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

https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139175104.001 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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.

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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

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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.

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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.

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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).

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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.

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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."

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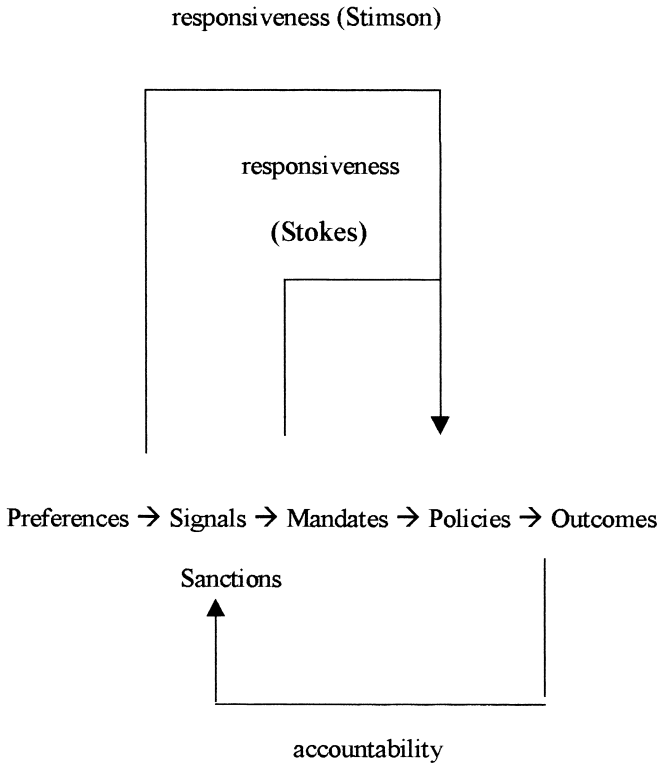


Figure I.1. Policy process

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.

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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

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observe it (e.g., the negotiating posture of foreign governments or international financial institutions) or because the information is costly to obtain (e.g., the level of demand in the major recipients of the country's exports). If people are not certain about exogenous conditions or about the effect of policies on outcomes, then they cannot be sure which policies are in their best interest or how much they can expect from the government.

With such incomplete information, a government may be representative even if it is not responsive to the expressed wishes of the people, and, conversely, it can be unrepresentative even if it follows the signaled preferences.

When people are not certain what is the true state of the world, a betrayal of the mandate no longer implies that the government was unrepresentative. As Stokes (in this volume) emphasizes, if voters' instructions are based on mistaken assumptions, governments may betray them in good faith, which led Pitkin (1967: 163) to maintain that "the represented have no will on most issues, and the duty of the representative is to do what *is* best for them, not what they latently want" (emphasis added).

One way to think about representation under such conditions has been offered by Lord Brougham[5] (cited by Pitkin 1967: 150; emphasis added): "the essence of Representation is that the power of the people should be parted with, and given over, for a limited period, to the deputy chosen by the people, and that he should perform that part in the government which, *but for this transfer*, would have been performed by the people themselves." But this transfer is not innocuous: governments know what citizens do not precisely because they are governments. The counterfactual conjured by the lord and his acolytes is *in modus irrealis*. It calls for imagining what the Peruvian citizens would have done had they known what President Alberto Fujimori of Peru knew when he did in office exactly what he campaigned against in the election. But the citizens of Peru do not know, and neither does anyone else. And if the people do not know what they would have done because the government, by virtue of being the government, knows what people do not, who is to judge its action?

If citizens had really wanted governments to follow their instructions, they could have forced them to do so. As Manin (1997) points out, while this possibility was debated both during

[5] And rediscovered independently by Rogowski (1981) and Stokes (1997).

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the American and the French constitutional debates, in no existing democracy are representatives compelled to abide by their electoral promises. But even without imperative mandates, voters could at least inform the government what it needs to do in order to be reelected. They could offer the government a contract: if the incumbent delivers what the voter wants, the latter will renew the contract. This is indeed the construction adopted in models of accountability: voters announce to the government that they will vote to reelect it if their income increases by 4%, if streets are safer, if abortion legislation is liberalized, if the country qualifies for the World Cup, and the incumbent decides what to do armed with this knowledge. Yet this construction is obviously artificial: voters make no such announcements. Indeed, democracies have no institutions through which such announcements could be made. We could have them: as voters cast their ballots, they could also include the terms of their personal contracts. But we do not.

Why don't we? The reason may be that we expect governments to do all that is possible under the circumstances to improve our welfare, rather than fulfill contracts. Voters are uncertain about the possibilities. And if governments are not perfect agents, if they want anything different from and costly to citizens, then by revealing what they will be satisfied with, voters allow governments to do less than they could do for them.

Thus, informational asymmetry between governments and citizens can work against the latter. As Cheibub and Przeworski (Chapter 7) argue, when governments know what voters will be satisfied with and voters do not know what governments can do for them, room is opened for moral hazard. Suppose that voters do not announce the terms of the contract to the government but that the incumbent learns, say from public opinion polls, what voters expect. Then the fact that the government adopts policies that follow the trends of public opinion – in other terms, that the government is *responsive* to the public opinion – does not imply that it is *representative*. If voters inform the government that they care most that streets be safe, the government may do nothing about unemployment, even if it could. Contrary to Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995), responsiveness is not the same as "dynamic representation."

Mandates are not instructions. At best, they signal voters' preferences. Clearly, voters who voted for the victorious party would prefer if the government pursued its announced platform

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rather than platforms that were defeated. But if voters are rationally ignorant, they must know that they do not know. Hence, while we choose policies that we think represent our best interests or candidates who will represent us as persons, we want governments to be able to govern. And this may mean that they should not be responsive to our expressed wishes.

Indeed, many theorists of democracy argued that governments should not follow the twists and turns of public opinion but should exercise the courage and the authority to do what is best for the society. As Lippman (1956) wrote about citizens, "Their duty is to fill the office and not to direct the office-holder." And Schumpeter (1942) admonished voters that they "must understand that, once they elected an individual, political action is his business not theirs. This means that they must refrain from instructing him what he is do."

Under democracy, people invest governments with the power to rule because they can remove them. If voters do not need to issue any instructions to the incoming government, it is because the incumbents know that voters will have the last say. At the beginning of the term voters need not even have a clear view what to expect or to demand. It is up to the incumbent to guess what voters will reward and what they will punish (Manin 1997). Voters can rely simply on the politicians' desire to be reelected, for, as Hamilton (*Federalist* no. 72) observed, "There are few men who would not feel . . . zeal in the discharge of a duty . . . when they were permitted to entertain a hope of *obtaining by meriting*, a continuance of them."

Yet is this prospect, the prospect of having to render accounts at the time of the next election, sufficient to induce representation? If voters do not observe some conditions that affect the outcomes of government actions, they will sometimes reelect politicians who have not done all they could and will at other times throw out of office governments that did all that was feasible, which led Pitkin (1967: 165) to observe that the incumbent's "reelection is not absolute proof that he is a good representative; it proves at most that voters think so."

Thus, even if individuals know what is best for them, if they are not fully informed about some relevant features of the world, they may not want the government to follow their signals and they may err in their retrospective sanctions. This is why several chapters in this volume explore the relation between elections and

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representation. What are the conditions, if any, under which using the vote to inform the government about one's preferences induces representation? What are the conditions under which using it to sanction past performance of the government accomplishes this effect? What happens if people use the vote simultaneously for both purposes: to select policies or policy-bearing politicians and to sanction the past performance? We also investigate facts. Do governments follow public opinion (Stimson)? Do they implement mandates (Stokes)? Do they manipulate public opinion (Maravall)? Does their survival in office depend on the outcomes they generate (Cheibub and Przeworski)?

Yet we must also allow the possibility that many people do not know what is best for them. President Chirac of France observed recently that "les politiques courageuses sont rarement populaires," consoling himself with the hope that in the end people will see the light. Why would policies that are in the best interest of citizens not enjoy their support?

People may have inconsistent time preferences. Suppose that the electoral term is divided into two periods: early and late. Suppose that the ex ante preferences of citizens are ($\delta < 1$)

$$\mathrm{UA} = \mathrm{U(EARLY)} + \delta\,\mathrm{U(LATE)}\,,$$

and the ex post preferences are

$$\mathrm{UP} = \delta\,\mathrm{U(EARLY)} + \mathrm{U(LATE)}\,.$$

A responsive government follows policies dictated by UA, and the ex ante signal of voters is "do pleasing things early." But by the end of the term voters will have preferred that the government followed policies implied by UP: "impose hardships early, then please." Hence, Chirac may have been correct that people sometimes object to policies that they find attractive in retrospect.

Inconsistent time preferences are not the same as myopia. Suppose now that there are two periods: the current term and the future beyond it, and that the present value of the future at the beginning of the current terms is

$$\mathrm{W} = \mathrm{U(CURRENT)} + \delta\,\mathrm{E[U(FUTURE)]}\,.$$

Clearly, if they are not myopic, voters should evaluate the performance of the government by looking not just at what will happen or has already happened during the term but also at the

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legacy the government leaves for the future. If the government produces a bonanza during the current term by cutting all the trees in the country, nonmyopic citizens will think badly of it, even though they lived on champagne during the term. Conversely, if a government embarks on policies that have short-term costs and long-term benefits, nonmyopic citizens will support it.

A government convinced that a long-term future necessitates short-term sacrifices is representative if it does act courageously. But its actions may be unpopular ex ante and disapproved at the end of the term. Effects of policies do not conveniently materialize with the rhythm of the electoral calendar, so the future remains uncertain and people's expectations may be incorrect even if they are not myopic. The present value of the future at the end of the term, the legacy the government leaves, is not something people can easily observe. They must make inferences from what they do see, which is mainly what happened to them or others during the term. But such inferences are not easy and people can reasonably use different rules to make them: "the worse, the worse" but perhaps also "the worse, the better" (Stokes 1996).

If individuals are not the best judges of their own welfare, then who is to judge if a government acts in a representative manner? Pitkin claims that in such situations governments should act on behalf rather than on bequest: on what people "ought to want" rather than what they say they want. But "ought to want" can be taken at least in two ways: (1) "would have preferred the particular outcome with their current preferences, had it already materialized, over what they do want now," or (2) "ought to have different preferences."

The first case is subject to reasoned arguments appealing to people's own hypothetical judgments.[6] The obvious difficulty is that observers may be insufficiently well informed or that they may be interested themselves. Thus, while economists always think that the informed observers are economists (obviously of their particular persuasion), one may reasonably doubt whether their prescriptions are sufficiently well grounded in theory and evidence to warrant overriding people's own judgments. Moreover, even

[6] Marxists maintain that an informed, "critical," observer can ascertain what individuals ought to want by looking at their class position. Bartels (1996) suggests that we can tell what people ought to want by looking at what enlightened members of the same groups do want.

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when valid, such inferences deteriorate into the second posture if preferences are endogenous. And the second posture is just a way of saying that people's preferences should be disregarded altogether, for reasons base or lofty, as when Henry Kissinger declared that President Salvador Allende of Chile was "elected due to the irresponsibility of the people."

To reject welfarism, one must be willing to accept that individual preferences are not the best standard by which to evaluate collective welfare.[7] For example, observing that "The Arrowian postulates may model the idea of democracy-respecting social choice," Roemer (1996: 37) goes on to ask, "why should distributive justice be determined by a democratic procedure, when citizens vote in a self-interested way?" Governments may pursue ideals and use criteria different from those whom they represent, and they may be "just" or "good" by some normative criteria. But the concept of representation is essentially welfarist. At the limit it can be based on conjectures about what people would have wanted, but it cannot free itself from those whom it represents altogether.

Representation and Elections

The alternative roles of elections in inducing representation are the focus in the first part of the book.

Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes (Chapter 1) distinguish the "mandate" from the "accountability" views of elections: in the first, citizens signal to governments what to do; in the second, they judge whether governments have done what they should have. Having examined the conditions necessary for either mechanism to induce representation, the authors conclude that implementation of electoral promises should be expected whenever what politicians and voters want coincides or whenever reelection-seeking politicians expect voters to stick to their initial preferences. Yet, on the one hand, incumbents may adhere to their promises even if their implementation is not the best for citizens and, on the other hand, they may deviate from the promises in the best interest of the public. Hence, "mandate-representation" – a situation in which mandates are faithfully implemented in the best interest of the electorate – is fragile. In turn, the threat of the electoral sanction

[7] On this issue, see the essays in Sen and Williams (1982).

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is undermined when voters do not observe various things that politicians observe or know. Hence, the fact that governments must render accounts at the polls is insufficient to induce representation. Moreover, when voters use their vote both to choose better governments and to structure incentives for the incumbent, they must sacrifice one goal at the expense of the other.

Fearon (Chapter 2) contests that elections are about taking governments to account. He argues that voters use elections to choose good governments, rather than to sanction the incumbents. Fearon cites several facts that are manifestly inconsistent with the idea that voters think retrospectively. Developing a formal model that includes both a selection of prospective governments and a sanction for the incumbents, he also comes to the conclusion that using the vote for two purposes weakens the power of incentives for the incumbent government.

Stokes (Chapter 3) is particularly concerned with implementation of mandates. She observes that in Latin America's democracies politicians deviate from their mandates with some regularity and shows that they are unresponsive to voters when they switch policies. Pressure from markets, as well as the possibility that voters' preferences may change (or that politicians will somehow escape retrospective sanctions), induces deviations from mandates. Stokes's chapter underscores the complexities of assessing whether a government is representative when it is unresponsive. Does the government think that voters' preferences are ill-informed and that voters will recognize their mistake once the unpopular policies have run their course? Or are unresponsive governments shirking or responding to special interests?

Reflecting on the history of the U.S. Congress, Ferejohn (Chapter 4) poses a puzzle: why would politicians ever voluntarily make their actions more visible to voters? The principal-agent model entailed in the relation of representation is a peculiar one, insofar as it is the agents who decide what principals will know about their actions. Why, then, would politicians, subject to the electoral sanction, make it easier for voters to learn about their conduct? Ferejohn's answer is that under some conditions voters will be disposed to invest politicians with more-extensive powers or resources when citizens are more certain that they will be able to learn what the incumbents did with these powers. In turn, politicians may prefer to have greater resources and be subject to more-extensive scrutiny than have less power.

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Reviewing the recent Spanish democratic experience, Maravall (Chapter 5) comes to conclusions opposite to those of Ferejohn. He assumes that since politicians know that they will be judged by voters, they do whatever they can to escape their sanction. Maravall distinguishes mechanisms by which politicians seek to influence public opinion from mechanisms by which they hide their actions from public scrutiny. He is particularly concerned with the role of political parties as a mechanism of accountability.

Finally, the two statistical chapters pose a puzzle. Stimson (Chapter 6) finds that American public officials – legislators, presidents, and even Supreme Court justices – are extremely responsive to public opinion as conveyed by the polls. In turn, analyzing all democracies that existed in the world between 1950 and 1990, Cheibub and Przeworski (Chapter 7) discover that the survival of heads of governments does not depend on economic performance. Both findings run with the grain of the respective bodies of literature (see Cheibub and Przeworski for a summary). Studies of responsiveness typically find a close correspondence between public opinion and policy. Moreover, time-series studies of particular countries, which take as the dependent variable the popularity of the government at the polls or the share of the vote of the incumbent party in elections, also typically find that economic performance plays a role in sanctioning governments. In turn, cross-national studies of the same type, with some exceptions, fail to discover an impact of economic performance on the vote for incumbents. Yet what ultimately matters for accountability is not the popularity or even the share of the vote but survival in office. And while studies of survival of cabinets in parliamentary systems tend to find a clear effect of unemployment, the effect of inflation is problematic. So the findings of Cheibub and Przeworski, who distinguish parliamentary from presidential democracies and discover that economic variables do not matter for the survival in office of the respective heads of governments, are consistent with the tenor of other studies.

If both Stimson's and Cheibub and Przeworski's findings are true, then the puzzle is this: why would politicians choose policies responsive to the public opinion if they do not lose office when they generate bad economic results? One explanation may be that public opinion is not a reliable signal about future retrospective judgments – in particular, that, consistently with Maravall but against Stimson, public opinion is the result, not the cause, of

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policies. But it may be also true that Fearon is simply correct that voters use elections to choose better governments, rather than to sanction the incumbents.

Representation and the Structure of Government

Although we consider the government as a unitary agent in the first part of the book, in today's democracies power is divided among several agencies or departments, sometimes also between national and local governments. Historically, moreover, a number of key figures in the establishment of representative institutions, such as Locke, Montesquieu, or Madison, to mention just a few, also advocated separating and dividing political power.

Elections are not the only mechanism that may induce governments to act in a representative manner. To use the language of O'Donnell (1991), while elections are a "vertical" mechanism of accountability, democratic institutions are supposed to offer also "horizontal mechanisms": the separate powers of government respond and render accounts not only to citizens but also to one another. Indeed, not all organs of government are elected in democracies: the occupants of legislative and executive powers are elected, directly or indirectly, but judges and bureaucrats almost never are.

The potential importance of separation of powers in generating representation is highlighted by Persson, Roland, and Tabellini (1996), who show that if the separation of powers is organized in a particular way, the government as a whole will be induced to reveal to citizens the true conditions under which it operates and that this information, in turn, will enable citizens to enforce representation through retrospective voting. Although their model ignores the potential role of political parties in promoting collusion, it demonstrates the importance of institutional design. Democracies are not all the same, and the particular features of their institutional system may have profound consequences for the performance of governments.

The second part of the book approaches the government as a composite agent and examines some ways in which its structure affects representation. This part, it will be noted, is less systematic than our analysis of the role of elections. Such a difference is not coincidental. While the arrangements that initiate, enable, and terminate the activity of representatives have been relatively

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stable and uniform throughout the history of representative democracy, there has been a much wider variance across time and countries in the way governmental power is divided. To be sure, the separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers can be found in all democracies. The concrete implications of this separation, however, vary widely depending on whether the institutional system is presidential or parliamentary. It seems that the conclusions of Persson, Roland, and Tabellini hold for presidentialism, but not, or much less so, for parliamentarism. Besides, not all countries have a system of checks and balances. Although the principle of the separation of powers and the principle of checks and balances are related, they are not identical. The former requires that the three traditional functions of government be entrusted to distinct organs. The latter prescribes that each branch partially participate in the function primarily exercised by another (e.g., through a presidential veto, judicial review), so that they can hold each other in check (Manin 1994). The consequences of the two systems for representation can hardly be the same. Similarly, the place of the judiciary cannot be the same in the civil-law and common-law traditions. The list of such variations could go on.

Moreover, the concrete functions of governments have enormously changed over time. Yet we continue to conceptualize governmental powers along the lines proposed by Montesquieu 250 years ago. It is at best doubtful that we should still speak of the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary as the three main powers of government. Note, for example, that such a conceptualization makes no room for the bureaucracy. There is also every reason to doubt that we should keep defining the activity of the "executive" branch as carrying out and applying the decisions of the legislature, which was Montesquieu's conception of execution. We are simply lacking a systematic picture of the functions performed by present-day governments.

This volume offers a highly selective view of the consequences of the structure of government for representation, focusing on the bureaucracy and the relations between government and parliament in parliamentary systems.

Citizens' control over the bureaucracy can be only indirect, since democratic institutions contain no mechanisms that would allow citizens to sanction directly the legal actions of bureaucrats. Citizens can at most consider the performance of the bureaucracy

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when they sanction the behavior of elected politicians. As Dunn and Uhr (1993: 2) suggest, we do not even seem to know how to think about principal-agent relations involved in controlling bureaucrats: "it is by no means clear what place executive officials are meant to play as representatives of the people. Are they agents of the government or of the people? If of the former, are they primarily responsible to the executive which employs them, or the legislature which funds them?" Hence, while the bureaucracy is supposed to serve citizens, it is accountable at most to politicians.

Drawing on the Australian experience from 1983 to 1996, Delmer Dunn (Chapter 10) argues that even such a modest aim is not easy to achieve. When the Labor Party came to power in 1983, the bureaucracy was seen as too independent from ministers and insufficiently responsive. Dunn analyzes the reforms that apparently succeeded in establishing a greater control of ministers over their bureaucracies. He draws broader lessons about the kind of relationship between elected and nonelected officials that best secures responsiveness of the latter to the former.

Laver and Shepsle (Chapter 9) focus on another form of indirect accountability. They argue that in most democracies governments are not accountable to citizens but to the parliament. Thus, political accountability is essentially mediated. Focusing on the motion of no confidence as the privileged mechanism of accountability of the government to the parliament, and using the portfolio approach, they conclude that a government is accountable to its parliamentary principals when it is an equilibrium government. On their view, an agent is accountable to his or her principal when the principal, having the means to do so, has no inclination to replace the agent with a feasible alternative. So if the principal is merely content, though not necessarily happy, with the services of an imperfect agent, that agent may be said to be accountable to the principal.

Elster (Chapter 8) turns to antiquity, more specifically to Athenian democracy, to identify various modalities and mechanisms of accountability. He argues that while all political systems need accountability mechanisms, Athens was special in that individuals could be held accountable for their proposals, not just for their actions. Another striking difference between Athens and modern democracies is that in Athens people could be punished for sheer bad luck: they were held accountable for outcomes,

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regardless of whether they had been demonstrably incompetent or dishonest.

Conclusion

Finally, John Dunn (Chapter 11) provides a provocative overview of the preceding chapters by situating the issue of accountability in a broader context of democratic theory. He points out that being ruled is an unpleasant necessity. To avoid conflicts, we transpose the "horizontal danger" of killing each other into the "vertical danger" of being coerced by governments. But the necessity does not turn being ruled into a pleasure. Hence, Dunn argues, elections are not about rendering accounts for specific actions: they are an occasion for people to reassert their sovereignty. Elections, in Dunn's view, have two functions under democracy: they offer the losers a chance in the future, and they issue an authorization to rule. Although elections may prevent some abuses, given the intrinsic opacity of the modern-day politics, it is futile to expect that they would serve as an instrument of control over governments.

While Dunn's conclusion reflects the general tenor of other analyses in this volume, it is subject to modalities and degrees. Empirical evidence – accumulated elsewhere as well as offered here – seems to indicate that often what governments do is what people say they want them to do, although it is less clear which comes first. Yet it also appears that while voters sanction incumbent governments for economic performance, this sanction does not extend to the point of throwing out governments that do not perform well. And while the analytical distinction between using the vote to select governments and using it to structure incentives for the incumbents is illuminating, voters probably do some of both: empirical studies of this issue provide highly divergent results. Thus, although we end up with a vague sensation that what governments do has some connection to what citizens want, the modality of this connection remains opaque.

Degrees are even harder to assess. Perfect representation is not a feasible democratic ideal. Even if individuals were best judges of their own interests and even if they could uniquely aggregate their preferences into a collective will, they would not want to bind governments to implement this will. To govern, our rulers must have some latitude and some authority: this much is

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inescapable. Hence, at times they will do things that surprise us and leave us wondering. But even ex post, when their effects have already materialized, actions of governments are hard to judge. There are so many things we do not know, not even what the government knows. So again, even if citizens could coordinate their ex post evaluations, they have to cast judgments with a fuzzy understanding of the responsibilities. All this means that governments can to some extent escape from public scrutiny and public control. To what extent, we cannot tell: as conceptual discussions of representation indicate, even the yardsticks are difficult to establish, not to speak of their realization.

This is a paltry conclusion. We are not even claiming that, in the standard hand-waving gesture, "further research is necessary." Further research is necessary; while we think that several chapters in this volume have significantly clarified the role of elections in securing representation, our understanding of the effects of the structure of government clearly lags behind. But we should be prepared that results of further research will not remove the basic ambiguities, that answers will depend on assumptions, and divergent assumptions will remain plausible. Does it make sense to think that individual are the best judges of their own interests? Does it make sense to assume that individual preferences are autonomous? Do they neatly order along one dimension? Should we consider a government to be representative when it pursues the interests of a majority different from the one that brought it to office? These are just some examples. The fact is that we can entertain alternative conceptions of representation and that these conceptions will shape the answers.

Yet there are some things we have learned. Perhaps foremost is the importance of information – a theme pervasive in most contributions. The main difficulty both in instructing governments what to do and in judging what they have done is that we, citizens, just do not know enough.

True, we will never know what all governments know, nor would we want to. After all, governing is a part of division of labor, and even if we were to select our rulers at random, not on the basis of the privileged knowledge they already have, they would inevitably acquire what economists term "firm-specific skills." Indeed, we want them to develop such skills. Yet we do not know enough, and the reason is structural, not just volitional. The peculiarity of the principal-agent relation entailed in the relation

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of political representation is that our agents are our rulers: we designate them as agents so that they would tell us what to do, and we even give them the authority to coerce us to do it. And the rules that our agents impose on us include access to information: to use just one example, the British government barred independent researchers from access to tissues extracted from cows suffering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy ("mad cow" disease).

Yet, to evoke Kant, "All actions affecting the rights of other human beings are wrong if their maxim is not compatible with their being made public." Bobbio (from whom this passage is taken, 1989: 84) comments further that "a precept not susceptible to being publicized can be taken to mean a precept which, if it was ever made known to the public, would arouse such a public reaction that one could not put it into action." We do not want governments to take actions that they would have not taken had we known why they are taking them. But this means that we have to know what the governments are doing and why independently of what they want us to know. Our authorization to rule should not include the authority to hide information from us. To promote representation, democracy requires a "regime of free information" (John Dunn).

Thus, even if elections give governments a broad authorization to rule, this authorization should not extend to informing us. Our information must not depend on what governments want us to know. The institutional implications are obvious: we need independent electoral commissions, independent accounting offices, independent statistical agencies. To coin a term, we need "accountability agencies," independent of other branches of government and subject to direct popular control, perhaps through elections.

These institutional considerations bring us to the second lesson of these analyses: the importance of the institutional structure of government. This is a topic with regard to which we made little headway and where further research is definitely needed. One implication of the ineffectiveness of elections as a mechanism of control over governments is that we may want to be able to control governments independently for their actions in different realms, say, to elect the governors of an independent central bank (Minford 1995). Yet short of multiplying the number of directly elected agencies, the central question is how to design the structure of

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government in such a way that its various branches would control each other to make the government as a whole act in the best interest of the public.

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