Bernard Manin, Adam Przeworski, and Susan C. Stokes

Introduction

> The aim of every political constitution is, or ought to be, first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust.
>
> James Madison, *Federalist* no. 57

> In framing a government to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.
>
> James Madison, *Federalist* no. 51

The Problem of Political Representation

Democracy is a form of rule. Even in direct democracy, decisions of a majority are binding on everyone, including the minority that finds them against their opinions or interests. In a representative democracy – our form of government – these decisions are made by elected representatives and implemented by appointed officials to whom the representatives delegate some of the tasks of governing. The representatives decide what citizens must and cannot do, and they coerce citizens to comply with their decisions. They decide how long children must go to school, how much individuals should pay in taxes, with which countries men must go to war, what agreements private parties must adhere to, as well as what citizens can know about the actions of

governments. And they enforce such rules, even against the wishes of the individuals concerned. In this sense, they rule.

The question of representation is why would rulers, equipped with such powers, act in the best interests of others, of citizens, or at least some majority thereof. This is what we mean by "representation": acting in the best interest of the public (Pitkin 1967). Such a definition is obviously broad. While the concept of representation has a long history and remains shrouded in ambiguities, we do not focus on its meaning. Our purpose is different. We explore the connection between the institutions that are normally associated with representative democracy and the way in which governments act.

We ask whether these institutions induce governments to act in the best interest of citizens for two reasons. First, there probably is a wide agreement that a government acting in the interests of citizens is a normatively appealing goal. From a normative standpoint, the question is why exactly would the institutions characteristic of representative democracy be conducive to such a goal. Second, defining representation as acting in the interest of the represented provides a minimal core conception, one on which a number of more specific theories converge. It is compatible with a wide variety of views about what representing implies, depending on how the notion of the interests of the represented is interpreted. People holding the view that a government is representative if it acts on the wishes of voters may agree with our minimal definition on the grounds that the interests of the represented can be taken to mean what the represented themselves see as their interests. But the minimal conception stated here is also compatible with the view that a government is representative if it does what according to its own judgment is in the best interest of citizens. Similarly, our definition of representation does not entail a position on whether the representative should do what voters want him to do at the time a policy is adopted or should adopt the policy that voters would approve in retrospect. Such issues have long been in contention among theorists of political representation from Burke (1949 [1774]) to Kelsen (1929). The meaning of representation is notoriously contested. Beyond the notion that representing implies acting in the interest of the represented, there seems to be little else on which theorists agree.

It should be noted, however, that what has been in contention since the establishment of representative government – not to go farther back – concerns primarily the nature of the activity of representing, not the procedures and institutional arrangements that induce political representation. As we have seen, views about what is expected of representatives diverge. But the formal arrangements that initiate, enable, and terminate the activity of representing have been remarkably stable over the last two centuries. Since the establishment of representative institutions, their basic structure has been the same everywhere:

1. Rulers, those who govern, are selected through elections.
2. While citizens are free to discuss, criticize, and demand at all times, they are not able to give legally binding instructions to the government.
3. Rulers are subject to periodic elections.

Except for electoral systems, such formal arrangements have virtually never been questioned since the end of the eighteenth century. It is indeed one of the most striking facts in the history of representation that, while there has been a broad and stable consensus over representative institutions, people have constantly argued over what was supposed to go on during representation.

This discrepancy between agreement over procedure and controversy over substance underscores the uncertainties that have surrounded representative institutions since their establishment. The founders of representative government expected that the formal arrangements they advocated would somehow induce governments to act in the interest of the people, but they did not know precisely why it would be so. Neither do we today, after two hundred years.

There are four generic reasons why governments may represent the interests of the people:

1. Only those persons who are public-spirited offer themselves for public service, and they remain uncorrupted by power while in office.
2. While individuals who offer themselves for public service differ in their interests, motivations, and competence, citizens use their vote effectively to select either those candidates whose interests

are identical to those of the voters[1] or those who are and remain devoted to the public service while holding office.

3. While anyone who holds office may want to pursue some interests or values different from and costly to the people, citizens use their vote effectively to threaten those who would stray from the path of virtue with being thrown out of office.
4. Separate powers of government check and balance each other in such a way that, together, they end up acting in people's best interest.

The first hypothesis should not be dismissed. Many persons who seek public office want to serve the public, and some probably remain dedicated to the public service while in power. If we do not pay much attention to this possibility, it is because this way of securing representation is not distinctive of democracy. Dictators can also be representative: if they know and if they seek to do what people want, nothing prevents them from doing it. The connection between democracy and representation cannot depend on luck: who the dictator happens to be. And, indeed, a central claim of democratic theory is that democracy systematically causes governments to be representative.

This claim is widespread. To take just a few examples, Dahl (1971: 1) asserts that "a key characteristic of a democracy is the continued responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens." Riker (1965: 31) claims that "democracy is a form of government in which the rulers are fully responsible to the ruled." Schmitter and Karl (1991: 76) maintain that "modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens." Indeed, our political system was distinguished from all its predecessors as one of "representative government" long before it was identified as a democracy.

Modern democracy is an elitist system or, as Manin (1997) would say, an aristocratic one. By Aristotle's criteria, it is an oligarchy: a rule by the few (Bobbio 1989: 107). Yet it is a competitive oligarchy (Schumpeter 1942; Dahl 1971; Bobbio 1989): we are ruled by others, but we select them and we replace them with

[1] Citizens and governments have identical interests if governments want in their self-interest to bring about states of the world that are most desired by citizens.

our votes. This is what is distinct about democracies: rulers are selected through elections.

The question, then, is whether the fact that they are elected is sufficient to cause governments to act in a representative manner. The purpose of this volume is to examine whether there are grounds to believe that if elections are contested, if electoral participation is widespread, and if citizens enjoy political liberties, then governments are indeed representative.

As the essays in this volume testify, our questions converge but the answers do not. The volume offers the gamut of facts and opinions: some deeply skeptical, if not outright negative, others unabashedly positive. Given this divergence, one role of the introduction is to analyze why we arrive at different answers. We begin with analytical distinctions, summarize the distinct views, and conclude.

Representation and Its Cognates

Thus far, we have spoken loosely about the best interest of "the people" or "citizens." Yet interests are often in conflict. It is, thus, necessary to ask what interests there are for a government to represent.

1. There are situations in which the same course of action is best for all citizens. Such situations satisfy the conditions of Condorcet's (1986 [1785]) jury theorem: everyone chooses the same course of action in each possible state of the world. Hence, if the state of the world were known, the decision about how to act would be reached by unanimity. But individuals are uncertain which it happens to be. The democratic process is then a search for truth. This can be termed an epistemic conception of democracy (Coleman 1989). If there are disagreements, they are purely cognitive. A government is representative if it acts on the best available knowledge; and if individuals are sufficiently well informed so that each of them or the average one is more likely than not to reach the correct decision, this knowledge is revealed by the verdict of the majority of voters (Grofman, Owen, and Feld 1983). The same is true if the structure of interests is one of pure coordination: individuals do not care whether they drive on the right or the left as long as they drive on the same side. In such situations, the government can represent individual interests, since the common interest is nothing but their sum.

2. There are situations in which the structure of interests places individuals in a prisoners' dilemma. If individuals were to make decisions in a decentralized way, each deciding what to do, the collectivity would arrive at a state of the world that would be strictly inferior to a state of the world that could be attained if individuals voted and the decision reached by the vote were coercively enforced. Suppose that each individual decides independently whether to vaccinate himself or herself against a contagious disease, where vaccination has some positive probability of triggering the illness. Each individual would prefer not to vaccinate if all others (or some number of others) did, and the result would be that no one would vaccinate and the disease would be widespread. Yet if individuals vote whether to impose compulsory vaccination, they unanimously decide to do so and, in the centralized equilibrium, few people suffer from the disease.

In such situations, the government cannot represent individual interests, which would be not to vaccinate if others did. Yet the government can represent an interest that is collective in the sense that everyone is better off under the centralized decision than they would have been had they all pursued individual interests. People have to be coerced for their own good; the government is representative in such situations when it pursues the collective interest.

3. In the case of outright conflicts of interests, some people inevitably gain and some lose from any course of action a government chooses. Even under constitutional constraints, majority rule leaves some interests of the electoral minority unprotected. Suppose citizens vote on one issue, linear taxes, and the majority rule equilibrium calls for a major redistribution from the rich to the poor, a redistribution not forbidden by the constitutional guarantees of property. By our definition, the government is representative if it effectuates such a redistribution, that is, if its actions hurt a minority. Note that the epistemic notion, according to which this redistribution would be also in the interest of the minority, makes no sense when interests are in conflict.[2]

Yet governments rarely admit that their actions hurt anyone. President Salvador Allende's declaration that "I am not the president of all the Chileans" was generally recognized as a major blunder and was politically costly. Former British Prime Minister

[2] For an attempt to salvage the epistemic notion from Black's (1958) criticism, see Miller (1986).

Edward Heath seems to have been the only politician in recent times who openly declared that he represents class interests, and he was promptly removed from office by his colleagues. There seems to exist a perennial tension between the rationalist origins of democracy and the interest-ridden structure of modern societies.

When the structure of interests is such that any course of action puts individuals in conflict, a government that pursues the best interest of a majority, at a cost to the minority, is representative. This is, after all, what majority rule is about.

Yet since the vote of a majority need not constitute a unique aggregation of individual preferences, there may exist other majorities whose interests the government could pursue. Indeed, it is possible for a government to be elected by one majority and to pursue the interests of another. Since this issue receives little attention in this volume (but see Ferejohn 1986, 1995), let us clarify it at the outset, using an example adapted from Rogowski (1981: 407). Suppose that the electorate has (single-peaked, monotonic) preferences in two (equally weighted) dimensions – social and military expenditures – and the distribution of peak preferences is as follows (0 indicates a preference for the status quo, + for more, – for less):

		Military			
		+	*0*	–	
	+	36	4	12	52
Social	**0**	15	8	9	32
	–	0	8	8	16
		51	20	29	100

Given this distribution of preferences over {social, military} spending, there are three possible majorities: {0,0}, {0,+}, {+,+}. That is, each of these policy combinations obtains the support of majority when paired against any other policy. Yet no policy outside this set is preferred by a majority to any policy within it.[3] Thus, given majority rule, we can think in two ways: a government

[3] To take an example, {+,+} is preferred over {0, 0} by the 36% of voters for whom {+,+} is the ideal point, {0,0} is preferred by the 8% for whom this is the ideal point as well as by the 12 + 9 + 8 + 8 whose ideal points are farther away from {+,+} than from {0, 0}, for the total of 45%, while 15% of voters, with ideal points {0,+} and the 4% with {+,0} are indifferent between {+,+} and {0,0}. Hence, {0,0} defeats {+,+}. Similarly, {+,0} defeats {0,0} and {+,+} defeats {0,+}. Yet, say, {–,–} defeats no alternative in the top cycle.

is representative in the narrow ("mandate") sense if it adopts the policies preferred by the specific majority by which it was elected (say, +,+), or it is representative in a broader ("top cycle") sense as long as it pursues the interests of any majority. In either case, a government is not representative if it pursues a course of action that would be defeated by every majority, that is, as long as it acts in the interest of a minority, including its own.

Note the fluidity of the language just cited: Dahl refers to "responsiveness," Riker to "responsibility," Schmitter and Karl to "accountability," while Pitkin speaks of "representation." To introduce the terminology we agreed to use, let us conjure up an idealized policy process.

This process begins with interests and values by which individuals evaluate different states of the world, outcomes of policies pursued under conditions. When these basic criteria of evaluation are combined with beliefs about the effect of policies on outcomes, they induce preferences over policies. These preferences are signaled to politicians through a variety of mechanisms, such as elections, public opinion polls, or other forms of political expression. "Mandates" are a particular kind of signals that are emitted in elections: they constitute a choice among proposals ("platforms," however vague these may be), offered by competing teams of politicians, by a fixed rule of aggregation, namely one of majority. Once elected, the victorious politicians adopt policies. These policies become transformed into outcomes under the noise of conditions. As the electoral term ends, voters evaluate the outcomes and decide whether or not to retain the incumbent government.

A picture may be of help (Figure I.1). "Representation" is a relation between interests and outcomes. Yet given this idealized picture, we could think of as many as eleven labels that would denote different types of consistency between the different phases of this process. For example, we could say that signals that accurately reflect interests are "rational" or that policies that bring about the intended outcomes are "effective." We will, however, focus only on three of these relations: (1) between signals and policies, which we will call "responsiveness"; (2) between mandates and policies, which Downs (1957) referred to as "reliability," but which, following Stokes (Chapter 3 in this volume), we will call "mandate-responsiveness"; and (3) between outcomes and sanctions, which we will call "accountability."

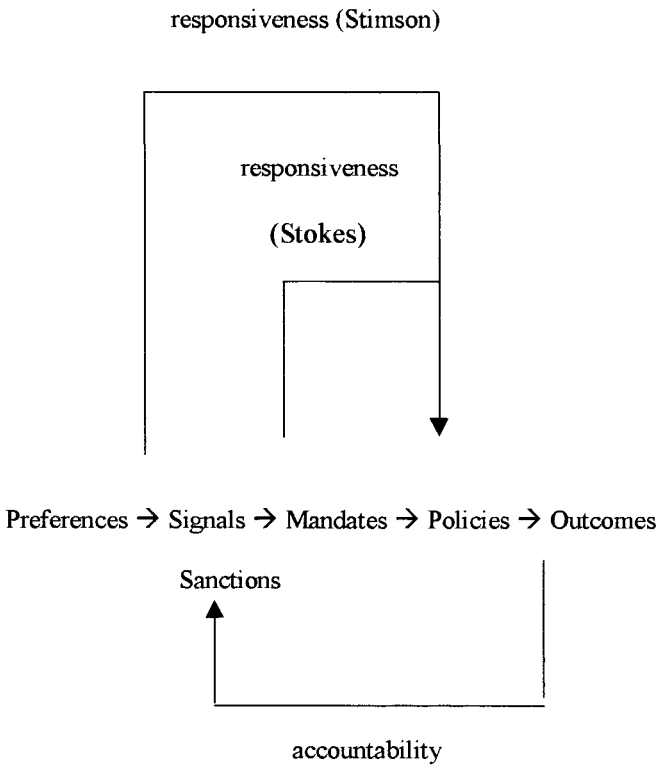

Figure I.1. Policy process

A government is "responsive" if it adopts policies that are signaled as preferred by citizens. These signals may include public opinion polls; various forms of direct political action, including demonstrations, letter campaigns, and the like; and, during elections, votes for particular platforms. Hence, the concept of responsiveness is predicated on the prior emission of messages by citizens. Stimson (with MacKuen and Erikson 1995[4] and in this volume) examines to what extent the actions of the United States representatives and senators, presidents, and Supreme Court justices follow the unidimensional "mood" of public opinion. Stokes (Chapter 3) does the same with regard to electoral mandates, asking whether governments pursue the policies that

[4] Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) refer to "dynamic representation," but we argue here that this is not an accurate term.

they advocated in election campaigns. In both cases, the message comes first, and public officials are responsive to the extent to which their actions follow the preferences signaled by citizens, whether via polls or via elections, simply "responsive" in the first case, "mandate-responsive" in the second.

Governments are "accountable" if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately, retaining in office those incumbents who perform well and ousting from office those who do not. An "accountability mechanism" is thus a map from the outcomes of actions (including messages that explain these actions) of public officials to sanctions by citizens. Elections are a "contingent renewal" accountability mechanism, where the sanctions are to extend or not to extend the government's tenure.

These distinctions highlight the double role of elections in engendering representation, emphasized in this volume by Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (Chapter 1), as well as by Fearon (Chapter 2). A government may act in a representative fashion because it is responsive or because it is accountable.

If individuals are rational and governments are competent in the sense defined here, and if voters know everything they need to know about the exogenous conditions and about the effect of policies on outcomes, then either a responsive or an accountable government will be representative. People will signal their will in elections, and a responsive government will implement their instructions to generate outcomes that people want. Alternatively, the government will anticipate retrospective judgments of the electorate and, to win reelection, will do the same. Compliance with instructions inherent in the mandate is then equivalent to anticipations of retrospective judgments: they generate the same, first-best actions by the government.

Yet neither a responsive nor an accountable government need be representative. As this is the theme of several chapters, we sketch some of the reasons. We assume first that individuals know what is best for them but are uncertain about some relevant states of the world. We then lift the liberal assumption that individuals are the best judges of their own interests.

With Pitkin, assume first that "normally a man's wishes and what is good for him will coincide" (1967: 156). Individuals know what is best for them. Yet suppose that there is something that people do not know, perhaps because only the government can