# 1

# The Scientific Study of Constituency Representation

> "Sometimes I vote in ways that are not popular with my constituents. . . . They know how I vote, but they will listen to me and let me explain. They trust me."
>
> "On gun control, I believe we should have it. But my district is overwhelmingly against gun control. . . . So I decided a long time ago not to hassle that issue."
>
> "They don't know much about my votes. Most of what they know is what I tell them."
>
> — Three anonymous members of the U.S. House of Representatives (Fenno 1978, 151–52, 143, 153)

During the debate in 2013 over the budget stalemate that led to the closing of much of the federal government, Republican party members of the U.S. House of Representatives proposed numerous ways to repeal Obamacare – the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act adopted in 2010. This controversial law is intended to ensure access to health care for all Americans and is a notable extension of the social welfare guarantees of the U.S. federal government. The original law was adopted when the Democratic party controlled both houses of Congress, and it passed in both houses with strong Democratic support and equally strong Republican opposition. After the Republican party gained a majority of seats in the House in 2010, however, numerous bills or amendments were passed in that body to end or restrict Obamacare. All those proposals were adopted on the same kind of party-line vote by which the law was first adopted.

The original votes on Obamacare and the subsequent votes to repeal it will not surprise even casual observers of contemporary U.S. politics. Since the late 1990s, the two parties have been strongly divided on a host of policy topics and especially on social welfare. Thus, the Obamacare votes fit with what is commonly expected. Furthermore, political scientists account for these votes in good part by observing that the elected legislators of each party are generally voting on such bills in accord with the preferences of their copartisan constituents (Fleisher and Bond 2004, 449–50). That is, the policy preferences of Republican party constituents served by Republican House members and of Democratic party constituents with Democratic House members are being well represented. In such instances, political scientists conclude there is high *responsible party* constituency representation, although the preferences of other constituents might be ignored.

Consider, however, recent votes in the House of Representatives on other social welfare programs under the Violence Against Women Act of 1994. The latter act has led to a host of programs to reduce domestic violence against women (and against men) and to provide services to the victims of such violence. In the twenty-first century, the House of Representatives has voted almost annually on bills that would increase the funding for these programs. And in every instance, proposals for more funding have passed with overwhelming bipartisan support. For example, the vote on such an amendment in the House on June 18, 2009, was supported by every voting member regardless of party. Even the extension of the act adopted in 2013, which included new and controversial protections for homosexuals, immigrants, and Native Americans, passed with strong bipartisan support. What kind of constituency representation is demonstrated in these bills? These votes are hardly compatible with the responsible party model.

Consider one more example. From 2004 to 2007, Congress debated whether to allow the use of embryonic stem cells (a type of cell derived from human embryos – the isolation of which for research usually requires the destruction of the embryo from which it comes) in research on disease. One bill allowing such research under limited conditions passed Congress in 2006 and was vetoed by President George W. Bush. A second such bill passed in 2007 and was again vetoed by President Bush. A casual look at the roll call votes on these bills suggests they were generally party-line votes and thus likely indicate responsible party representation was occurring. But a number of leading Republicans in the House and the Senate supported passage of one or both of these bills.

And substantial numbers of Republicans voted for each bill. Furthermore, close observers (such as Burgin 2009) of the debate over these bills conclude that party policy positions were not highly influential and that individual legislators were often swayed by personal religious or moral beliefs, friendships with individuals suffering from diseases that might be cured by stem cell research, or with compassion for such disease victims more generally. The latter characterization fits Burden's (2007) exposition of how the personal experiences of legislators at times influence their policy positions, but what kind of representation of constituency preferences, then, is reflected by the votes on this issue?

The preceding examples suggest a puzzle about how we might account for the policymaking actions of members of the U.S. Congress *and* for how they represent their constituents in those actions. The latter topic of how legislators represent their constituencies has produced one of the oldest and most distinguished research literatures in political science. It also evokes considerable everyday discussion and popular writing in the United States. Remarkably, mixed conclusions are also reached on that topic in scholarly research and popular discussion. Indeed, as we will explain, there is no consensus among political scientists about how well constituency representation works *or* about which constituents are well represented – if any are.

Our goal is to resolve this puzzle about constituency representation. To do so, we propose and test a theory that will explain the kinds of representation that exist on different examples of policymaking in the U.S. Congress like those mentioned. We recognize that legislators can also represent the preferences and interests of their constituencies by so-called case work, in pursuit of "pork barrel" policies, and even by symbolic actions (Eulau and Karps 1977). But constituency representation in the roll call votes of elected legislators (also called *dyadic* representation because it is explicitly between the individual legislator and his or her constituency) is the avenue by which their constituents might most influence government policy. For that reason, this form of representation is uniquely fundamental to democratic government.

In this chapter, we summarize the principal research in political science on dyadic representation. Our work in this book contributes to this specific body of scholarship. There are, however, lines of research that address representation in different ways. Later in this chapter, we briefly discuss some of the latter research, and in our concluding chapter, we explain how our theory of dyadic representation might help advance scholarship of the latter kinds.

The legislature for which we provide validating evidence for our theory is the U.S. Congress. Indeed, most of the evidence we will marshal will be for the House of Representatives. But Congress as a whole and the House share many fundamental features with numerous other democratic legislatures in the United States and around the world. The latter parallels and the broad applicability of our theory will be explicated later in this chapter.

## UNRESOLVED PUZZLES ABOUT DYADIC REPRESENTATION

Writing almost two generations ago in the most widely cited paper ever published on dyadic representation, Miller and Stokes observed: "Substantial constituency influence over the lower house of Congress is commonly thought to be a normative principle and a factual truth of American government" (1963, 45). But Miller and Stokes added that only modest evidence existed for the latter expectations. Their own seminal analyses also produced only mixed evidence for those expectations.

Abundant subsequent research, however, has been carried out on dyadic representational linkages between members of Congress and their constituencies. Erikson and Wright – two of the most distinguished contributors to this line of scholarship – offer a valuable recent summary of this research. Reflecting on that body of scholarship and their own contributions, Erikson and Wright conclude there is substantial evidence for constituency influence over the ideological and policy positions of elected members of Congress. In support of this conclusion, they observe "a clear pattern wherein the most liberal districts elect the most liberal members and the most conservative districts elect the most conservative members" (Erikson and Wright 2009, 88).

If one takes the large body of scholarship on dyadic representation in Congress at face value, Erikson and Wright's conclusion appears justified. Very many analyses have provided evidence for strong associations between constituency preferences and legislator policy decisions. While this evidence has notable limitations we will discuss, this general finding has come from numerous analyses of the relationship of constituency preferences with legislator attitudes and behavior for members of Congress from the 1950s to the present.

Furthermore, Erikson and Wright's assessment comports with a common characterization in other literature about how Congress – and especially the House of Representatives – functions to ensure high constituency representation. Brady offers an especially good summary of the

latter characterization (1988, 1–19). As he observes of "the way the House normally operates," weak national parties, heavy dependence of elected members on local constituency support for reelection (by means of a "personal vote," as we will explain in more detail), and a committee system that allows members to work especially for constituency needs and preferences produce "intense representation of local interests" (1988, 7).

Despite considerable evidence in support of Erikson and Wright's and Brady's conclusions, there are doubts about the quality of dyadic representation provided by members of Congress. Besides the original criticisms we offer of this existing research, two challenges to a rosy portrait of democratic representation based on the preceding evidence are common in the research literature. First – and going back at least to McClosky, Hoffman, and O'Hara (1960) – numerous studies have demonstrated that the partisan political elite is more ideologically extreme than is the bulk of the general public. Such evidence has been frequently provided for comparisons of the political elite collectively to the mass public collectively *and* for comparisons of legislators to their specific constituencies. Various observers as early as Achen (1978, 483–90) and as recent as Bafumi and Herron (2010) conclude that dyadic representation is compromised by this circumstance. But the normative standard on which such conclusions are based may be flawed. Adams, Bishin, and Dow, among others, demonstrate that voters prefer and reward electorally candidates "when they present distinctively noncentrist positions on the side[s] of the issue" (2004, 348). Furthermore, there is also evidence that voters sanction electorally those legislators who adopt policy positions that are too extreme (such as Canes-Wrone, Brady, and Cogan 2002).[1]

A second concern about the quality of dyadic representation is whether some constituents' preferences are better represented than others. Such work is referred to as that on "subconstituency" representation. Recent work of this type has explored the representation of select political and demographic groups, such as that for voters versus nonvoters (Griffin and Newman 2005), voters of different income classes (Bartels 2008, 252–82; Ellis 2013; Ura and Ellis 2008), voters sorted by ethnicity (Griffin and Newman 2007), and voters interested in particular policy issues (Miler 2010).

[1] While the two studies cited here and the literatures from which they are drawn address the concern about how ideological extremity among legislators might affect representation, they also produce some contradictory findings about congressional elections and representation. We provide evidence in Chapter 5, however, for how our theory of representation can resolve those contradictions.

But there is older, long-established research literature on how different *partisan* constituency subgroups are represented by their member of the House or the Senate. Numerous research findings are relevant to this concern – beginning with the analyses in Miller (1962/1970) and extending through many later studies, such as those by Stone (1982), Wright (1989), Shapiro, Brady, Brody, and Ferejohn (1990), Bishin (2000), Hurley and Hill (2003), and Clinton (2006). Such research principally compares how well legislators represent the preferences of mass constituents of their own party as opposed to the preferences of constituents who adhere to the opposite party.

The subconstituency literature has provided a range of notable findings, but it is beset by conflicting findings across studies with the same subconstituency focus. More importantly, this research has proceeded in a generally *ad hoc* fashion. No scholarship has attempted to unify theoretically the questions about the representation of different subconstituencies and then develop empirical findings that would support such a theoretical synthesis. Our theory, however, offers one kind of theoretical synthesis by distinguishing when the representation of legislators' copartisan constituents does and does not trump that of the larger constituency.

Taking into account all the preceding bodies of research, we conclude that no overall characterization of dyadic representation – be it a rosy or a critical one – is presently justifiable. Erikson and Wright are correct that most prior studies find support for good representation. But a notable number of others do not. Of even more importance, we have no systematic explanation for *why* representation appears to work well (or should work well) in some instances and not others. Stated differently, we do not know the cause of good representation (or of poor representation, for that matter) when it arises. As we will explain more fully, the vast bulk of existing research adopts an *instructed delegate* expectation for how representation should work – the expectation that is implied by this Miller and Stokes observation: "Substantial constituency influence over the lower house of Congress is commonly thought to be both a normative principle and a factual truth." Thus, when evidence for good representation is uncovered, the implication is that citizen desires are motivating the policy actions of legislators. But we do not know if the latter causal conclusion is indeed correct, the mechanisms that connect citizen desires to legislator policy actions, or whether the same mechanisms operate for all policy issues.

The preceding gaps in our knowledge mean we do not understand the fundamental character of constituency representation. What is needed to

fill those gaps is a systematic theoretical account of representation of the kind that we seek in this book. Absent such a theory, concern for subconstituency representation *and* for the normatively assessed quality of representation is premature. Even knowing how best to frame such concerns as well as any possible empirical work in response to them depends on an understanding of more basic representational linkages. Thus, valid conclusions about the latter concerns await more complete theoretical and empirical work on observed patterns of representation.

## THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS ABOUT DYADIC REPRESENTATION IN CLASSIC, SEMINAL RESEARCH AND IN THE BULK OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Four alternative "models" of representational linkage were crystallized in scientific research in the 1950s, and we find them critical – indeed, perhaps necessary – as a basis for crafting systematic theory for this topic. These models remain prominent in some research about legislative behavior (such as Fox and Shotts 2009), in the textbook literature on legislative behavior (such as Smith, Roberts, and Vander Wielen 2009, 28) and in normative political theory scholarship on that behavior (such as Rehfield 2009). Each of these models, as explained shortly, envisions a different form of representation that might arise between a legislator and his or her constituency. These alternative models were fundamental to how legislative scholars attempted to understand representation in the 1950s and 1960s, but those alternative conceptions of linkage are virtually never considered in contemporary empirical studies. Brief descriptions of these four conceptions and how they arose provide a foundation for assessing subsequent efforts at theory construction.

The conceptions of *trustee*, or Burkean, and *instructed delegate* representation were so prominent in normative political theory and legislative scholarship in the 1940s and 1950s that students of U.S. legislatures especially sought evidence for both of them. Trustee representation implies that legislators make policy decisions based on their independent judgment rather than the preferences of their constituents. Delegate representation, in contrast, means that the legislator sets aside his or her independent preferences and adopts those of the constituency – as the second quotation at the head of this chapter suggests. Substantial evidence was also accumulated from interviews with U.S. legislators in the 1950s (see Dexter 1957, 1969 151–78; Eulau, Wahlke, Buchanan, and Ferguson 1959; Ferguson 2011) that notable numbers of them

professed to adopt one or the other of these two representational orientations most of the time.

A third possible form of representational linkage – based on *belief-sharing* – was also recognized in legislative scholarship during this period. In this characterization, legislators are thought to provide representation of the preferences of their constituents because they themselves come from the constituency, know its values and preferences, and share many of those preferences themselves (Froman 1963, 14; MacRae 1958, 256; Matthews 1960, 231; Miller 1962/1970). As Miller observed: "The electorate may choose to elect as Congressman a person who shares in his personal convictions the dominant policy preferences of the constituency. If the Congressman is thus representative of the district, . . . his own policy attitudes will provide a base for roll call behavior which is consonant with the preferences of the district" (1962/1970, 290–91). Thus, one might say that on belief-sharing issues, the *a priori* preferences of the legislator are the same as those held predominately in the full constituency.

Finally, it was recognized that representation could take a distinctive form that was characterized as *responsible party* representation. In this conception, candidates from different parties take different stands on some prominent issues and voters choose among candidates in response to those stands and their own partisan preferences. Thus, the representational bond would be especially strong between legislators and their copartisan constituents rather than with the full constituency. The findings of two lines of research converged to produce this fourth model. First, studies of roll call voting in the House of Representatives by Turner (1951) and Froman (1963) demonstrated that party polarization and unity differed across issues and were especially high on New Deal social policy ones.[2] While the efforts of these scholars to link roll call vote positions to constituency preferences were primitive, Froman (1963, 90–95) concluded from his analyses that the general roll call vote policy positions of legislators on such issues also comported with the general preferences of their constituencies. (See Matthews 1960, 230–39.)

Better evidence on the latter point came from the second important line of research – on mass political understandings of political parties and their policy positions on social welfare. Based on the analysis of mass

[2] Notably, Turner (1951, 22–23) also concludes that the debate about how "responsible" U.S. parties were – that was stimulated by the publication of *Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System* (American Political Science Association 1950) – was ill-informed about actual levels of polarization and unity on any specific kind of policy issue.

survey data, Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960, 183–84 and 201–09) and Stokes and Miller (1962, 546) conclude that public understanding of the parties' stands on social welfare was reasonably accurate *and* closely linked to the partisanship of individual members of the general public. As Stokes and Miller summarize both of these two lines of research, "[on] social and economic welfare it can be argued that the parties have real differences and that these have penetrated the party images to which the electorate responds at the polls" (1960, 546).

Miller and Stokes (1963) are recognized for the seminal research on dyadic representation that, in principle, provided the foundation for most subsequent scholarship. *Their analysis was motivated precisely by recognition of the alternative forms of linkage outlined earlier and their research question was "whether different models of representation apply to different policy issues"* (Miller and Stokes 1963, 46). They also found evidence for delegate representation on civil rights, responsible party representation on social welfare, and suggestive but not conclusive evidence for trustee representation on foreign policy. It is important to add, however, that Miller and Stokes had no *a priori* expectations about whether any particular model of representation would best characterize any particular policy issue. Instead, they compared observable patterns of representation for all three issues to what they envisioned each of the three models would imply.

Remarkably, the vast majority of subsequent research on dyadic representation in the U.S. Congress ignores Miller and Stokes's theory-testing precedent and their specific findings. The bulk of this later research adopts the assumption – even if implicitly, as we will explain more fully – that only delegate representation might exist or is to be investigated. A second common assumption in contemporary research is that the delegate model should apply to virtually any policy issue. Rarely has any research after Miller and Stokes examined the character of representational linkages on multiple issues separately and simultaneously. And only a few of those scholars who have studied multiple issues have contemplated the relevance of alternative forms of representation for those issues.

## THE CURIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF MILLER AND STOKES'S THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH DESIGN PRECEDENTS

If Miller and Stokes's theoretical precedent was lost or ignored, how did that happen? To answer that question, however, requires that we fully appreciate the character of their research. The theoretical basis for their

analysis, as summarized earlier, is one key element of their intellectual precedent. That is, their analysis was motivated by the assumptions that representational linkages might differ on different policy issues *and* that different causal processes (defined by the different models of representation) might account for these different patterns of linkage. But these assumptions were not Miller and Stokes's alone. As our citations indicate, arguably the most influential students of U.S. legislative politics in the late 1950s and early 1960s accepted these same assumptions and addressed them in their research.

Second, however, Miller and Stokes had more than theory. They had data of notable quality that supported tests of their alternative theoretical expectations. Nor was the existence of these data a matter of happenstance. Miller and Stokes (n.d., chapter 3, 15–20 and 45–49) – in the unpublished book manuscript they started but never completed on this work – explain how the design for their data collection was motivated precisely by the intention to investigate the four alternative theoretical models for constituency influence. The data set that was assembled for this purpose was the American Representation Study, a one-time variant of the American National Election Study (ANES) for the 1958 off-year election. Their research design explicitly called for direct measures of constituency policy preferences, legislator policy preferences, legislator perceptions of constituency preferences, and legislator roll call vote data on each of the three policy issues they studied. Miller and Stokes assumed that such data were required to test for the existence of any of the four models of representation they sought to uncover.

The tale of how Miller and Stokes's research precedent disappeared – and later reemerged – is principally about how concern with the four conceptions of representation fell out of scholarly consideration and rose again *specifically* in research on dyadic representation – despite the fact that more general literature on legislative behavior continued to recognize them. But this tale is also about how data availability constrained the research of most scholars interested in representation. Both of these elements of the tale also led at times to research practices that were detrimental to theoretical progress.

The most remarkable attribute of the research that followed Miller and Stokes could be called a case of collective intellectual amnesia. With only one exception, the discipline effectively forgot – or ignored – for a generation the four alternative models of representation investigated by Miller and Stokes. Erikson (1978) discussed three of those four possible models and reached some general conclusions about their relevance.