CONCLUSION

Parliaments' Endless Pursuit of Trust: Re-focusing on Symbolic Representation

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This conclusion reviews the styles of relationship between parliament and citizens visible in very different political systems across the world. It shows that increasingly this relationship follows different styles according to specific contexts and beyond the traditional perception of a specific type of representation. It then demonstrates that parliaments have finally become public institutions with the new millennium, opening up considerably by becoming more transparent, accessible and visible institutions. However, when it comes to developing real links between parliaments and citizens, the reality is very patchy. These developments are then assessed in light of levels of trust in parliament, to note that decline in trust may have little do to with poorer performance from parliaments. The study concludes by showing that re-focusing our understanding of the parliament–citizen relationship on symbolic representation allows us to understand what is missing in that relationship.

Keywords: *parliaments and citizens; representation; symbolic representation; Pitkin; trust in parliament*.

Introduction

The late Secretary General of the Mozambican Assembly summarised well the views of many concerning the relationship between parliament and citizens: 'Why do you want to know what the public says about us? I can tell you in just three words what their image of parliament is: a) useless, b) unperturbed, and c) too expensive' (Azevedo-Harman, this issue, p. 419); and across the 14 studies included in this issue, this is the main idea that runs through most of the contributions: that the public does not value parliament. And yet the same studies also show that parliaments have never been so active in developing linkages with citizens, or as transparent and accessible. In fact it is those cases where confidence in parliament is at its lowest that there is the most activity, transparency and accessibility, such as the British or the German legislatures. Beyond stating yet another of parliaments' many paradoxes, what does this show us? Are parliaments bound to be unloved? Are parliaments just not trying hard enough? Should one indeed expect that a *better* relationship between parliament and citizens would lead to higher levels of trust? And how

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would one assess a *better* relationship between parliament and citizens? In this final contribution we review the evidence presented in this volume and consider the extent to which the developments in the relationship between parliament and citizens over recent decades matter for our trust in, and perceptions of, parliament.

Styles of Relationship between Parliament and Citizens

The case studies analysed in this volume show that there are multiple models of relationship between parliament and citizens. There is an almost established expectation in the literature that ultimately this relationship should be focused around well-delineated geographical constituencies and that the representative (MP) should be the main agent in that relationship. Norton distinguishes, for instance, two types of representation, general and specific (Norton 2002, pp. 3–4), with *general* reference to representation on 'behalf of the collectivity of citizens' embodied mainly by parties, and *specific* being the one through which representatives pursue 'the interests of particular groups and individuals' (Norton 2002, p. 3). He goes on to say that it is the specific representation that primarily embodies the parliament–citizen relationship. Although this is a useful categorisation of different levels of representation, by dividing general and specific styles of representation and establishing MP-focused representation as the path for the development of potential institution–public contacts, it sets an ideal-type template of expectations for this relationship; an ideal-type that revolves around the MP as the unit of representation, which tends to imply a majoritarian electoral system leading to constituency-based type of representation. However, as this volume has shown, not only do contacts develop at other levels besides the MP, but also cases of specific representation do not always lead to particularly high levels of public satisfaction. By contrast, the Dutch parliament, for instance, has one of the highest trust levels from our case studies and it is founded on a collective style of representation.

The contributions to this volume show that conceptually we should consider three levels embodying the parliament–citizen relationship: the MP, the party (parliamentary group) and the actual legislature. Each of these levels can lead to the development of the relationship between parliament and citizens. Although this relationship did tend to revolve around single representatives, modern developments such as the potential of communication brought in by new media and the pressures towards addressing political disengagement, have led to the opening up of new possibilities of contact with citizens. This has developed the relationship beyond the single representative to parliamentary groups and legislatures. Electoral systems are of course a key variable impacting on the relationship between parliament and citizens, but increasingly this determines the style of this relationship, not necessarily its effectiveness.

The relationship between parliament and citizens reflects everything that makes up a political system. If, as is the case of the Latin American parliaments,

the context is of a presidential system, then the public's expectations in relation to the legislature are almost non-existent in light of its diminished decision-making role. If, as is the case for the African legislatures, democracy has not been established for long, then expectations towards the legislature may be very different to those of a well-established democracy, being more influenced by the hopes laid down in the democratic model than on a critical evaluation of parliamentary performance. Our case studies also show that historical and cultural contexts matter considerably in the determination of representative mandates and the expectations towards these. The French case presents a particularly interesting and complex case. For historical and cultural reasons, the representative mandate is constitutionally determined as national (as is the case in Portugal), although the electoral system and the deputies' practice essentially articulate a locally based mandate. To add to this, there is a widespread practice of accumulation of mandates, between parliamentary and local levels. Although this *cumul de mandats* is highly controversial, it does accomplish a function of representation in that it provides visibility to deputies and constituents. Interestingly, accumulation of mandates also takes place elsewhere (for example, Finland, Hungary, Portugal), but does not cause so much controversy; in Hungary in fact, it also performs an important role in maintaining connections with constituents. The accumulation of mandates raises ethical issues of course, but it leads us to question the concept of representation solely focused on its formalistic dimension. As Pitkin (1967) has shown, representation after all is not just about an accountability chain, it is about making present what is absent; it is not just about a process, but about a sense of being represented.

Our case studies demonstrate, therefore, how diverse the relationship between parliament and citizens can be, indicating that we should look beyond the formal representative mechanisms and focus instead on the activities, and their meaning, that permeate interactions between parliamentary institutions and the public.

Opening Up as Institutions

Regardless of the style of the parliament–citizen relationship and its context, our case studies demonstrate a move towards the opening up of the parliamentary institution across the globe, from Latin America to Europe, from sub-Saharan Africa to Bangladesh. This is clear whether we are talking of accessibility, transparency or visibility. The possibilities offered by new media are a clear enabler of this expansion, but the opening up is not limited to virtual means.

From the UK to the Bangladeshi parliament, the studies in this volume talk of expansion of possibilities of access to the parliamentary institution. Either by simply opening the building to all citizens – South Africa, where parliament has become a symbol of democracy since 1994 – or by reinforcing the visitors' programme, such as in the UK or Bangladesh, where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has funded projects specifically geared towards developing a guided tours programme. In the case of the German parliament,

ordinary citizens can even have their accommodation and travel expenses paid. A different example comes from Chile where for over 10 years the monthly 'District Weeks' programme ensures that representatives travel back to their constituencies for direct contact with the electorate.

New media are, however, the main enabler of increased accessibility. Although there is still considerable variation in the amount and quality of the information provided, many of these parliaments now offer contact details at a few clicks. Arnold (this issue) illustrates well the difference this makes, by showing the contrast between the prior practice of having to obtain these details from a local library, to today's ease of access facilitated by the Internet. Of course, infrastructures vary considerably and there is still a massive digital divide in access to the Internet. Azevedo-Harman shows, however, how in a situation where network infrastructures are still very poor, such as in Mozambique, the radio has been used very effectively to disseminate parliamentary practice. There are still clear access restrictions, such as the Bangladeshi, and most of the French, committees' proceedings, which are not open to the public, but the trend towards openness is patent across all parliaments.

The move towards transparency is also clear in most of the studies, whether through the promulgation of Freedom of Information Acts as in many Latin American countries, or through the simple publication of increasing amounts of material through the parliaments' websites. The Portuguese parliament's official journal, for example, is now published only online. Even taking into account the variations between parliaments, the amount of information about parliamentary proceedings now made available clearly surpasses that of the mid-1990s when parliaments started to make use of the Internet.

This is the main tool parliaments have used to enhance their visibility to citizens. Besides the institutions themselves, representatives are also increasingly using this tool. As Norton puts it, new media have transformed the potential for contact with constituents. This is true even of systems not based around the concept of the constituency MP, such as Finland, Italy, Germany and Portugal, where representatives are increasingly using individual web tools. In Germany, for instance, there has been a boom in the use of social media tools, with Saalfeld and Dobmeier showing that 71 per cent of the *Bundestag* representatives utilise Facebook and/or Twitter to support their parliamentary work.

There is no doubt as to the amount of information made available today, though the detail and quality of this information varies considerably from institution to institution. The differences are very clear in Latin America, with Brazil and Chile standing out as outliers in their model use of new media compared to countries such as Bolivia or Colombia where, for instance, even information about individual representatives is absent or very difficult to find. The Griffith and Leston-Bandeira study demonstrates many of the current gaps in the availability of information, in particular with regard to non-static information relating to legislative, oversight and budgetary activities. It also notes that there is

still a considerable digital divide between parliaments in higher income countries and those with lower income levels.

The move towards higher visibility has also been accompanied by substantial resources dedicated to institutional communication. Costa *et al.* show how the two French parliamentary chambers have both invested considerably in communication, to the point that many of the activities being organised may have little to do with actual parliamentary work, such as art exhibitions; a similar phenomenon is also noted in other parliaments, such as the British or Portuguese. Italy and Chile are other examples of considerable investment in institutional communication. Institutional communication focuses essentially on raising the levels of visibility of the legislature, and is usually detached from political meaning so as to ensure an unbiased perspective. This explains the development of many institutionally based initiatives, which can often seem detached from the actual work of parliament,[1] as Costa *et al.* note for France. Regardless of the actual impact of institutional communication, the contributions to this volume demonstrate a considerable reinforcement of parliaments' active role in promoting the institution's visibility.

With due variations, there is no doubt as to the considerable opening up that parliaments have undergone all around the world over recent decades; with the new millennium, legislatures have finally become public institutions. By being more accessible, transparent and visible, one could argue that this would enhance the relationship between parliament and citizens. However, as important as these may be, in particular in the context of new democracies with a recent past of an authoritarian regime, such as Mozambique, it does not add up to an actual relationship. New media have been very effectively utilised by parliaments to inform, though this does not mean that it is facilitating communication with citizens. The evidence provided in this volume's case studies indicates that communication with citizens has improved, but it is extremely patchy. This is no surprise since the step from information to communication requires considerably more resources and know-how.

Developing Linkages with Citizens

Actual linkages with citizens have been slower in being developed, but the studies in this volume again show a definite increase in linkages, either through more direct and regular communication between citizen and institution, or through citizen-based tools such as petitions. In the context of growing demand for participatory democracy, tools such as petitions or citizen-led legislative initiatives have become increasingly popular.

All of our case studies, except Finland and Hungary, include some form of legislative petition system – though with very considerable variation in practice. In most of the cases the petition right has been in place for a long time and, although cases such as the French or British show a decline in its use,[2] Hough demonstrates recent renewed interest for this tool. This renewed interest is very clear in the UK

where the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly have developed petition systems modelled by others (Hansard Society 2012). From the petition systems covered in this volume, the German case is without doubt the most complex. Enshrined as a constitutional right, petitions have long been part of parliamentary practice in Germany. The *Bundestag* includes a large dedicated petitions committee and has recently developed an online petitions system, which allows citizens to collect signatures and to initiate discussion forums.[3] Online petitions have been introduced elsewhere, such as in Portugal, though simply as a means to register new petitions, with no provision for collation of signatures or associate discussions, as shown by Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio. Although the evidence on practice is limited, this volume's contributions show that a reinvigoration of this tool, such as bringing it online, leads to reinforced citizen engagement. The data on Germany and Portugal are very clear in this regard. At the other end of the scale, the British House of Commons petitions hardly have any visibility, being presented through MPs, with no committee considering them thereafter.[4] The submission through an MP still lingers in Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda, where again there tends to be no specific committee to consider petitions, with the exception of Bangladesh. All of these are single-member constituency-based systems. As Hough shows (this volume), evidence on the effectiveness of petitions systems is scarce, although having a specific process to consider these does seem to be important to transform them into an effective tool for citizens to bring issues to the parliamentary forum. As Carman (2010) showed for the Scottish petitions system, perceptions about the fairness of the process matter more for citizens than the actual outcome. Although the evidence is patchy, the contributions to this volume do indicate an increased interest for petitions – the Dutch case shows that this interest goes beyond the parliamentary institution – as a tool to promote citizen engagement with parliament. It also shows that, when the petitions system has an adequate and visible process associated with it, citizens use it.

Petitions are the most well-established parliamentary citizen-based tool. However, this volume shows that citizens' legislative initiatives have also become increasingly popular – and more of a contemporary phenomenon. In Latin America, in particular, popular initiatives have thrived over the last couple of decades. Arnold gives the example of Costa Rica, where an office has been installed specifically to consider those legislative proposals initiated by citizens. Although the success rate of this type of proposal is very low across all the case studies presented in this volume, the Latin American examples do seem to stand out as the most effective. Russo and Verzichelli show that, in Italy, this type of initiative has been utilised mainly by interests groups and/or parties rather than citizens. Ilonszki and Papp describe a very similar reality in Hungary, where both citizen-led referendums and popular initiatives have been monopolised by political groups. All in all, not only are these participatory tools still being used timidly, they also do not seem to bear successful stories of citizen engagement, except in very specific cases.

Besides citizen-based tools, the contributions in this volume show that linkages with electors have also developed from the top – that is, representative led. Although the Bangladesh example shows how investment in constituency linkages can easily lead to perverse effects, other cases show how these contacts can develop even in non-constituency-based systems, in great part thanks to the new media. Several of the contributions show that representatives are increasingly making use of web-based tools to develop communication strategies with their electorate. In Finland, Arter demonstrates that MPs have a complex use of new media tools, leading some to develop a personalised type of representation, which would not happen otherwise. This is very similar to what has happened with Portuguese deputies, who in a highly party-dominated context have developed a more specific type of representation thanks to the Internet, which allows them to establish direct and regular communication with citizens. There is also evidence showing that representatives are using their own parliamentary activity to reflect specific constituency interests, such as demonstrated for Finland, Germany and Italy. The latter two, in particular, are good examples of how parliamentary questions can be used by MPs to reflect constituency matters.

There is no doubt that parliamentary citizen-led tools have expanded over the last two decades, and that parliaments, parliamentary groups and representatives are establishing a more communicative relationship with citizens in between elections, but the evidence does not show a revolutionary change. Whilst there is a general trend of parliaments developing linkages with citizens, this is slow going and, in particular, we have not witnessed the revolutionary move that early 'visionaries' had predicted new media would bring (Gibson *et al.* 2005, p. 562). Still, although slow, it is nonetheless a move towards more communication and more linkages. The 2012 parliaments are definitely more open to citizens' ideas and views, and are providing information in a way never seen before. Yet overall trust in parliament has never been so low. Not only that, but policy makers and authors often identify low trust in parliament as the key cause for wider low levels of political support. As Norris (2011, pp. 105–107) put it: 'much of the concern emphasizes that the public has lost faith in legislatures. . . . The trends in confidence in parliament do display a significant fall over time. [And] any loss of institutional confidence is more clearly related to the legislative body rather than to all public sector institutions.'

Parliaments' Endless Pursuit of Trust

The studies in this volume confirm the general trend of decline in support for political institutions widely documented elsewhere (for example, Dalton 2004, Torcal and Montero 2006). However, when focusing on the parliamentary institution they depict important variations and a complex picture. Whilst trust in parliament may seem low, general trends of decline are not as strong as we are often led to believe. Systematic comparisons between our case studies are of course

difficult to put into practice, as the data and their associated indicators vary considerably. But, overall, they indicate two distinct groups: a lower, and declining, level of trust in parliament in the European parliaments, in contrast with those in Africa and Latin America, where levels of trust are in fact higher and/or on a rising trend. Within the European parliaments, however, the Finnish reflects high levels of trust and Andeweg notes that, if there is a trend of decline in the levels of trust in the Dutch parliament, this is negligible. Our studies on the European parliaments show in particular considerable variation between elections and according to specific events. The British and Finnish studies show a sharp decline in trust in years coinciding with political scandals, and Andeweg shows a similar effect in the Netherlands following the so-called political earthquake phenomenon of 2002.[5] The contributions on France and Hungary also show considerable variation in the levels of trust between election and non-election years. The studies show, though, that levels of trust in parliament tend to be higher than in other institutions, and that it is important to distinguish between trust in parliament, the institution, MPs in general and MPs specifically. This is demonstrated in several contributions and is very clearly shown in the British case, where the public tends to show higher levels of satisfaction with the work developed by their own MP.

More importantly, this volume shows that increased levels of parliament accessibility, transparency, visibility and communication have not coincided with increasing levels of trust. As Saalfeld and Dobmeier (this issue, p. 328) put it, the decline in trust has happened 'despite the fact that the *Bundestag* has become a more professional, open, transparent, and active parliament since the 1960s – and despite the fact that German citizens are much better informed'. The availability of more information does not necessarily lead to higher levels of trust on its own: as Norris (1999) shows, as citizens become more informed, but also better educated, they also become more sceptical and able to criticise. As Fine Licht (2011, p. 196) also shows, transparency can 'actually lead to weakened, rather than strengthened perceived legitimacy'. The declining trust despite higher accessibility may also be due to a low predisposition for citizen engagement. Ilonszki and Papp (this issue, pp. 339–340) demonstrate that in Hungary, despite the fact that MPs are more accessible than ever, opportunities for engagement are not being seized by the public. They note that 'the relationship between trust and openness is concentric, which means that opening up the parliament itself will not cure the low level of connection'. As Dalton *et al.* (2003, p. 264) show, forms of advocacy democracy, such as petitions, demand much more from the citizen than simply casting a vote every few years and can result in a reinforcement of inequalities in participation rather than a strengthening of democracy; that is, these opportunities may not be being utilised by the wider public, but only by the very few who were already engaged with politics. Other findings included in this volume indicate that evaluations of trust do not necessarily derive from a rational assessment of parliament's power and performance, but rather on general assessments of contentment with the political system

in general. Russo and Verzichelli demonstrate, for example, that the extraordinary power held by the Italian chambers is met by acute low levels of trust. Similarly, Azevedo-Harman shows how the public's evaluation of African parliaments is, on the one hand, linked more to the faith placed in democracy and what this form of political system can achieve than on actual performance and, on the other, with how fair the electoral process is perceived to be.

It is, in fact, unlikely that parliaments' own actions have considerable impact on people's feelings of trust towards the institution, as this is often more dependent on external factors such as corruption, citizens' subjective evaluation of the country's economic performance (van der Meer 2010), unemployment or government performance (Magalhães 2006). Parliaments reflect their political systems, being highly dependent on external variables, rather than determining those same variables. Contrary to what is often assumed in public discourse, there is little parliaments can actually do to address low levels of trust in political institutions. This is particularly true in the case of advanced industrial democracies, where the public is characterised by highly complex levels of specialised and volatile interests, as shown by Dalton (2004, p. 195); it would be impossible for parliament to please all of the multiplicity of interests. However, there is a case to argue that parliaments need at least to be seen to be strengthening public engagement, even if this is simply to maintain the percentage of those who already trust the institution; to keep moving forward, to at least maintain the existing reservoir of diffuse support. The evidence in this volume indicates that parliaments have embarked on an endless pursuit of trust. Acute levels of political disengagement have led many parliaments to take action and become more accessible, transparent and visible; however, these actions may result in little more than maintaining a reservoir of diffuse political support. As Pitkin said back in 1967, there is indeed an inherent tension to representation:

> The concept of representation thus is a continuing tension between ideal and achievement. [It] should present a continuing but not hopeless challenge: to construct institutions and train individuals in such a way that they engage in the pursuit of the public interest, the genuine representation of the public; and, at the same time, to remain critical of those institutions and that training. So that they are always open to further interpretation and reform. (Pitkin 1967, p. 240)

And many parliaments have embarked on considerable reform – some of it procedural, some electoral, some focused on opening up as institutions – though these will never be institutions with high scores of satisfaction; it is in the nature of a parliamentary institution to be the focus of criticism. Still, the relationship with citizens does need nurturing in order to avoid a deterioration of trust; what would be the most effective path to nurture this relationship? In his detailed analysis of trust in parliament, van der Meer shows that 'care relationships may be more important to trust in parliament than accountability' (van der Meer 2010, pp. 530–531). This suggests that initiatives through

which parliament's engagement with the public takes place more directly and frequently may have a positive effect on trust; not necessarily because of a rational evaluation of performance but because of more subjective assessments. This leads us to the final section where we suggest that our assessment of the relationship between parliament and citizens should re-focus on symbolic representation.

Re-focusing on Symbolic Representation

In her seminal essay, Pitkin (1967) provided us with a fourfold conceptualisation of representation: as formalistic, descriptive, symbolic and substantive representation. This has become the main conceptualisation framing the study of parliamentary representation. The concept identifies four dimensions of representation, which lead to a very useful methodological differentiation of several focuses for analysis; at the same time as highlighting different meanings and paths for representation. Formalistic representation, which Pitkin (1967, p. 39) also calls the 'authorisation' view 'because it defines representation in terms of the giving and having of authority', refers to the institutional arrangements in place that translate the relationship of representation; it can refer to the electoral system in place, but also the means of contact between representatives and the electorate. Descriptive and symbolic representation relate to representation as *standing for* the represented; descriptive specifically refers to the extent to which representatives mirror the characteristics of their represented – that is, the representative does not act for specific interests, representation takes place because there is a 'likeness' between represented and representative (Pitkin 1967, p. 61). Symbolic representation also refers to standing for, not on the grounds of likeness but of symbols, which by their presence make the meaning of representation be present (Pitkin 1967, p. 92). Finally, substantive representation refers to *acting for* – acting on behalf of – representatives, making particular interests present in the act of representation.

From these four dimensions, the concept of substantive representation is the one that the legislative studies sub-discipline has focused on the most, by analysing the nature of interests being represented (namely the discussion on the contrasting trustee and delegate styles of representation (for example, Judge 1999)). Descriptive representation has also been addressed extensively, namely through the feminist discussion around the concept of a critical mass which would link descriptive to substantive representation (for example, Celis and Childs 2008). Finally, formalistic representation is effectively addressed every time the institutional arrangements at the basis of parliamentary representation are discussed, such as its electoral system, but also the mechanisms of access to parliament. Symbolic representation, however, is often ignored by the literature, and yet it offers a crucial dimension to understanding the relationship between parliament and citizens. What is more, formalistic and symbolic representation are the two dimensions that have been the most affected by contemporary developments in parliaments. The moves towards advocacy democracy,

which creates further opportunities of access to parliament, have added a new dimension to the traditional perception of formalistic representation beyond the chain of liberal accountability. And the influence that traditional and new media now have on people's perceptions of political institutions has brought in a new layer of mediation that needs to be considered in the way it impacts on symbolic representation.

Symbolic representation relies essentially on subjective meanings given to representation. Applying this to parliament, it could encompass symbols such as the legislature's building or the idea of democracy. As Pitkin (1967, p. 100) says, 'since the connection between symbol and referent seems arbitrary and exists only where it is believed in, symbolic representation seems to rest on emotional, affective, irrational psychological responses rather than on rationally justifiable criteria'. By focusing on symbolic representation, one is focusing on connections that allow for identification between citizens and parliament; from this perspective, it does not matter how parliament is performing, what matters is whether citizens identify parliamentary symbols of representation and the affective meanings they give to these. If parliament has little or no visibility, then it is unlikely that citizens may be able to develop any subjective meanings about parliament other than what the media may occasionally portray. Likewise, however, tools such as new media could provide for an opportunity to affect symbolic representation more effectively.

Regardless, what Pitkin shows is that representation is mainly about connections. Although parliamentary representation has developed associated with the liberal principles of accountable government subject to the scrutiny of the people, representation is not just about accountability; it is also about irrational connections between the represented and the present (such as representatives). Through their contemporary analysis of representation, Brito Vieira and Runciman (2008, pp. 80–81) reinforce this argument by explaining representation as a form of identification, a way of sharing a common identity; that is, it is not just about representing interests. The expansion of advocacy democracy tools such as petitions also demonstrates that parliamentary representation cannot be perceived merely from the perspective of representatives acting for the interests of represented; those same represented can now also present their own interests directly to parliament. What is more, as shown above, the citizen of the advanced industrial society encompasses such a specialised, volatile and complex multitude of interests that it is effectively not possible for all citizens to be represented at all times within a parliamentary institution. We need therefore to understand the relationship between parliament and citizens besides a representation of interests. The higher levels of satisfaction that specific MPs enjoy (as opposed to MPs in general) indicates the value of representation as connections – citizens are able to identify more clearly with these representatives and to establish connections through identification.

Re-focusing the understanding of the relationship between parliament and citizens on symbolic representation allows us to grasp the complexity of this

relationship better. Contrary to the relationship between parliament and government – which is essentially a trade-off in decision-making power – the relationship between parliament and citizens reflects all variables of a political system, including the citizens' irrational sense of identification with this institution.

Conclusion – Establishing Connections

The contributions to this volume show that legislatures are often the public face of political disengagement, being a highly visible institution often centrally located at the core of a political system and, more importantly, being the key mediating political institution between electorate and state. However, the volume also shows that the parliamentary institution should not necessarily be blamed for all evils. Not only have MPs never worked so hard, but also transparency has never been so high and there has never been so much information or access to parliament. What is more, decline in trust in parliament depends more on variables external to parliament than on what parliament actually does. However, as collective, visible and accountable institutions, parliaments are destined to be unloved. No parliamentary institution will ever please all the voters all of the time, according to their performance. What this volume also shows is that what the current relationship between parliaments and citizens lacks most of all is connections. This may well be what is often missing. All too often parliaments are still seen as distant and unfamiliar institutions, having no common ground with which citizens may develop a sense of identification. In their endless pursuit of trust, this is the area that parliaments should focus upon in creating and maintaining a relationship with their citizens. Likewise, this is the area of the relationship between parliament and citizens now craving further research.

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Notes

1. Research undertaken for a project on 'Managing Parliament's Image', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-22-4072).

2. In the British case, we are referring to the traditional petition mechanism, not the Downing Street e-petitions system.
3. This was modelled on the Scottish Parliament's e-petitions system; as of 1 June 2012 though, the Scottish e-petitions system had been suspended pending improvements to the system (http://epetitions.scottish.parliament.uk/).
4. At the date of writing: Following the experience of the Downing Street e-petitions site, the pressures this put upon the Backbench Business Committee, and the Hansard Society recommendations for a new petitions system (Hansard Society 2012), there is potential for considerable change in this regard.
5. The rise and fall of the populist party, List Pim Fortuyn, accompanied by the assassination of its eponymous leader and the party's subsequent rise to, and fall from, government.

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