

Rethinking Representation

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Along with the traditional “promissory” form of representation, empirical political scientists have recently analyzed several new forms, called here “anticipatory,” “gyroscopic,” and “surrogate” representation. None of these more recently recognized forms meets the criteria for democratic accountability developed for promissory representation, yet each generates a set of normative criteria by which it can be judged. These criteria are systemic, in contrast to the dyadic criteria appropriate for promissory representation. They are deliberative rather than aggregative. They are plural rather than singular.

Over the past two decades empirical political scientists have developed increasingly sophisticated descriptions of how American legislators relate to their constituents. Yet although the empirical work has often been motivated by normative convictions that one way of relating is better than another, the normative theory of what constitutes “good” representation has not kept pace with current empirical findings. This paper seeks to narrow the gap.

The traditional model of representation focused on the idea that during campaigns representatives made promises to constituents, which they then kept or failed to keep. I call this *promissory representation*. In addition, empirical work in the last 20 years has identified at least three other forms of representation, which I call “anticipatory,” “gyroscopic,” and “surrogate” representation. *Anticipatory representation* flows directly from the idea of retrospective voting: Representatives focus on what they think their constituents will approve at the next election, not on what they promised to do at the last election. In *gyroscopic representation*, the representative looks within, as a basis for action, to conceptions of interest, “common sense,” and principles derived in part from the representative’s own background. *Surrogate representation* occurs when legislators represent constituents outside their own districts.

These are all legitimate forms of representation. None, however, meets the criteria for democratic accountability developed for promissory representation. I argue that the appropriate normative criteria for judg-

ing these more recently identified forms of representation are systemic, in contrast to the dyadic criteria appropriate for promissory representation. The criteria are almost all deliberative rather than aggregative. And, in keeping with the conclusion that there is more than one way to be represented legitimately in a democracy, the criteria are plural rather than singular.

The forms of representation identified here do not map well onto the traditional dichotomy of “mandate” and “trustee.” Both mandate and trustee forms can appear as versions of promissory representation (or, alternatively, the trustee concept can figure as a subset of gyroscopic representation), but the new concepts of representation implied by recent empirical work do not have an obvious relation to the earlier dichotomy.

In practice, representative behavior will often mix several of these forms. One cannot always tell by looking at a specific behavior what dynamics lie behind it. Yet analyzing each form separately makes it possible to identify the underlying power relation in each form, the role of deliberation in each, and the normative criteria appropriate to each. These normative criteria are goals toward which to strive (“regulative ideals”), not standards that can be fully met. Conceiving of democratic legitimacy as a spectrum and not a dichotomy, one might say that the closer a system of representation comes to meeting the normative criteria for democratic aggregation and deliberation, the more that system is normatively legitimate.

Addressing the norms appropriate to a system of representation assumes that representation is, and is normatively intended to be, something more than a defective substitute for direct democracy.¹ Constituents choose representatives not only to think more carefully than they about ends and means but also to negotiate more perceptively and fight more skillfully than constituents have either the time or the inclination to do. The difference between representation and direct democracy creates a need for norms designed particularly for democratic representation. Yet democratic representation comes in different forms, with norms appropriate to each.

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This paper has evolved over time. Most recently I am grateful for the suggestions of Douglas Arnold, David Brady, Martha Minow, Mark Moore, Dennis Thompson, and participants in seminars at Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Princeton University, the University of California Los Angeles, Stanford University, and the University of Toronto. For excellent suggestions on earlier versions I thank William Bianco, Carol Swain, Melissa Williams, Iris Marion Young, and participants in seminars at the Institute of Governmental Studies at Berkeley, the Ohio State University, Nuffield College Oxford, Indiana University, Princeton University, the University of California San Diego, Harvard University, and Northwestern University. I particularly thank Benjamin Page for his close reading and incisive comments at an early stage, and the insightful reviewers for this journal. This paper, begun with support from the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University, was completed while the author was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. I am grateful for financial support provided by National Science Foundation Grant SBR-9601236.

¹ Although deliberative forms of direct democracy can be effective methods of democratic governance in many circumstances, representative forms of democracy have their own uses, functioning not just as “transmission belts” for constituent opinion (Schwartz 1988; see also Achen 1978, 476, Hibbins and Theiss-Morse 2002, Manin 1997, and Pitkin [1967] 1972).