected representatives. These normative preferences for representation are one of the basic lenses through which individuals view (and judge) the actions and messages of their representatives. Certainly one would not want to argue that individual level preferences for the representational relationship are highly constrained and sophisticated attitudes that individuals form only after cogent and coherent evaluation. The vast research in political behaviour has demonstrated that we should not expect too much in the terms of structure and constraint in American public opinion (see Kinder, 1998, for an extensive review). Further, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995, 1998) have shown us that individuals do not understand how complicated political, legislative and representative systems are. Instead of developing a sophisticated appreciation for the vagaries of the American political system, individuals base their preferences for the representational relationship on a simple understanding about how much authority they think should be delegated to representatives (see Mansbridge, 2003). Hence, though we must be careful not to expect that individuals hold constrained representational preferences, neither should we assume that individuals' preferences for representation are voiced entirely randomly.

Additionally, we should not necessarily expect that individual's representational preferences are fixed and invariant. Again, referring back to the work of Zaller and Feldman, we know that "individuals possess multiple and often conflicting opinions toward important issues" (1992: 420). Pitkin (1967) and Mansbridge (2003), among many others, have noted that representation may be conceptualized in many different ways. Similarly, we could imagine that individuals may hold different preferences and expectations about the way the representational relationship should work. While individuals may hold a general preference, they may express a different preference for representation when the specific context in which they find themselves differs from their general context. We might expect, for example, members of a minority community to express a preference for one type of representation when represented by someone from within their community than if they are represented by someone from the majority. In this sense, Mansbridge (2003) discusses what she terms "gyroscopic representation" as an alternative to her "promissory" model discussed above. The gyroscopic model is dominated by the voter's sense that they

are able to predict how a representative will act based on the "politician's personal reputation, descriptive characteristics, and character (as the voter's judge it)" (Mansbridge, 2003: 521). Under this framework, we might expect that individuals may be more willing to delegate greater authority to representatives that share their descriptive characteristics and delegate less authority to representatives with whom they do not have characteristics in common.

To sum up so far, representational preferences are likely a function of the degree of authority that an individual believes should be delegated to the elected officials serving as the individual's proxy in government. Using Bianco's (1994) terms, representational preferences reflect the degree of "leeway" individuals believe should be given to elected officials to act independently of their constituents' policy preferences. We should not expect, however, that these preferences are constrained and sophisticated. One possibility is that preferences for the degree of authority that should be delegated to elected officials will vary with the political context of the individual. Individuals in minority communities within a majority dominant district, for example, may express a different preference for the representational relationship than will minority community members represented by someone from within their community.

Given this, how can we predict these representational preferences? First, political efficacy may share a relationship with representational beliefs. The greater the degree of political efficacy one has, that is, the stronger the connection one perceives between him- or herself, their elected officials and the government, the greater the authority they are likely to be willing to delegate to their representative. Stated another way, the highly efficacious are more likely to feel that they can adjust the policy "thermostat" (to use Wlezien's, 1995, terminology) if they believe that policy moves in a direction that they do not prefer. If, on the other hand, one believes that there is a fundamental disconnect between herself and the government, she may be more likely to want to limit governmental discretion, or maximize what control citizens do have over governing institutions. Believing they have no way to stop a government run amok, the politically inefficacious may want to limit governmental discretion from the outset. Under this hypothesis, low efficacy individuals will hold preferences based on tightly controlling their elected representatives – this would necessarily be done through a direct, delegate relationship.

The prediction for the influence of governmental trust on representational preferences is conceptually similar to that of political efficacy. We could expect that the more an individual trusts the government, the more likely they are to favour delegating greater authority for independent action to their representative. That is, if one believes that the government generally tries to do what is "right", it is also likely that she will also believe that the government (and the members of that government) can be given discretion to do what is in the best interest of the country. On the other hand, individuals who distrust government are more likely to want to control and limit it to only pursuing those policies specified by constituents.

Following Kinder's observation that shared group interests are a significant influence on public opinion (1998: 808), we can predict that one's membership in a

traditional political minority group may influence one's preferences for political representation (as discussed above). Here we can hypothesize that political minorities may express a preference for delegating greater authority through a "trustee" relationship between the district and representative. Members of minority groups are, virtually by definition, political minorities in their districts (but, of course this may differ in majority–minority districts). A delegate representative–constituency relationship would dictate that a minority group's policy preferences would rarely be heard or acted upon. It would, of course, be the majority's policy preferences that would be advanced under the delegate model. The best chance minority communities would have for having their policy preferences acted upon would be through greater delegation of authority for the representative to act independently of the majority. Under this condition, the representative, acting according to their perception of the best interest of all constituents, may take the views of the minority community into account when formulating policy positions. This hypothesis may well be conditioned by two contextual factors: first, when the representative is a member of the minority community; second, in districts that are purposefully drawn to give a traditional minority groups descriptive representation in the legislature – such as majority–minority districts. Under both conditions, members of the minority group, following Mansbridge's (2003) discussion of gyroscopic representation, may prefer a direct relationship with their representative believing that their policy preferences would carry a higher priority as the representative would share the minority community's descriptive characteristics.

Of course, models predicting representational preferences must control for other covariates. The early studies of representational preferences by Patterson *et al*. (1975) and McMurray and Parsons (1965) argue that certain demographic characteristics may serve as significant predictors of an individual's beliefs about representation. Foremost, an individual's relative level of education may influence how they perceive the relationship between themselves and their representatives. The more highly educated one is, the better they may understand the functioning of government, understand the necessary give and take in the legislative process and, therefore, endorse a trustee relationship with their representative. Less educated individuals, on the other hand, may not feel as secure with the abstract relationship necessary with an independence model, thus preferring a mandate model. Additionally, to reflect the early representational studies income is entered as a control into the equations predicting representational preferences.

Finally, the estimated models control for party identification. Davidson (1969) finds that party affiliation is a significant predictor of the representational predispositions held by members of Congress. Within the mass US electorate party affiliation has been shown to be one of the most durable political orientations and may influence individual level value orientations (Goren, 2005). However, the relationship between party identification and mass representational preferences is not immediately clear. It may well be the case that Republicans, being associated with the party that traditionally favours a smaller, more constrained government would prefer the delegate model more than would Democratic identifiers.

However, it is likely that relative levels of trust in government and political efficacy overshadow any direct relationship between party affiliation and representational preferences.

A final obvious point before we proceed, this paper does not pretend to exhaust the list of potential hypotheses that could – and in the long run should – be generated and tested relating to individual preferences for political representation. Here, the goal is to subject extant theories relating to representational preferences to multivariate testing. The conclusion of this paper will discuss a few omitted hypotheses that should be examined.

Testing a Basic Model of Representational Preferences

The purpose of this paper, then, is to establish that individuals have (normative) preferences for the representational relationship between themselves and their representatives and that these preferences vary in systematic ways across individuals and contexts. While the possible hypotheses are numerous, the data, at this stage of inquiry, remain limited. A search of available secondary datasets yields little fruit. To be sure, Jewell's observation from 1985 still holds: few publicly available surveys have asked a battery of questions extensive enough to examine carefully public beliefs about representation.

That said, existing data from two sources can be leveraged to shed light on this question: the 1978 American National Election Study (ANES) and a 1977 public survey commissioned by Congress' Commission for Administrative Review (a.k.a. the Obey Commission, 1976–1977).[2] As with most secondary data sources, neither perfectly meets the current need. Both available datasets have their advantages – and their limitations (as will be described in more detail below). The strategy adopted in this paper is to present analyses of both surveys. If both analyses provide concurring results, we cannot write off significant findings as the fluke of a single survey instrument or sample.

The 1978 ANES

The 1978 ANES provides a good opportunity to test the basic propositions about individual level preferences for political representation as well an excellent opportunity to test the contextual propositions relating minority status with representational preferences. While it is the case that the data are dated, the 1978 ANES has the distinct advantage of (1) being designed, in part, to investigate specific public assessments of the ability of a member of Congress to represent their constituency's interests. Additionally, and equally importantly, (2) the final release of the dataset is contextually rich, containing not only individual survey responses, but also a wealth of contextual election data aggregated to the district, county and state levels that has rarely been duplicated. Therefore, despite the age of the dataset, the inclusion of measures designed to tap representational preference, as well as the extensive inclusion of contextual data allowing for the testing of the contextual hypotheses, make

this a useful resource for assessing public preferences for the representational relationship they share with their members of Congress.[3]

The dependent variable in this portion of the analysis is drawn from the question that asked respondents:

> Sometimes voters want their US representative to do something the representative disagrees with. When this happens, do you think the representative should do what the voters think best, or should the representative do what he or she thinks best?[4]

Dichotomized,[5] this question provides a measure of respondent preferences for the degree of authority respondents are willing to delegate to their representatives, where 1 indicates that respondents agree that representatives should "do what the voters think best" (or act as a classic "delegate") and 0 indicates representatives should act as "trustees" and "do what he or she thinks best". As such, the equations predicting representation preferences use logistic estimation.

As noted, the strength of the ANES dataset lies in its pool of explanatory and contextual variables. The relationship between political efficacy and representational preferences is tested with the inclusion of the standard ANES additive scale (combining all six "efficacy" items).[6] The trust in government measure (range 1–4) is simply derived from the question which asks respondents, "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" In addition to these measures, the model includes a dummy indicating whether or not the respondent claimed to have voted in both the 1976 and 1978 elections (1 = voted in both elections) as a measure of connection to the political system.

The proposition that members of minority groups will be more likely to favour delegating more authority to their member of Congress is tested using several variables. First, the model includes a dichotomous variable identifying African American respondents (1 = black, 0 = non-black).[7] Additionally, a variable that indicates that both the respondent and their member of Congress are African American is included to test the conditional nature of the hypothesis, namely, that blacks represented by blacks will be more likely to express a preference for a delegate relationship.

Partisan identification is controlled for using dichotomous variables indicating Democratic and Republican identification, leaving Independents as the reference category. Differences between Northern and Southern Democrats opinions are controlled in the model by interacting the Democrat dummy with a dummy for Southern residence. While controlling for the unique aspects of the South, the indicator for Southern Democrats has the added benefit of testing for differences in representational preferences between party identifiers in the long-time political/partisan majority (Southern Democrats) versus party identifiers in the minority since Reconstruction (Southern Republicans). Finally, the model includes indicators of respondent education, age and sex.

ANES Findings

Table 1 presents the results from a straightforward logistic equation, with robust standard errors, predicting dichotomized respondent preferences for representational style. Here we find that partisan identification and voter status are not significant predictors of representational preferences on their own. Southern Democrats, however, were 11% ($p = 0.05$) more likely to prefer a direct, delegate relationship with their member of Congress. Note that this is a sign shift from the Southern dummy, which indicates that Southerners in the political minority were significantly more likely to prefer granting more leeway to their representatives while Southerners in the political majority preferred to bind their representatives.[8]

In support of the hypotheses discussed above, both political efficacy and trust in government correspond with an increased probability of preferring greater delegation of autonomy to one's member of Congress. With both of these variables, a full range change from either the least to the most efficacious or the least to the most trusting

Table 1. Logistic regression predicting preferences for representational style using data from American National Election Study (1978)

Dependent variable: preference for representational style ("delegate" = 1; "trustee" = 0)

Predictors (range)	Logit coefficient	*Z*	Δ probability (for full range)
Democratic identifier (1,0)	0.09	0.38	
Republican identifier (1,0)	0.31	1.30	
Southern Democrat (1,0)	0.55*	1.99	0.11
Southerner (1,0)	–0.44**	2.07	–0.11
Efficacy (0–6)	–0.15**	3.54	–0.20
Trust government (1–4)	–0.16*	2.45	–0.20
Voter (1,0)	0.17	1.18	
Age (18–98)	–0.01**	2.87	–0.23
Female (1,0)	0.31*	2.31	0.05
Education level (1–10)	–0.08*	2.27	–0.15
African American (1,0)	–1.04**	3.60	–0.25
R and MC African American (1,0)	1.32*	2.23	0.21
Constant	1.32**	3.23	
$N = 1080$			
Wald $\chi^2 = 60.78$ ($p > 0.000$)			

*$p > 0.05$, **$p > 0.01$.
Source: National Election Studies (1978).
Cell entries as labelled: logit; Wald's *Z* statistic; change in predicted probability of selecting delegate over trustee for a full range change in statistically significant independent variables (computed using J. Scott Long's S-Post commands for Stata; see Long & Freese, 2006). Equations estimated in Stata 9.2 using robust standard errors.

of government increases the probability of preferring a "trustee" by approximately 20%. That is, people who are inclined to believe that they have some say in government or that the government generally does what is "right" are willing to allow their elected officials a greater degree of latitude in pursuing policy outputs.

Similarly, a full range change from the least to the most educated respondents corresponds with a distinct increase in the probability of preferring a trustee relationship even after controlling for political efficacy and trust in government. Here we find that the most educated are 16% more likely to say that representatives should do what they think "best". As posited above, it is likely that the most educated have a better understanding of the give and take that is necessary in policy making and are therefore likely to grant greater discretion to their representatives.

The most interesting findings, however, are those relating racial minorities with preferences for political representation. Being African American is a significant predictor of representational preferences, both statistically and substantively. Blacks are about 25% more likely to prefer a trustee over a delegate. That is, membership in a group that is clearly in the numerical and, more importantly, political minority corresponds (at the 0.000 level) to an increased probability of preferring a representative who will do what they think is "best" for their constituents while not necessarily following the mandates of the majority. However, this preference is conditional on the race of the *representative*. Blacks who are represented by someone with whom they identify racially are much more likely, about 21%, to prefer a *delegate*. That is, a black constituent with a black representative is much more likely to prefer the representative to follow the constituents' mandates. Of course it is not surprising that the percentage of African Americans residing in the congressional districts represented by an African American is quite high. Indeed, in four of the seven congressional districts in which both respondents and members of Congress are African American (and happen to be in the 1978 ANES), blacks constitute a clear majority of the districts' population. In all but one of the seven districts, African Americans form a plurality of the districts' population.[9] This further supports the general argument proposed: political *minorities* tend to prefer a trustee relationship with their representative, while political *majorities* would prefer that the representative follow the will of the majority.

The ANES data from 1978 tells us a pretty strong story. Higher levels of political efficacy and trust in government are shown to be significant predictors of a preference for greater delegation of authority to elected representatives. Similarly, individuals with higher levels of education are also more likely to support trustees over delegates. Finally, racial minorities, specifically African Americans, tend to think that non-black representatives should act independently of the desires of the (white) majority. But if the representative is also black, and likely to hail from a predominately black district, then they should be more specifically responsive to constituents' direct mandates.

But can we find any other evidence to support the key findings from the ANES data? We next turn to a dataset that will be much less familiar to most readers.

Commission for Administrative Review Survey

In the late 1970s Congress' Commission for Administrative Review (often referred to as the Obey Commission, 1976–1977; see US House of Representatives, 1977) conducted a series of surveys to aid Congress in reforming itself – learning how it operated, identifying the problems with its operating arrangements and public perceptions of the institution, etc.[10] While the survey data generated several interesting reports (see e.g. Cooper & Mackenzie, 1981), little was done within the academic community with the public survey data.

In the least, the Obey Commission's survey is an untapped pool of data that can be used to confirm some of the findings from the analysis of public attitudes toward Congress. Using a multistage stratified random probability cluster sample[11] of the American public, the survey asked 1510 respondents an extensive battery of questions relating to their perceptions of Congress (e.g. attitudes toward congressional operations, procedures, and ethics) in face-to-face interviews. Several questions probed respondents' beliefs about representational linkages shared between constituents and members of Congress. To assess preferences for representational style, respondents were asked:

> When there is a conflict between what your Congressman feels is best and what he thinks the people in his district want, do you think he should follow his own conscience or follow what the people in the district want?

This question wording is not identical to that used in the later 1978 ANES survey. Given this, the results of this analysis cannot be considered to be strictly comparable with those discussed in the previous section. That said, there is quite a large overlap between these questions. Both begin with a statement that raises a hypothetical "conflict" or "disagreement" between constituents and their member of Congress. Both questions then ask the respondent which should carry the most weight in a member of Congress' decision – the constituents' desires or the member's "conscience". Hence, while the same question was not asked in both surveys, both questions share similar wording and structure, and were designed to assess a similar aspect of respondents' political beliefs. Given this we should expect that the significant predictors in the ANES analysis would likewise be significant predictors in this analysis.

Using this dichotomous dependent variable, what does the Obey Commission data tell us about preferences for representational style? Unfortunately, these data lack some of the attitudinal, as well as virtually all of the contextual, indicators one would need to run the same models as those presented in the previous section. We can, however, run multivariate equations that take into account some of the indicators found to be significant predictors in previous elite and public studies (e.g. Eulau *et al*., 1959; McMurray & Parsons, 1965; Davidson, 1970; Patterson *et al*., 1975) as well as those included in the ANES models above. While these models are underspecified, they do offer some degree of confirmation of the findings reported in the previous section.

The model that uses the Obey Commission data to predict public preferences for representational style includes: respondent party identification; educational level; age; income; union membership; race; sex; political knowledge; and voting participation. The party identification variable is a -3 to 3 scale created from a branching set of questions, with strong Democratic affiliation coded as 3.[12] Educational level,[13] age[14] and income[15] are self-placement items and are coded as one would expect (high = more), while sex is a dummy variable (1 = female).[16] Race[17] (dichotomous variable coded 1 = African American; otherwise 0) is included to test the general prediction that political minorities will tend to prefer a trustee relationship with representatives. Respondent self-identification as a voter[18] (whether or not they voted in the 1974 and 1976 elections) is included as a measure of attachment to the political system.

The logit estimations of preferences for representational style reflect many of the key findings from the ANES analysis and are displayed in Table 2. In the Obey Commission data party identification is again not a statistically significant predictor of representational preferences. The two variables with the greatest degree of substantive significance confirm findings from the ANES data. A full range change from the least to the most educated respondent predicts a 25% increase in the probability of preferring a trustee. Again, the idea here is that more education leads to a greater understanding of the political system and the give and take required in policy making.

Table 2. Logistic regression predicting preferences for representational style using data from Commission for Administrative Review (1977)

Dependent variable: preference for representational style ("delegate" = 1; "trustee" = 0)

Predictors (range)	Logit coefficient	*Z*	Δ probability (for full range)
Party identification (–3–3)	0.05	1.86	
Voter (1,0)	–0.21	1.68	
Education level (0–20)	–0.05**	2.57	–0.25
Income (1–11)	0.00	0.07	
Age (1–10)	–0.03	1.67	
Female (1,0)	–0.26*	2.33	–0.06
African American (1,0)	–0.51**	2.66	–0.12
Constant	0.94**	2.82	
N = 1334			
Wald χ^2= 38.32 (p > 0.000)			

*p > 0.05, **p > 0.01.

Source: US House of Representatives (1977), Commission for Administrative Review (Obey Commission 1976–1977).

Cell entries as labelled: logit coefficients; Wald's *Z* statistic; change in predicted probability of selecting delegate over trustee for a full range change in statistically significant independent variables (computed using J. Scott Long's S-Post commands for Stata; see Long & Freese, 2006). Equations estimated in Stata 9.2 using robust standard errors.

The other substantively interesting variable is race. Just as was found with the ANES data, African Americans are more likely to express a preference for a trustee. However, given the nature of the Obey Commission data, the conditional nature of this preference cannot be tested. That said, these data do confirm a key finding from the ANES analysis – racial minorities are more likely to express a non-majoritarian representational preference than are members of the racial majority.

A puzzling difference does exist between the NES and Obey Commission data, however. There is a sign switch between the two sets of data: women in the NES data are 7% more likely to prefer a delegate relationship with representatives, while women in the Obey Commission data are 6% more likely to prefer a trustee relationship.[19]

Generally, and on their own, the findings from the analysis of the Obey Commission data are interesting, but not terribly earth shattering. Yet, if we adjust our perspective from the trees to the forest and take a broad view of the results derived from both the ANES and Obey Commission surveys, there is indeed an interesting story here.

Pitkin (1967) argued that "political representation" is best thought of and modelled as a system involving both legislators and constituents. This study demonstrates that to model this system fully, we must consider not only the perspectives of legislators (as many studies have done in the past), but also the preferences of constituents for the representational relationship. The data collected in 1977 for the Obey Commission and in 1978 for the ANES provide confirmation of some of the basic hypotheses of this study. Namely, individuals who understand the abstract functioning of government and have more confidence in their ability to influence government are more likely to assert that representatives should follow their consciences in order to act in the best interest of their constituents. It is not likely that this finding is time dependent.

Of greater interest, however, is the indication that minority status may have some influence on the degree of authority one is willing to delegate to their legislators. Members of minority groups (racial and, perhaps, political) are less likely to wish that representatives follow the majoritarian preferences within their local districts and instead act in the best interest of the "community". Yet, this preference is conditional. When an African American respondent's representative was also black, we find a distinct shift toward preferring a delegate.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper demonstrates that the analysis of public preferences for representation is a promising area of study that should receive further attention. It is likely, for instance, that most people have multiple, perhaps even conflicting, representational preferences. We can easily develop scenarios that would predict that individual preferences relating to representation vary by issue domain (e.g. environmental or race related domains) or clusters of issue domains (say, social versus economic). Indeed, it would be surprising to find that individuals do not vary their responses by issue (see Cooper, 1999).

Further, we need to develop models that account for the ways in which contextual effects influence how individuals think about representation. As the findings presented in this paper indicate, minority group membership plays a pivotal role in representational preferences. Further, the ANES data demonstrate that our expectations about representation vary by our political status. Does this hold if we think beyond the traditional measures of minority status (race/ethnicity) to other possible measures of political minority status? If one is in a political "out-group", is it possible that they may desire different types of representation? "Orphaned voters" (those voters who reside in a district that is represented by a member of a different political party), for example, may express a different representational preference than if they were represented by a co-partisan. Recall, for example, that in 1978 Southerners (i.e. southern Republicans and Independents) favoured a trustee relationship, while the southern Democrats favoured a delegate relationship. This leads to the question of whether one must be a "chronic" political minority for representational attitudes to take an in-group/out-group pattern, or whether it is enough to be in the political minority only "temporarily" (say, one or two congressional election cycles) for this pattern to develop.

Despite the remaining questions, however, this study highlights the fact that it is not only the elected elites who enter the representational relationship with a set of expectations. Individual electors also have a set of expectations about the representational relationship they share with the elected. These expectations are in part a function of their understanding about the role and functioning of government. They are also in part driven by perceptions of their relative role and place in the polity.

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Notes

1. To assess "process space", Hibbing and Theiss-Morse pose the question to survey respondents: "Some people say what we need in this country is for ordinary people like you and me to decide ourselves what needs to be done and how. Others say ordinary people are too busy and should instead allow elected officials and bureaucrats to make all political decisions. Still others say a combination would be best. Imagine a seven-point scale with 1 being ordinary people making all decisions on their own and 7 being elected officials and bureaucrats making all decisions on their own, while 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 indicate in-between options on the two extremes. Which number from 1 to 7 best represents … how you think government should work?" (2001: 147). While this conceptualization of "process space" seems similar to representational preferences, it is important to note that it is, in fact, distinct from representation. The question asks if "ordinary citizens" should make decisions "on their own" or if "all elected officials" (and "bureaucrats", a term likely to carry significant baggage) should make "all political decisions" "on their own". Their first option implies

no representational relationship at all; their second option severs it. It is only the options in the middle that may be interpreted to imply some representational relationship, though even this is not clear. What constitutes a "combination" of citizens making all decisions and elected officials/bureaucrats making all decisions is not necessarily obvious. Does this mean a representational relationship, or just that 50% of decisions will be made by citizens "on their own" and the other 50% will be made by elected officials and bureaucrats "on their own"?

2. The polling firm Louis Harris and Associates was contracted to conduct the surveys. Congressman Obey, Joseph Cooper and the Commission staff reviewed and suggested changes to the instrument prior to it going into the field.
3. This is not to argue that these data are optimal – their age is a limitation. It is possible to argue that given the findings from this paper are time bound. However, given the fact that no other publicly available surveys have included representational questions in their instruments and revisiting old data to gain new insights is an accepted approach in the field (see e.g. Erikson, 1978, 1979; Hill & Hurley, 1999), these data provide a nonpareil source of information on public attitudes toward the representational relationship.
4. Clearly we would expect that an individual's preferences relating to representation probably "depend" on the issue domain. Unfortunately, given the nature of the survey, it is difficult to test this assertion. As discussed in the concluding section below, further research should be conducted to examine the extent to which public preferences for representation vary not only by respondent, but also by issue context.
5. One would prefer a continuous measure of representational preferences, as discussed earlier. No publicly available, extant survey has yet asked such a question.
6. Alpha = 0.69. Briefly, the items included asked respondents to agreed or disagree with the following statements: people like me don't have any say about what the government does; voting is the only way that people like me can have any say about how the government runs things; sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on; I don't think public officials care much what people like me think; generally speaking, those we elect to Congress in Washington lose touch with the people pretty quickly; parties are only interested in people's votes but not in their opinions.
7. 10.28% of the sample self-identified as African American (black).
8. All predicted probabilities were computed using Scott Long's S-Post routines in Stata 9.2 (see Long & Freese, 2006).
9. Congressional district population data from *The Almanac of American Politics*.
10. Note that even recently released versions of leading textbooks on Congress are still citing data from this series of surveys (i.e. the Obey Commission data) as authoritative evidence regarding public opinion on representation (see e.g. Keefe & Ogul, 2001; Davidson & Olesek, 2004).
11. The survey was conducted between 5 and 17 January 1977.
12. Party ID range (–3–3), mean = 0.68 (strong Republicans = –3; strong Democrats = 3).
13. Education range = (0–20), mean = 12.65.
14. Age scale range = (1–10), mean 4.83.
15. Income range = (1–11), mean 5.62.
16. Female range = (0,1), mean = 0.57.
17. Race range = (0,1), mean = 0.07.
18. Voter range = (0,1), mean = 0.58.
19. No obvious, intuitive reason explains this shift. Given the limitations of the data, teasing out the reason for the shift was not possible. Further research may shed light on gendered preferences for representation.

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