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Publisher: Routledge
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UK



The Journal of Legislative Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fjls20>

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Published online: 04 Jun 2013.

To cite this article: Sylvain Brouard , Eric Kerrouche , Elisa Deiss-Helbig & Olivier Costa (2013) From Theory to Practice: Citizens' Attitudes about Representation in France, The Journal of Legislative Studies, 19:2, 178-195, DOI: [10.1080/13572334.2013.787196](https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2013.787196)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2013.787196>

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From Theory to Practice: Citizens' Attitudes about Representation in France

SYLVAIN BROUARD*, ERIC KERROUCHE,
ELISA DEISS-HELBIG and OLIVIER COSTA

French institutions, political culture and history have favoured a very abstract conception of representation: MPs are expected to embody collectively the French Nation, but little is known about citizens' concrete views on representation. In this paper, data gathered through a citizen mass survey are used. To overcome the usual abstract considerations on representation, respondents were asked their opinion on an MP who would endorse amendments proposed by an interest group. In the questionnaire, two features were changed randomly: the MP's political leaning and the type of interest group. It is shown by means of an original experiment that the 'general' conception representation has disappeared from citizens' attitudes: despite the enduring legitimacy of the general will approach in the public sphere, French citizens appear to promote a conception of representation close to the Madisonian views on pluralism involving a strong attachment to the logic of territorial electoral linkage.

Keywords: *representation; attitudes; experiments; France.*

Introduction

France is characterised by a low level of civic involvement, largely because of the weakness of its system of interest intermediation. Voluntary associations, pressure groups and political parties do not play an important role as points of access to the political system (Gabriel, Keil, & Kerrouche, 2012). Party-related and social participation have remained low in France, particularly in comparison with other European countries (Bréchon, 2006; Schain, 2008). Such a configuration may explain why the topic of a crisis of representative democracy is especially acute in France (Rosanvallon, 2000). One of the reasons for this crisis lies in the divorce between citizens and elected representatives. This situation is illustrated by the fact that only about one-third of French citizens trust the deputy of their constituency and even fewer do so regarding MPs in general (28.3 per cent).¹ One can also underline other symptoms of a crisis of representative democracy in France: in addition to the growing lack of citizens' confidence in politicians, French MPs are often criticised for their inability to mirror the population in terms of age, gender, level of education, occupation and ethnic background (Costa & Kerrouche, 2007; Rouban, 2011).

In France, parliament is considered – by both politicians and scholars – as a weak institution that should be reinforced (Belorgey, 1991; Birnbaum, Hamon, & Troper, 1978; Chandernagor, 1967; Masplet, 1981). Despite this weakness – and the new constraints derived from European integration and the process of decentralisation – the National Assembly remains the main arena of political representation and political debate in France. As, since the Revolution, French institutions, political culture and history have favoured a very abstract and global conception of representation, MPs are expected to embody collectively the French Nation, the so-called ‘national sovereignty’. For this reason, the French Constitution has always forbidden a delegate practice of elected official positions.² Additionally, Article 23 of the National Assembly’s internal rules prohibits the creation of groups of MPs based on private, local or professional interests and therefore forbids any binding mandate.

At the same time, French MPs prove to be very active in their respective constituency, particularly for electoral reasons (Kerrouche, 2009). Two-round majority legislative elections still mobilise citizens: they create strong political competition and quite a high level of participation. MPs are deeply involved in their constituency to improve the likelihood of being re-elected. This involvement includes occupying other electoral functions at local level: the figure of the deputy mayor is still very vivid in France, and the vast majority of MPs are involved in the *cumul des mandats*.

So French MPs not only take care of national issues but also, at the same time, manage a growing range of local policies and cope with local issues. Local investment of MPs appears to be very important and to contradict the principle of National Sovereignty.

Such a situation calls into question the concept of political representation, which is among the most important topics in the analysis of modern democracy. Most scholars in the study of political representation refer to the differentiation made by Pitkin (1967): defining representation in a *formalistic way*, it can be conceived either as authorisation, ‘the giving of authority to act’ (Pitkin, 1967, p. 11), or as accountability, that is, ‘the holding to account of the representative for his actions’ (1967, p. 11). Beyond these meanings, representation can also be seen as a *standing for*. In this case, Pitkin distinguishes descriptive and symbolic representation. The former defines representation as ‘the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection, as in a mirror or in art’ (1967, p. 11). Symbolic representation, conversely, requires ‘no resemblance or reflection ... and the connection to what is represented is of a different kind’ (1967, p. 11). Finally, representation can also be conceived as *acting for*. In this case, the focus lies on the ‘substance of the activity itself’ (1967, p. 11). That is why scholars of political science also use the term ‘substantive representation’ (Campbell, Childs, & Lovenduski, 2009, p. 172).³ It is beyond the scope of this article to tackle all aspects encompassed by political representation, especially as this field of political science stimulates much debate among scholars (see Dovi, 2011).

A further classification – that focuses more on the behaviour of deputies – distinguishes between representatives as trustees and as delegates. On the one hand, according to Dovi (2011), delegates simply follow the expressed preferences of their principals, the constituents. Trustees, on the other hand, are representatives who follow their own understanding of the best action to pursue (cf. Burke, 1774). If such a distinction has been called into question (Rehfeld, 2009), or even considered obsolete (Eulau, 1967), the mandate-independence controversy can be considered as the central classical debate in the literature on political representation. One important aspect in this debate refers to the actual connection between the representative and his/her constituents. Eulau and Karps (1977) have pointed to this aspect and have shown the importance of representatives' 'responsiveness', in all its components, that is, geographical focus, functional groupings – including interest groups – and individual aspects.

The goal of this paper is to adopt a complementary view on this problem by focusing on representation from a different vantage point in questioning citizens' attitudes on representation and on representatives.

The data we use were gathered through a citizen mass survey regarding French citizens' views on political representation that was run for a French-German research project on representation (Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany (CITREP)).⁴ In this paper, we rely on two types of data that are based on two complementary approaches: an observational and an experimental approach.

In the observational approach, we asked several questions about what MPs *should* do and what they *are* doing. Respondents answered with the knowledge of the purpose and the dimensions of the investigation.

In the experimental approach, we designed an experiment with random assignment regarding an MP endorsing amendments proposed by an interest group. In the experiment two features changed randomly: the MP's political leaning and the type of interest group. Respondents had to evaluate whether the MP's behaviour was justified or not, without prior knowledge of the purpose and the dimensions of the investigation. The respondents could thus not adjust their answers strategically. The experiment allows the researcher to go beyond discourse and to understand respondents' attitudes regarding representation using the MP–interest group relationship as a test case. The experiment is a way to investigate the various attitudes towards the representative link thanks to a concrete case with practical consequences.

In the first part of the paper we shall analyse French citizens' views both on representation in general and on the local and national dimension in particular, based on an observational approach. In a second step, we shall use the evaluation of the role of interest groups as an experimental tool to deepen our investigation of citizens' attitudes towards representation as well as test their robustness.

At the Root of the Crisis of Representation: Citizens' and Representatives' Views on Representation

The survey results show clearly that French citizens do not feel represented in the first instance by the traditional representative actors or institutions – the deputies or parliament – but in a far stronger way by new political actors. About half of French citizens state that they feel very well or well represented by organisations of civil society. Among them labour unions or employers' organisations (MEDEF: Mouvement des Entreprises de France) received a higher score than Parliament or MPs in general. See Figure 1.

Several analyses have shown that, regarding trust, we have to differentiate between politicians in general and particular representatives (Bréchon, 2004, pp. 50–51; Norris, 1999, p. 12). If we also make that distinction regarding the feeling of being represented, we observe the same difference: only about 6 per cent of French citizens think that they are (very) well represented by the *députés* in general and almost two-thirds do not think so. However, 17 per cent think that they are very well or well represented in their interests and values by the MP of their constituency, but more than half of French citizens (55.7 per cent) still do share this view; also, 20.3 per cent chose the category 'don't know', which could easily be interpreted as an expression of distance towards the political sphere. See Figure 2. Moreover, the respondents' knowledge of their own MP is limited: 40 per cent state that they know the deputy of their constituency, 60 per cent do not know him/her; among those who pretend to know their MP, one-third are not able to give his/her name or they give a wrong answer.

When we look at our data on the disaggregated level, we can observe that about one-third of those who pretend to know their own deputy also feel very

Figure 1: Feeling of being Well-represented by the Different Actors and Institutions (%)

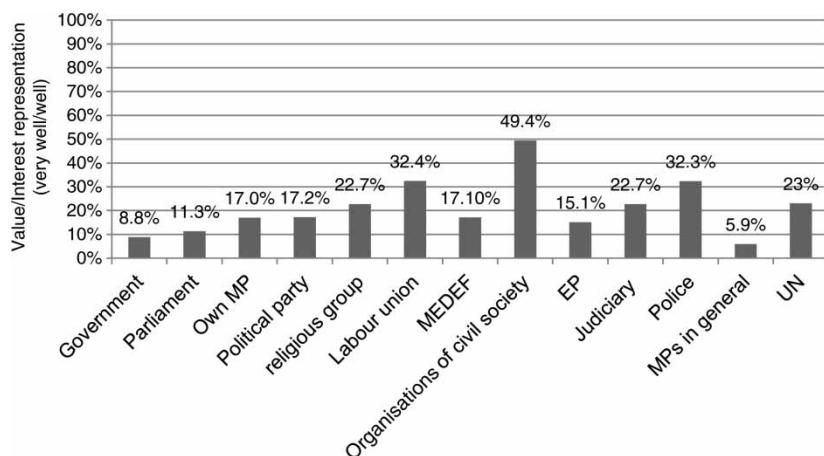
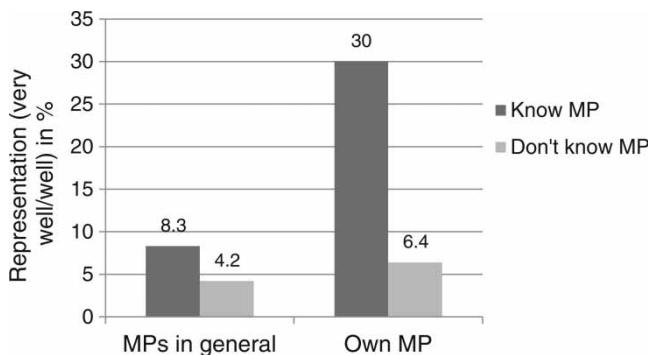


Figure 2: Feeling of being Represented by MPs in General and by the MP of the Constituency (in %) Controlled by the Indication that the Person Knows the MP of his/her Constituency



well or well represented by him or her; among those who do not know their deputy, this is the case for only 6.4 per cent (Cramer's $V = 0.367^{***}$; significance levels are *0.05, **0.01, and ***0.001). In accordance with theory (Patzelt, 1994), good political knowledge clearly enhances the feeling of being represented. We can also observe that knowing the MP of the constituency seems to have an effect on the feeling of being represented by MPs in general (Cramer's $V = 0.140^{**}$): there appears to be a generalising effect even if there is always a minority of respondents feeling well or very well represented.

When asking citizens whom MPs should represent in the first instance (focus of representation),⁵ we end up with the distribution shown in Figure 3.

Regarding the focus of representation, citizens cite all categories at a high level: the MP's voters (90.7 per cent), the constituency (88.1 per cent), the whole French population (85.4 per cent) and the party (48.8 per cent). If the party is clearly mentioned less, there is a minor difference (around five points) between the three first answers. Contrary to MPs, who seem to be in line with

Figure 3: Focus of Representation Idea/Reality (%)

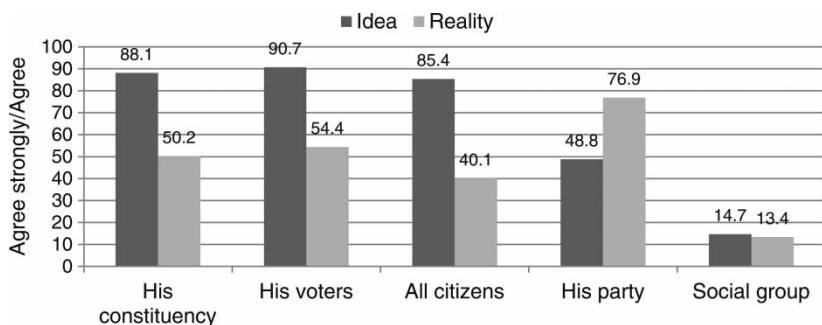
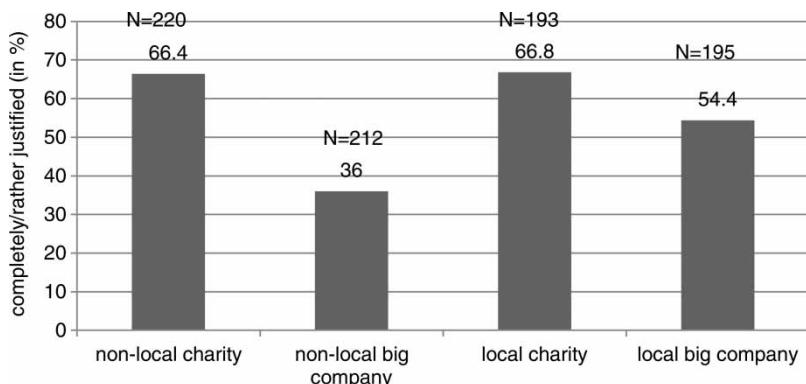


Figure 4: Approval of Endorsement of Amendments by Charity or Company (%)

the French doctrine of national sovereignty (see the contribution by Brouard, Costa, Kerrouche & Schnatterer, this issue), citizens value the general interest and the electoral linkage at the same time. Furthermore, they claim a difference between their conceptions of representation and reality: 90.7 per cent of respondents would like the MP to represent first and foremost his/her voters, but only 54.4 per cent think that MPs do so in reality. The same pattern emerges regarding representation of 'all citizens' or 'constituency': there is a big discrepancy between citizens' normative expectations and their perception of MPs' 'real' behaviour, respectively, 45 and 38 points. Conversely, 76.9 per cent of the respondents think that MPs in reality represent their party whereas only 49 per cent of them wish them to do so. It is interesting to recall that only 13.3 per cent of the deputies state that they should first represent their party (see Brouard, Costa, Kerrouche, & Schnatterer, this issue), whereas almost 80 per cent of the citizens think that this is the case for their MPs. Such a mismatch could be a reason for the often quoted 'crisis of representation'. These results show that there is a clear gap between theory of representation – MPs are supposed collectively to embody the French nation – and citizens' views about it. Also, the data prove that they have conflicting or complex ideas about representation itself: both general interest and electoral linkage appear legitimate. Furthermore, they perceive a strong inconsistency between ideas and reality.

Another way to observe these different conceptions of deputies' mandate is to analyse the answers to our question about the tasks an MP should fulfil in order of priority. We asked respondents to choose the first activities in a list of five: '1. to influence governmental action; 2. to help their constituents who have problems with the administration; 3. to participate in parliamentary work; 4. to defend their constituency interests in Parliament; 5. to solve problems in their constituency'. Only about one-third (34.3 per cent) of the respondents chose a national activity (answers 1 and 3), whereas the majority (65.7 per cent) favoured a local activity (answers 2, 4 and 5).⁶ In the second row, a majority still chose a

'local' activity (69.1 per cent). These results are in conflict with the MPs' balanced view about their most important task (see Brouard, Costa, Kerrouche, & Schnatterer, this issue) and clearly emphasise the citizens' local expectations towards their MPs. Following the French citizens, the concerns of their constituency have to be the first preoccupation of an MP: 30 per cent of those respondents who chose a local task as most important also chose a local task in second place. Conversely, only 14 per cent of the respondents chose national activities as the first and second task. This means that very few people think that a French MP should have purely national activities. By contrast, a majority of the respondents (57 per cent) expects that one of the two main tasks of the MP is to solve constituency problems. Beyond this local involvement, respondents also, once again, greatly value the electoral linkage: 45 per cent of them state that defending the interest of the constituency should be one of the two main tasks of the MP. Among the complex or conflicting normative expectations associated with MPs, the analysis of citizens' perception of their most important task underscores that the electoral linkage is prevalent.

Observational data clearly emphasise the roots of the crisis of representation in France: citizens expect MPs to give priority to general interest and/or electoral linkage but they perceive them as agents of their party. Nevertheless, it is difficult to rely on observational data to determine which type of representation citizens prefer – general will or electoral linkage. Experiments will allow us to obtain more information about that.

Testing the Robustness of Attitudes towards Representation: MPs and Interest Groups

In order to analyse the relationship between French citizens and their *députés*, we use the relationships with interest groups as a tool to reveal attitudes towards representation. Unlike the general will theory, since Madison (1787), the pluralist theory has argued that the activities of interest groups contribute to the representation of the various 'factions' of society by competing in the political marketplace, as long as no group is able to become hegemonic. Indeed, despite appearances, in 'Federalist' 10, Madison (1787) recognised that the best solution is to accept their existence as incidental to a free society, but considered that appropriate controls might be imposed (Yoho, 1995). From this pluralist point of view, lobbying is legitimate; but, as this conception of democracy is in contradiction with the French constitutional tradition, based on the principle of the Nation's sovereignty, incarnated by elected people, be they MPs or the President, lobbying is perceived negatively. In fact, little is known about the phenomenon in France: with the exception of a few journalistic essays,⁷ we lack data about the behaviour of lobbyists towards politicians and about citizens' views on them. Focusing on lobbying is relevant for this paper because attitudes towards this phenomenon address the core of the representation puzzle: is interest representation legitimate or should elected bodies be able to act autonomously? Are

some interest groups more legitimate than others, and why? How should MPs manage their relationship with interest groups? Also, from a methodological point of view, the topic of lobbying allows us to ask very concrete questions of citizens, and to overcome the very abstract nature of most discussions dealing with parliamentary representation. It is thus quite easy to organise an experiment in order to assess citizens' attitudes regarding the relationships between interest groups and MPs.

In order to design this experiment, we first need to set the hypotheses to be tested. Given the main issues underscored previously and the features of MPs–interest groups' relationships, the following four general hypotheses should be tested:

1. *General will hypothesis*: citizens have in general negative attitudes regarding the representation of interest groups.
2. *Pluralist hypothesis*: the nature of the interest groups affects citizens' perception of their legitimacy to be represented by MPs.
3. *Electoral linkage hypothesis*: whether or not interest groups are linked to an MP's constituency affects citizens' perception of their legitimacy to be represented by MPs.
4. *Political affiliation hypothesis*: the MP's political affiliation affects the level of approval of MPs' behaviour regarding the interest group.

In order to test these hypotheses, an experiment was designed with random assignment of the following features:

1. The interest group may be a big company, a big company from the MP's constituency, a charity organisation, or a charity organisation from the MP's constituency.
2. The MP is presented as an MP, a left-wing MP, or a right-wing MP.

The survey experiment was designed following the work of Sniderman (1996). The experiment is an individual decision making experiment (Morton & Williams, 2010), where respondents choose a candidate without knowledge of the purpose and dimensions of the investigation. Our study first investigates the 'effects of a cause' (Morton & Williams, 2010): what are the effects of the types of interest group and of the MP's political affiliation on the level of approval of MP/interest group relationships by the respondents? The experiment assumes two *treatment variables*: the type of interest group and the MP's political affiliation. We expect these variables to have a causal impact on our dependent variable (that is, citizens' attitudes towards the relationships between MPs and interest groups). In order to test the two treatment variables, we used two *manipulated variables*: the distinction between big company and charity and the level – local or general – for the type of interest group, as well as the political affiliation and lack of political affiliation of the MP for the political feature. The values of the two manipulated variables were randomly assigned by CAPI (Computer

Assisted Personal Interviewing) procedures. Random assignments were independent between variables.⁸ In a second stage we shall focus on ‘the causes of the effects’ of the types of interest group and of the MP’s party affiliation on the level of approval of MP/interest group relationships by the respondents.

In the experiment, the respondents listened to the following short description of the situation.

During the discussion of a bill in Parliament, a (*left-wing member, right-wing member, member*) of the Parliament had an appointment with a (*big company, big company from MP’s constituency, charity organisation, charity organisation from MP’s constituency*). This (*big company, big company from MP’s constituency, charity organisation, charity organisation from MP’s constituency*) gave him amendments to defend. The MP has accepted to introduce these amendments. Do you think that his decision is:

1. completely justified
2. quite justified
3. not quite justified
4. not at all justified

Applied to the experiment, the general hypotheses lead us to the following expectations.

Effects of Causes

H1a: Pluralist hypothesis: respondents should have more positive attitudes towards charities than companies.

H1b: Electoral linkage hypothesis 1: respondents should be more positive about an interest group from the MP’s constituency than other interest groups.

H1c: General will hypothesis 1: Respondents should be less positive about an interest group from the MP’s constituency than other interest groups.

H1d: Political affiliation hypothesis: the MP’s political affiliation affects the level of approval of MPs’ behaviour regarding interest groups.

Causes of the Effects

H2: Interest group political perception hypothesis: left-wing leaning respondents should have more negative attitudes towards the relationship between MPs and companies than right-wing respondents.

H3a: Political support hypothesis 1: left-wing (right-wing) leaning respondents should display more negative attitudes towards right-wing (left-wing) MPs than right-wing leaning (left-wing) respondents, regardless of the type of interest group involved.

H3b: Political support hypothesis 2: omitting MPs’ party should significantly affect the result among the groups of left-wing and right-wing leaning respondents.

H4: Independence hypothesis: when respondents value more independence from the interest group, the level of approval of an MP helping a big company should decrease.

H5: Electoral linkage hypothesis 2: when respondents value the defence of the constituency's interest more, the level of approval of MPs helping interest groups from the constituency should increase.

H6: General will hypothesis 2: when respondents value more general interest of the society over special interests, the level of approval of an MP helping an interest group should decrease.

Effects of the Types of Interest Group and of an MP's Party Affiliation

Our analyses show that a majority of respondents approve the introduction by an MP of amendments provided by an interest group (see Table 1). This is quite surprising if we consider the importance given to general will in the French political tradition. Our data thus prove that it is useful to overcome the formal approach of parliamentary representation by asking citizens about the concrete activities of an MP and about the dilemmas of representation. The level of approval changes according to the various features of the experiment. Regardless of the MP's party affiliation, respondents consider it, in general, more legitimate that an MP help a charity (66.6 per cent of agreement) than a company (46.2 per cent).⁹ The higher approval for the charity is systematic, regardless of the other features of the experiment.¹⁰ When the party affiliation of the MP is omitted, the level of support for an MP taking up a big company's amendments is at its minimum with 28.5 per cent, less than half the level of approval for the charity. The enduring distrust towards companies or at least the weaker level of trust in companies than in charities in France helps to explain this important difference. We can therefore conclude that the mere fact that an MP helps an interest group is not a problem per se, but depends on the kind of interests.

Table 1: Proportion of Respondents' Approval of the MP's Behaviour (%)

	Completely or Quite Justified	N
Left-wing MP/big company	48.5	68
Left-wing MP/charity	68.7	67
Left-wing MP/company from his district	62.7	59
Left-wing MP/charity from his district	66.7	66
Right-wing MP/big company	38.8	80
Right-wing MP/charity	65.3	75
Right-wing MP/company from his district	52.2	69
Right-wing MP/charity from his district	64.1	78
MP/big company	28.1	64
MP/charity	65.4	78
MP/company from his district	49.3	67
MP/charity from his district	71.4	49
Total:	56.5	820

From a broader perspective about representation this is a very interesting result: either, beyond speeches, the pursuit of general interest is not the root of the attitudes regarding MP–interest group relationships or only those organisations that are considered to pursue the general interest are legitimate.

A way to untangle the respective impact of general interest and electoral linkage is to study whether and how an MP helping locally based interest groups is accepted. Do citizens accept the idea better of endorsing amendments from interest groups if they come from the MP's constituency? If the main respondents' attitude was that MPs should represent the whole nation and the general interest, we would expect a lower level of approval of an MP helping locally based interest groups; conversely, if the main respondents' attitude towards representation was that MPs should represent their constituency and voters, we would expect a higher level of approval. Our data show that helping charities is highly approved in every case: it does not matter whether it is locally based or not. Given the already high level of approval associated with charity, it means at least that defending local interests is not perceived negatively.

The differences are far more striking regarding defending economic interest groups (Figure 4). Helping a local big company is approved by 54.4 per cent of respondents, regardless of the MP's party affiliation, whereas helping a big company is approved by only 36 per cent.¹¹ The variations in approval are statistically significant and, in absolute terms, range from 13.4 to 20.2.¹² Endorsing amendments from a locally based big company is clearly considered to be more legitimate – not less – than helping a big company with no local linkage: the distrust in big companies seems to be compensated for by the legitimacy of defending constituency interests. Consequently, when locally based, the difference of approval between helping a big company and a charity organisation decreases spectacularly. Despite still being significant, the approval difference is almost divided by two for an MP without any party affiliation and for a right-wing MP. Indeed, the difference reaches the insignificant level of four points in the case of a left-wing MP.

H1a and *H1b* clearly do not support the idea that respondents reject helping interest groups. Indeed, the majority finds ‘completely or quite justified’ the fact that an MP endorses interest group amendments. Empirical evidence does not show that attitudes towards representation rely on the idea that MPs only represent the whole nation and the general interest: there is a big gap between theory and practice or, more precisely, between the philosophical foundations of the French Republic and real attitudes of French citizens regarding the meaning of representation. More than upon the ideas of the French Revolution, French citizens seem to rely upon the pluralist views developed during the American Revolution.

Both hypotheses point to the fact that MP–interest group relationships depend first of all on the legitimacy of these groups. Big companies are distrusted by most of the citizens, whereas charities are trusted. So helping the latter is approved by a large majority of the respondents, whereas the former is not.

Studying the legitimacy of the interest groups also reveals that French citizens value linkage with the electoral constituency and its interests. This is the reason why local roots are enough to alleviate significantly the distrust towards big companies and legitimise, for at least a majority of the respondents, the endorsement of big company interests by an MP.

We ran a logistic regression with the manipulated variables as independent variables that confirmed our descriptive results.

The answer that the endorsement of the interest group amendment is ‘rather or completely justified’ is more likely if the MP is left wing (odds ratio¹³ of 1.4, $p = 0.065$) compared with an MP without any party affiliation.¹⁴ When the MP is right wing, there is little difference compared with an MP without any party affiliation. Approval of an MP’s help of an interest group is less likely if the interest group is a big company (odds ratio of 0.43, $p = 0.000$). If the interest group is from the MP’s constituency (odds ratio of 1.41, $p = 0.019$), approval is also significantly more likely. Nevertheless, the second model presented in Table 2 shows that the positive effect associated with a localised interest group is specific to the big company. When an interactive variable controls specifically the effect for a big company of the MP’s constituency, the general effect vanishes (odds ratio of 1.00, $p = 0.99$). The approval of helping a charity does not depend on whether or not the charity is from the MP’s constituency. Conversely, the likelihood of approving an MP endorsing amendments from a company located in his constituency is higher (odds ratio of 1.91, $p = 0.027$). Even when the effects of other variables are controlled in a multivariate analysis, the pluralist and electoral linkage hypotheses are supported by our experimental data. Effects of the causes are robust: the level of approval of amendments endorsement depends on the nature of the interest group and on the link to the constituency for business interest groups as well as the political affiliation of MPs.

Why do Types of Interest Group and MPs’ Political Affiliation Matter?

The nature and the electoral link of interest groups as well as political affiliation of MPs affect the level of citizens’ approval. The issue is why. What is the logic

Table 2: Logistic Regression of the Effects of the Experimental Features on the Approval of Endorsing Amendments

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	$p > z $	Odds Ratio	$p > z $
Big company	0.4261069	0.000	0.3148176	0.000
From the constituency	1.405833	0.019	1.002515	0.990
Left-wing MP	1.401099	0.065	1.440456	0.047
Right-wing MP	1.056325	0.753	1.086689	0.636
Big company from the constituency			1.906735	0.027
Correctly classified:	62.07%		62.32%	
Number of observations:	820		820	

underlying these effects? So, finally, we investigate the causes of the effects or of the lack of effects with several hypotheses.

The impact of political ideology should be controlled in any analysis of the attitude towards MPs–interest groups’ relationships. We hypothesise that the legitimacy of the various interest groups varies according to the respondent’s political ideology. In particular, distrust towards big companies is usually higher among left-wing leaning citizens. Thus, according to the interest group political perception hypothesis, we expect that left-wing leaning respondents are more negative about companies than right-wing respondents because of their reluctance to support the prerequisite of the capitalist system (Bréchon, Laurent, & Perrineau, 2000; Michelat & Tiberj, 2007). Indeed, only 44.5 per cent of the left-wing respondents approved an MP’s behaviour when big companies were concerned, whereas 60.6 per cent of right-wing respondents did so.¹⁵ Whether the big company is local (17 per cent) or not (12.9 per cent) does not significantly affect the difference in approval between left-wing and right-wing respondents. At the bivariate level, the interest group political perception hypothesis is supported by the evidence. Thus, the legitimacy of the interest group is a significant factor related to political ideology. In this case we can even observe congruence between citizens and MPs: in our French MP study, right-wing deputies are in general more willing to support a bill coming from a big company than the others.¹⁶

We also assume that the respondent’s judgement of an MP’s behaviour also depends on the deputy’s characteristics that are relevant for the citizens, in particular the congruence of their respective party affiliation (political support hypothesis 1). At a first level, we expect left-wing leaning respondents to be in general more negative than right-wing leaning respondents about right-wing MPs, and vice versa. Based on the respondents’ self-placement on a left–right scale, we have built a proxy variable dividing the respondents into three groups: left, centre and right. When the MP is presented as a right-wing one, the level of approval of left-wing respondents (48.7 per cent) is lower than that of right-wing respondents (63.3 per cent). Whatever the interest group, the difference is always negative, reaching its climax (-34.2 points) regarding a big company. Conversely, left-wing respondents (61.1 per cent) approved in general more often left-wing MPs than right-wing respondents (55.3 per cent), even if the difference was less important given the comparative reluctance of left-wing respondents to approve helping big companies.

At a second level, if we assume that judgements about MPs’ behaviour depend on the congruence between respondents’ and MPs’ partisanship, omitting the MP’s party should significantly affect the level of support he/she is enjoying among all groups of respondents (political support hypothesis 2). Our analysis indeed shows that left-wing respondents approved less often an MP without any party affiliation (48.7) than a left-wing MP (61.1).¹⁷ This trend is confirmed regardless of the type of interest group involved (biggest difference of 22.9 per cent when a big company is concerned). Similarly, there is a

(smaller) difference among the right-wing respondents who show less approval of an MP without any partisan leaning (63.3 per cent) than a right-wing MP (68 per cent).

Finally, we simultaneously test the various hypotheses in a multivariate logistic regression. The independent variable is still the view that the endorsement of the interest group amendment is ‘quite or completely justified’.

The model presented in Table 3 includes all the variables testing the various hypotheses regarding the causes (or lack) of the effects. When we thus include all these variables, we can observe that only one variable testing the effect of a causal approach is still significant, but highly significant. Being a left-wing MP is associated with more approval in endorsing amendments from an interest group compared with an MP without any party affiliation: the odds ratio shows that, everything else being equal, the likelihood of approving a left-wing MP is four times more important than for an MP without any party affiliation. Additionally, the more right-wing a respondent is, the less likely is the approval of a left-wing MP’s behaviour (odds ratio of 0.83, $p = 0.043$). So, as expected, the MP’s party affiliation and the respondent’s left-right position are relevant factors in order to understand citizens’ attitudes towards the MP–interest group relationship. Nevertheless, the other political features are not relevant: left-right position does not significantly affect the approval of an MP’s behaviour when he has no party affiliation or is from the right wing. The other features of the experiment are no longer significant when the logic underlying their effects is tested.

The types of interest group are no longer significant when various explanations regarding attitudes towards interest groups are introduced. For the first aspect, when the interest group is a big company, the likelihood of approving MPs’ behaviours decreases when respondents value more that MPs should be

Table 3: Logistic Regression of the Causes of the Effects of the Experimental Features on the Approval of Endorsing Amendments

	Odds Ratio	$P > z $
Big company	0.5428681	0.348
From the constituency	0.9568244	0.843
Left-wing MP	4.070768	0.011
Right-wing MP	1.298666	0.614
Big company from the constituency	0.4300083	0.278
Left-right position	1.10331	0.177
Left-right position \times big company	1.104141	0.177
Left-right position \times left-wing MP	0.8286226	0.043
Left-right position \times right-wing MP	0.9786692	0.807
Big company from the constituency \times constituency interest	1.298145	0.038
Big company \times independence	0.8480606	0.043
General interest	0.9193524	0.208
Number of observations:	725	
Correctly classified:	63.31%	

independent from interest groups (odds ratio of 0.85, $p = 0.043$). Nevertheless, the effect is only limited to big companies; in a way, charities are not perceived as interest groups. Everything else being equal, the left-right position is not statistically significant for predicting approval regarding big companies. For the second aspect, when the interest group is a big company from the MP's constituency, the likelihood of approving MPs' behaviour is higher when respondents value more that MPs should represent the interest of his/her constituency (odds ratio of 1.30, $p = 0.038$). The electoral linkage hypothesis is supported by the evidence, but it is not the case for the general interest hypothesis. Even if many respondents state that MPs should defend the general interest, when they assess concrete situations regarding deputies' attitude towards interest groups, they do not base their judgement on this perspective.

Conclusion

Rousseau's and Sieyès's conceptions of the general will and the national sovereignty gave birth to a very abstract approach of parliamentary representation. It is still vivid in French MPs, elites and scholars' speeches on representation, according to which MPs should collectively incarnate the French Nation, referring to their own views, and should not take into consideration the specific interests of a territory, a group of population or an organisation. However, as shown in this issue by Brouard, Costa, Kerrouche, and Schnatterer, this approach is far from the real attitudes of MPs who are very involved in constituency work and in pork barrel politics. Also, we have shown with our experiment that this 'general' conception of representation has disappeared from citizens' attitudes, if it had ever been present. Despite the enduring legitimacy of the general will approach in the public sphere, our study underscores that French citizens promote a conception of representation close to the Madisonian views on pluralism and involving a strong attachment to the logic of territorial electoral linkage.

As shown in Table 4, the hypotheses derived from those conceptions of representation (pluralism and electoral linkage) are clearly supported by our experimental data, even when several features are included and controlled for. Conversely, the general will is never supported beyond the blurred observational data.

In a review article, Jewell (1983) isolated four components of representation as defined by Eulau and Karps (1977): symbolic responsiveness, policy responsiveness, service responsiveness and allocation responsiveness. On the one hand, our results have shown that if the notion of symbolic representation (that is, a relationship 'built on trust and confidence'¹⁸) remains significant for citizens towards their own MP, policy responsiveness (that is, the interaction of 'the representative and the represented ... with respect to the making of public policy') is clearly not a priority for them, the local dimension being preferred. On the other hand, allocation responsiveness ('legislative allocations of public projects [that] involve advantages and benefits presumably accruing to a

Table 4: Results of the Empirical Investigation of the Various Hypotheses

	Empirical Support
<i>Effects of causes</i>	
<i>H1a: Pluralist hypothesis</i>	Yes
<i>H1b: Electoral linkage hypothesis 1</i>	Yes
<i>H1c: General will hypothesis 1</i>	No
<i>H1d: Political affiliation hypothesis</i>	Partial
<i>Causes of the effects</i>	
<i>H2: Interest group political perception</i>	Partial
<i>H3a: Political support hypothesis 1</i>	Partial
<i>H3b: Political support hypothesis 2</i>	Partial
<i>H4: Independence hypothesis</i>	Yes
<i>H5: Electoral linkage hypothesis 2</i>	Yes
<i>H6: General will hypothesis 2</i>	No

representative's district as a whole') appears clearly to be a main interest for voters.¹⁹ Even if some political effects are to be mentioned, the local dimension is at the centre of political concerns for voters of a constituency, in contradiction to the Rousseauist perspective on representation. As far as strategy is concerned, such results advocate for and validate the local implication of French MPs, which is the cornerstone and condition of their re-election.

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Notes

1. Other studies have shown that it is possible to mistrust deeply politicians as a class and to express confidence in particular representatives or the institutional structures (Bréchon, 2004; Norris, 1999).
2. 'No Member shall be elected with any binding mandate', Article 27 of the French Constitution of 1958.
3. Pitkin (1967) asserts that the state of the theory of representation is confused; but she considers that this is not a reason for abandoning the concept but to 'specify all the varieties of its applications to various contexts' (Pitkin, 1967, p. 8).

4. The survey, funded by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche in France and the Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Germany, was in the field at the same time (November 2010) in France and Germany and organised by the same company (TNS-SOFRES). In France, the sampling was done according to the INSEE regional sample. In order to identify the relevant households and persons, random walk was applied. The sample is 1,006 randomly selected respondents in France.
5. 'Please give a note from 1, "agree absolutely", to 5, "don't agree at all", for each of the following statements: 1. The deputy represents above all his constituency and his region; 2. The deputy represents above all his voters; 3. The deputy represents above all the whole French population; 4. The deputy represents above all his party.'
6. We have to emphasise that, among respondents who choose a local task as the most important task for an MP, the majority thinks that an MP should first and foremost solve the problems in the constituency.
7. See, for example, Constanty and Nouzille (2006) and their denunciation of the influence of lobbies on French MPs.
8. There is no significant over-representation of any relevant variable in the various cases of the experiment.
9. Chi² significant at 0.000.
10. Despite the small size of the sample, *H1a* (endorsing charity interest is approved of more than big company interest) is significant, respectively, at 0.008 for a 'left-wing MP' with a difference of 20.2 points, at 0.000 for a 'right-wing MP' with a difference of 26.5 points, and at 0.000 for an MP without any party affiliation with a difference of 37.3 points.
11. Chi² is significant at 0.002.
12. *H1b* (endorsing locally based big company interest is approved of more than big company interest) is significant at 0.05 for a 'right-wing MP', at 0.06 for a 'left-wing MP' with a difference of 14.2 points and at 0.007 for an MP without any party affiliation with a difference of 21 points.
13. The odds ratio is formally, everything else being equal: (number of approval of a left-wing MP/number of respondents answering on a left-wing MP)/(number of approval of an MP/number of respondents answering on an MP). In this case, an odds ratio of 1.40 means that the numerator is 40 per cent more important than the denominator.
14. MP without any party affiliation is the omitted case in the regression analysis.
15. Chi² significant at 0.029.
16. In the research project LEGIPAR (Parliamentary Legitimisation and Democratic Government in France and in the European Union), 230 members of the National Assembly answered in face-to-face interviews a detailed quantitative questionnaire based on their representations, perceptions and values (between September 2009 and February 2011). Part of the present experiment was replicated in this questionnaire. The results show strong support for charity organisations (89.6 per cent, whereas support for big companies reaches 72.5 per cent) and a significant negative difference between left-wing and right-wing MPs in the level of approval in the case of a big company (-26.5 points; $p = 0.019$).
17. Chi² significant at 0.024.
18. The definitions are taken from Eulau and Karps (1977, p. 246).
19. We may infer that the situation is nearly the same for service responsiveness ('the advantages and benefits that the representative is able to obtain for particular constituents'), but this dimension is not clearly available in our data.

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