

Introduction: political representation in modern liberal and democratic regimes: from its origins to its current strains and major challenges

Introduction

This introduction presents an overview of the general theme of political representation, especially in contemporary liberal democratic regimes, which is the major focus of the present *Encyclopedia*. It presents definitions of political representation, its historical anchors and its relevance for the current functioning of contemporary democracies. Different visions of political representation in modern democracies are also explored (delegate vs. trustee; substantive, acting for, vs. descriptive, standing for; ex ante vs. ex post, etc.). It also explains the importance of at least a certain level of congruence between citizens and representatives in terms of ideological and policy preferences so that public policies reflect the will of the majority of the people, a fundamental principle of a liberal democratic regime. Furthermore, the importance of the rules of the game, namely electoral systems and political parties, for the current functioning of modern political representation is analysed. Additionally, the major challenges for democratic political representation in a world of interdependence are taken into consideration: namely, globalisation, Europeanisation, the growth of non-majoritarian institutions and multi-level governance. Finally, this introduction provides an overview and a rationale for the organisation of the current volume; namely, the reasons for dividing the *Encyclopedia* into six parts and the rationale for the contents within each of the six parts.

Political representation: some basic definitions

Before proceeding with the more substantive topics of this *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Representation*, let us furnish some basic definitions. In her seminal work on the concept of political representation, Hanna Pitkin (1967) tells us that the concept of

representation is used not only in the sphere of politics but also in various other spheres of social and artistic life. Thus, we often speak not only of politicians who represent their constituents, voters or not, but also of pictorially and/or plastically representing an object, an emblematic figure, an idea, etc., or of representing a certain plot in terms of dramatic arts. To represent fundamentally means to make present something that is absent, which is the intrinsic paradox of representation. For example, we represent peace through a dove, pictorially and symbolically, but we can also represent human or animal figures in a painting, more or less faithfully (according to the objectives and artistic guidelines), or more or less symbolically in view of the underlying reality of the objects represented. We can also represent the story of Antigone through a theatrical representation of Sophocles' work, for example. A lawyer is supposed to represent the interests of his or her client vis-à-vis third parties, often obtaining a power of attorney to act on behalf of them. A business association or trade union may represent its members in a negotiation. An ambassador represents his or her country in international forums. We say that a politician represents his or her constituents, that is, his or her voters (in a democracy), in Parliament, in government, in intergovernmental negotiations, etc. In other words, representation is about making something present that is effectively absent. The idea of representation is used in a variety of arenas, and even if we focus only on the space of politics, often the idea of representation is defined in many very different ways. Hence the need for an articulated and coherent systematisation of the various definitions, particularly for the political sphere, which is the one that interests us above all in this book (as well as Pitkin, 1967).

On the other hand, Jean-Pascal Daloz (2017, pp. 8–11), in his manual on political representation, refers to three fundamental ways of conceptualising representation. First, the idea of representations as 'perceptions and figurations' refers to the human brain's ability to form images of elements that are not present: these mental images can rest on sensory perceptions, memories or abstract knowledge and be part of a personal or collective imaginary. Pictorial, topographical or metaphorical representations – allegorical – are of this type. The second type of representation, which Daloz calls 'vicariate',

concerns those situations in which someone, who can be either an individual or a group, acts on behalf of another, whether this is also another individual or a group. Here, we enter an absolutely different domain of representation, often presented with an associated adjective, such as ‘legal representation’ or ‘political representation’, which refers to a relationship between the agent, the representative, often designated as an actor or delegate, and the principal, the represented, often designated as the constituent. According to Daloz, the vicariate refers to the faculty to substitute for or act on behalf of someone to defend their interests before third parties (2017, p. 9). The third conceptualisation is that of ‘representation as theatricality’, which obviously refers to the theatre, but not only. In other words, we have an actor who represents a character on stage, and, on the one hand, refers to a fundamental separation between actors and spectators, a bit like political representation refers to a structural split between representatives and the represented. But, on the other hand, theatre also refers to a certain fusion/communion of actors and spectators around the plot that takes place on stage, around the spectacle, just as political representation also refers to a certain fusion or communion around shared political objectives. The metaphor of theatrical representation for the analysis of social and political interactions refers, for example, to the seminal work of the Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1993). And also in politics, the idea of theatrical representation has been used: see the entry about this approach by Jean-Pascal Daloz himself in Part III of the present *Encyclopedia*.

Let us now see the genealogy and etymology of the concept. According to Hanna Pitkin (1967, pp. 2–3), the idea of political representation is an essentially modern idea. On the one hand, in ancient Greece, fifth and fourth centuries BC, there was no equivalent of the word for the idea of human beings representing other human beings. The Greeks selected some of their fellow citizens for political positions and only in foreign affairs did they have ambassadors to represent them in negotiations between city-states (see the entry by Alberto Esu in Part I of the current *Encyclopedia*). On the other hand, the Romans, namely in the Roman Republic (509–27 BC), where they had several elective political offices, had such a word, *repraesentare*, but used it in a literal and not in a political sense. That is, they used

the concept as meaning to bring into presence something previously absent or embodying an abstraction in a certain object, pictorial or sculptural, for example. But they did not apply the idea of *repraesentare* to the representation of human beings by others or to their political institutions. However, the concept of representation came to us, through this word, via Latin and Old French (see Heather Duncan’s entry on the Roman Republic in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*, which discusses how the institutions of the Roman Republic were, in a way, precursors to modern representative self-government).

The modern uses of the word and the concept of political representation began to emerge with Latin in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, or in England even later, as people sent others to represent them in religious councils. The knights and burghers who were called to participate in Parliaments to consider the King’s proposals were considered representatives of those social orders. Subsequently, in the American and French Revolutions, the idea of political representation was also at the centre of the debates. On the one hand, we have, for example, the idea that ‘without representation there can be no taxation’, a slogan that was very common in the American Revolution, and on the other hand, above all, the inclusion of political representation as one of the fundamental rights of man and of the citizen. Regarding the English, American and French Revolutions, see the entries by Markku Peltonen and by José Gomes André in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*.

The idea of political representation in the modern sense concerns the interrelations between elected representatives and their constituents (citizens), mediated by political institutions, and can have several meanings. The work of Pitkin (1967) attempts precisely to systematise these various meanings in two major dimensions of analysis, which are complementary and not necessarily mutually exclusive – a subject to which we will return again in the section ‘The different visions of political representation in modern democracies’.

Modern political representation and its relevance for the current functioning of liberal democracies

The concept of democracy, whether in academia or especially in political practice and

in the ideological conflict associated with it, is clearly polysemic (see Beetham, 2005, pp. 1–11). It is enough to remember that, for example, during the Cold War, the dictatorships embodied in the regimes of ‘really existing socialism’ called themselves ‘people’s democracies’. Be that as it may, the first distinction to be made is between ‘direct democracy’, in the style of democracy as it was practised in classical antiquity, in the city-state of Athens and in other Greek city-states, in the fifth century BC (see the entry by Alberto Esu, Part I of the *Encyclopedia*, about the type of democracy in ancient Greece), and ‘representative democracy’ (Manin, 1997). In other words, in the Greek city-states, which were very small political units where a large part of the population (slaves and women) was excluded from citizenship, it was possible to apply a model of ‘direct democracy’: citizens met regularly in assembly, two or three times a month, to deliberate on the affairs of the city. Holders of executive and jurisdictional positions were often chosen by lot, not by election, and remained in those positions for limited periods (often a year or less).

Such a model is impractical in large and complex societies, such as the modern societies in which we live, and, therefore, the model adopted in modern societies is that of liberal and representative democracy (Dahl, 1998). That is, government is exercised by the representatives of the people, chosen in conditions of freedom and equal opportunities, and in principle according to popular preferences (Dahl, 1998, pp. 83–99). Although several representative democracies have elements of ‘direct democracy’ or ‘participatory democracy’ (‘direct government of the people’), such as referendums, popular legislative initiatives, recalls, citizens’ juries, participatory budgeting, etc., these elements are marginal to the essentially representative core of modern democracies, especially at the level of national government. On ‘participatory democracy’ and ‘direct democracy’, see the entry by Leonardo Avritzer and Priscila Zanandrez in Part IV of the *Encyclopedia*.

The choice of representatives under conditions of freedom and equality is therefore a central element of democratic systems. According to Robert Dahl (1998, p. 85), in political units with large populations, the existence of a ‘reasonably representative democracy’ requires a minimum of six institutional guarantees:

1. Elected representatives.
2. Free, fair and frequent elections.
3. Freedom of expression.
4. Alternative sources of information.
5. Freedom of association.
6. Inclusive citizenship.

Democratic political representation refers to the links between voters (i.e., those represented) and their political representatives, whether they are parliamentarians, members of government, etc., or collective entities that carry out the functions linked to political representation (social movements, interest groups, social groups and, above all, political parties), mediated by electoral institutions. That is, mediated by free, fair and frequent elections, and by the rules for the conversion of votes into mandates (i.e., electoral systems, a theme that is extensively developed through many entries in Part IV of the *Encyclopedia*). Through free, fair and frequent elections, on the one hand, and political parties, on the other, two essential functions of democratic political representation are fulfilled (Manin et al., 1999b). Firstly, there is the ‘representation function’ itself, which concerns the selection by voters of representatives – parties, individual Members of Parliament (MPs). Voters in each segment of the electorate choose the party or parties and candidate or candidates that best represent their preferences and interests. Secondly, at the end of each mandate, it will be the voters who will judge to what extent their political representatives have governed according to popular preferences. This ‘function of accountability’ fundamentally involves the accountability of the elected representatives/parties to the voters. If the electorate, as a whole, positively evaluates the performance of the majority in office, it will be reappointed. Otherwise, the alternation will work; that is, the majority of the day will be replaced by another.

However, Robert Dahl (1989, 1998) defines three important additional specifications of liberal and representative democracies. Firstly, equality of rights, at least civil and political, is a key axiom of liberal and representative democracy. Secondly, for effective control of the political agenda by the citizenry, it is essential that elected politicians have full sovereignty over the making and implementation of policies, safeguarding the limits of the rule of law and the constitutional

architecture of the regime. In other words, in a democratic regime, it is essential that there are no domains of public policy whose jurisdiction is reserved for non-elected institutions and/or political protagonists and, therefore, beyond the reach of sovereign (elected) political representatives. In this case, popular sovereignty would be truncated, limited and compressed. Wolfgang Merkel calls this ‘the effective power to govern’ of the democratically elected representatives of the people (see the entry by this author in Part V of the *Encyclopedia*: «Defective democracies»). Thirdly, the existence of a link between voters’ preferences, their political choices and the making and implementation of public policies is a *sine qua non* of the democratic quality of a political regime (see also Martin et al., 2014, especially ‘Part I – Theoretical Approaches in Legislative Studies’ and ‘Part VI – Policy-Making and Oversight’).

Clearly the requirements could not be met if the top government officials could set the agenda independently of the wishes of citizens. The only feasible solution, though it is highly imperfect, is for citizens to elect their top officials and hold them more or less accountable through elections by dismissing them, so to speak, in subsequent elections.

(Dahl, 1998, p. 93)

Since the seminal work of Miller and Stokes (1963), this adjustment between the policy and/or ideological preferences of voters and their representatives is called ‘policy congruence’, or ‘issue congruence’ and ‘ideological congruence’, respectively. There are several entries about these topics in Part III of the *Encyclopedia* by different authors. We will return to these topics in the section ‘Congruence between citizens and representatives’. For a more comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of the nature and characteristics of liberal and democratic political regimes, the different patterns of political representation within these types of regimes, see the entry by Alexandros Kabbathas and Wolfgang Merkel in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*.

To conclude this section, before moving on to the historical-institutional and doctrinal anchoring of modern political representation, let us briefly look at what differentiates political representation in liberal democratic regimes from authoritarian regimes, relying on the work of Maurizio Cotta (2020). As

Cotta (2020, p. 168) points out, there are many countries registered in the Inter-Parliamentary Union that have elections, although in many of them elections are neither free nor fair and parliaments are not exactly democratic parliaments. It is, therefore, a matter of ‘elections without choice’ and ‘non-democratic parliaments’, inserted in hybrid regimes, in illiberal or defective democracies or even in authoritarian regimes *tout court*. It is worthwhile (even due to the growth of these regimes in recent years: Pinto, 2021) to understand how political representation is processed in these cases and what differentiates it from democratic political representation.

With regard to ‘elections without choice’, there are – in addition to the lack of free competition (at the level of political supply) and free choice (in the sphere of voters) – relative degrees of political pluralism in electoral processes (see Hermet et al., 1978; Gandhi, 2008; Pinto, 2021), despite the non-democratic nature of the regime and the compression of political freedoms. It is precisely in the greater or lesser degree of openness of these authoritarian regimes and in the elections they hold that we can find material for the analysis of the variability of these regimes and their profile. Not least because often, when pluralism is limited but existing, the situation can escape the control of the dictators in office (see, for example, the case of the constitutional plebiscite in Chile in 1988, or what happened in some recent elections in Venezuela under the tutelage of Nicolás Maduro).

With regard to parliaments in authoritarian regimes, there are two fundamental questions that arise and that may reveal relative degrees of political pluralism and a greater or lesser degree of openness: the degree of political pluralism that exists in these parliaments and the powers of these parliaments. Authoritarianism will be greater in the case of parliaments with weak internal diversity/weak pluralism and/or in parliaments with weak powers (in these cases, the *locus* of power resides in another institution).

In short, democratic political representation is bidirectional, from voters to elected representatives, and in the opposite direction. Moreover, in parliaments of democratic and liberal regimes, voter feedback on governance by way of democratic elections can lead to the replacement of incumbent elites, while in authoritarian regimes this is highly unlikely. Therefore, in authoritarian regimes,

political representation is almost always one-way, from top to bottom, with the ruling coalition trying to direct and control the masses. In these cases, the adoption of electoral procedures with some degree of pluralism and parliaments with some political diversity generally aims at the domestic and international political legitimisation of authoritarian regimes, but not the adoption of truly free and fair elections, nor of truly plural parliaments with effective powers. While in authoritarian regimes political representation is almost always unidirectional, top-down, there can also be some connection from the bottom-up, albeit limited and controlled by the elites; for example, when the various factions of the ruling coalition try to change the relationship of forces within that same coalition. About political representation in dictatorships (hybrid regimes, competitive authoritarianism, totalitarian regimes), see the large entry by Filipa Raimundo in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*. While in this book we focus mainly on political representation in modern liberal and democratic regimes, the main exception is Filipa Raimundo's entry.

The historical anchors of modern political representation

In contemporary democracies, popular sovereignty is not exercised directly by the people but delegated by them to their political representatives, a delegation that has its essential support in free, fair and frequent elections (Dahl, 1998). In addition, another essential pillar of modern political representation is political parties.

Political parties are also fundamental elements of democratic and liberal political representation, at least in two fundamental dimensions (Manin, et al., 1999b). On the one hand, parties are crucial vehicles for the 'representation function', that is, different segments of the electorate supposedly choose the party that presents packages of public policies/government programmes closest to their preferences: this is the so-called 'responsible party model' (APSA, 1950; Thomassen & Schmitt, 1999; Mair, 2013). On the other hand, parties are also key agents of the 'accountability function'. In other words, again following the responsible party model, in free, fair and periodic elections, parties are accountable for the proposals made in the previous election, their policy implementation

and their results. Therefore, electoral processes, on the one hand, and political parties, on the other, are essential pillars of modern political representation, embodying a fundamental quality of any democratic and liberal regime: the incorporation of citizenship in political decision-making processes, self-government as delegation and the production of public policies (Miller & Stokes, 1963; Dahl, 1998; Pierce, 1999; Rosema, et al. 2011). Due to the fundamental importance of political parties for contemporary democratic political representation, we included several entries in Part IV, mainly about the nature of the different types of parties and their diverse patterns of representing their constituents, and in Part V, as examples of the challenges and strains on contemporary democracies posed by challenger parties, especially populist parties.

However, a democratic and liberal regime not only incorporates citizenship into political processes, which is the properly democratic component of the regime, but also has another fundamental axiom: the idea of limited government, which is the liberal component of the regime (Dahl, 1998; Merkel, 2004). Limited government is embodied in the various elements that characterise a liberal democracy. In other words, constitutions or para-constitutional texts, fundamental rights of citizens, the separation of powers, vertical accountability (on those elected by the voters), horizontal accountability (by the different organs of state power) and the rule of law are all elements that frame and limit the actions of the government of the day. Therefore, they are also a *sine qua non* of liberal and democratic regimes.

Modern political representation typical of contemporary democratic and liberal regimes historically intersects at two major critical junctures: the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789, in addition to the English Revolution of 1648–1688. This is a settled point; that is, the contours and fundamental characteristics of liberal and democratic representative government are structured mainly on the basis of these two 'critical historical junctures' and the differences with previous legacies are marked. However, it would be a serious mistake to suppose that there are no institutional and doctrinal legacies of modern representative government other than those that result from the revolutions mentioned above.

There are at least five previous institutional and doctrinal legacies, which we will detail in several entries across Part I of the *Encyclopedia*. Firstly, direct democracy, or assembly, typical of the Greek model of classical antiquity, as it was applied in several Greek city-states between the fifth and third centuries before Christ (Finer, 2003b, pp. 1081–1108). From this stems the democratic idea of self-governing communities, an idea that is clearly present in modern representative government: the so-called ‘bottom-up theory of government’, that is, the idea that political sovereignty comes from the people, from the community of citizens to the government (Manin, 1997, pp. 8–41; Hornblower, 1995). Secondly, there are the republican ideas and practices resulting from the legacy of the Roman Republic, as well as the rejection of the hereditary principle as a form of access to the government of societies, which lasted from the defeat of the autocratic monarchy in Rome (509 BC) until the beginning of the Christian era, when the imperial expansion of Rome led it to pass from republic to empire (Gwynn, 2012, chapters 2 and 9; Manin, 1997, pp. 44–51; Finer, 2003a, pp. 414–471; for more details, see also Mouritsen, 2017). Thirdly, we have the reiteration of the ideas of self-government and the republican idea, as well as electoral techniques and deliberative practices as the result of the legacy of the Italian republics of the Middle Ages (Dean & Waley, 2022; Manin, 1997, pp. 51–67; Skinner, 1995; Finer, 2003b, pp. 1008–1080). Regarding the Italian republics, see the entry by Newton Bignotto in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*. Fourthly, we have the idea of government based on the consent of the governed, as well as an enormous panoply of rules for the conversion of votes into mandates (electoral systems) and deliberative practices, bequeathed by the use of such methods within the Catholic Church, especially in the early days of its existence (Moulin, 1998). Fifth and finally, but not least, we have the legacy of the experiences with representative assemblies of the medieval era, which lasted until about 1800: it also imprints a significant mark on modern political representation (Monahan, 1987; Stasavage, 2010, 2016; Finer, 2003b, pp. 1081–1108). On this point, see also the very interesting and challenging entry by Carol Symes on political representation in the medieval era in Part I of the *Encyclopedia*. It should be noted that, from the first to the

fifth legacy, we gradually evolved from the predominance of lot in the selection of political representatives (Greece, to a large extent; Rome and Italian city-states, only partially) to the predominance of elections as a method of choosing representatives (Rome, Italian city-states and the Catholic Church, predominant; medieval assemblies, predominant, tending to exclusive). Adopting elections instead of the lot is a fundamental watermark of modern representative government.

The different visions of political representation in modern democracies

The idea of political representation in the modern sense concerns the interrelations between elected representatives and their constituents (citizens), mediated by political institutions, and can have several meanings. The work of Pitkin (1967) attempts to systematise these various meanings in two major dimensions of analysis which are complementary and not necessarily mutually exclusive. Firstly, the formalistic or procedural conception of political representation, either as authorisation (the investiture of representative authority of the representative by the represented) or as accountability (representation as accountability), namely and above all (in the contemporary era) through elections.

Secondly, there are the more substantive conceptions of representation, that is, about how one should be and/or act as the representative (individual or collective) in order to adequately substantiate the function of political representation. In the case of ‘representation as a way of being’, we have the question of whether representatives as a whole and parliaments as representative institutions *par excellence*, should reflect the fundamental characteristics of citizenship (the idea of the ‘mirror parliament’ and ‘descriptive representation’) in order to better represent their interests and aspirations. Still in the ‘representation as a way of being’, in addition to descriptive representation, we also have representation as a symbolic identity between representatives and the represented, which is a less substantive conception that can sometimes be associated with dictatorial regimes.

In the case of ‘representation as a way of acting’, it is a question of knowing what attitudes and behaviours representatives should follow in order to better represent the interests

and aspirations of their constituents. Here we have, on the one hand, the ‘mandatory vision’ of the elected as a delegate of her/his constituents, which defends the total dependence of the elected on the voter. This is the imperative mandate. On the other hand, we have the ‘trustee’ notion, which defends above all the autonomy of the elected representatives in relation to the voters in judging and defining their best interests and the general interest, as a way of better representing the interests and aspirations of their voters, the representatives being accountable for this autonomy and discretion in periodic elections. Several entries in Part III of the *Encyclopedia* deal with these and other different meanings of representation – namely, with descriptive, symbolic and substantive (delegate or trustee) representation – and with the controversies about the imperative mandate.

At the macro-social level, a complex, multidimensional, retroactive process of political representation was originally proposed by Manin et al. (1999a, p. 9). The fundamental axiom of democratic and liberal representative government is that governments are representative because they are elected. If elections are free and fair, citizen participation is widespread and voters (and candidates/parties) enjoy broad political freedoms, then in principle government will act in the best interests of the people. In the mandatory vision (‘responsiveness – mandate’), elections serve to choose the best policies and/or the politicians orientated to design and implement them. Mansbridge (2016) calls this path of political representation the ‘model of representation by selection’, as opposed to the more common ‘model of representation by sanction’. Returning to Manin et al. (1999b, pp. 29–46), parties and/or candidates make their proposals in terms of public policy packages in the election campaign and explain to voters how such policy packages can affect their social well-being. Citizens choose the parties whose proposals best suit their preferences and interests and which politicians should be in charge of designing and implementing them. The winning majority, its MPs and its government must then commit to the approval and implementation of such policies. This process of political representation is equivalent to that associated with the so-called ‘responsible party model’ (APSA, 1950). The credibility of parties and candidates, based on political promises that are effectively fulfilled

and implemented, is crucial for the affirmation of parties and candidates in the medium and long term. This is why parties have every interest and an advantage in taking their promises seriously, or explaining effectively why, due to originally unforeseen circumstances, promises could not be implemented (Manin, et al., 1999b, pp. 38–39; Schedler, 1998). Comparative studies on the fulfilment of electoral promises in contemporary democracies indicate reasonably high levels of promise fulfilment (Thomson, et al., 2017; earlier, Klingemann, et al., 1994).

The alternative model, not necessarily opposed, but certainly complementary and placing the emphasis not on the choice and selection of policies and politicians but on responsibility (of those elected to the voters) and accountability (of those elected by the voters), is that of the ‘vision of accountability’. It is the model that Mansbridge (2016) calls ‘representation by sanction’. In this view, governments choose the policies that best suit the preferences and interests of voters, or at least the majority of voters or the ‘median voter’ because they anticipate that if they fail to do so, they will be sanctioned by voters in the next elections. Hence, they supposedly choose and implement the policies most appropriate to the preferences and interests of the voters. However, both models have their problems. On one hand, parties and candidates have their own objectives and preferences that may not necessarily coincide with those of the voters. Voters, on the other hand, may have less than complete information about policies, their implementation and their results. Hence, this highlights the crucial importance of the *media*, independent agencies, separation of powers and political opposition for closer scrutiny of government policies, implementation and results.

Congruence between citizens and representatives

The electoral mechanism can lead to an adjustment in the political preferences of voters and elected representatives, followed by the behaviour of the latter in Parliament and in government. This results in the choice and implementation of public policies that accord with the preferences and interests of the (majority of) citizens. Ever since the seminal article by Miller and Stokes (1963), empirically oriented political scientists have called

this adjustment between the preferences of voters and the orientations/behaviour of representatives in Parliament and of rulers in the Cabinet as ‘policy or issue congruence’ and/or ‘ideological congruence’ (depending on the indicators used). Empirical studies of political representation have, in fact, been subdivided by scholars into two major groups: those that focus on the transformation of votes into mandates in parliaments, comparing the distributions in both arenas and those that focus on the adjustment between the political preferences of citizens and their elected representatives in the study of ‘policy/issue congruence’ and/or ‘ideological congruence’ (Powell, 2004).

Moreover, the degree of political congruence between constituents and representatives is seen as a key element of representative democracies (Converse & Pierce, 1986; Miller et al., 1999; Pierce, 1999; Thomassen & Schmitt, 1999; Powell, 2019). Miller and Stokes (1963) inaugurated a tradition of empirical studies on political representation that share the underlying assumption that the relative congruence between the political preferences of constituents and those of representatives (especially if the latter are also congruent with the behaviour of legislators in Parliament and of rulers in the Cabinet), is a key part of the quality of political representation. Within certain limits and without violating the principle of the ‘non-imperative mandate’ (as we will see below), it is generally believed that the greater the congruence between the preferences of voters and deputies, the more likely it is that voters will feel well represented and, additionally, that legislators (and the government) will act in accordance with popular preferences. This is a basic axiom of any representative democracy (Dahl, 1998).

However, effective electoral representation requires, on the supply side, that citizens are offered alternative governance solutions by the candidates/parties competing for the popular vote (Schmitt & Freire, 2012). Democratic political representation is, at its core, a mechanism for collective decision-making in matters of public policy. The choices of voters must have recognisable and significant effects in terms of their implications for the formulation and implementation of public policies (APSA, 1950; Miller et al., 1999; Pierce, 1999). This refers to the issues of the political differentiation of party proposals,

i.e., the ‘clarity of the alternatives’, as well as the proper functioning of the mechanism of political representation and, more generally, the degree of effective choice that is offered to voters (Wessels & Schmitt, 2008; Schmitt & Freire, 2012). The so-called ‘responsible party model’ also provides, of course, that candidates/parties, especially if they participate in government solutions (single or multiparty), will commit themselves to the fulfilment of electoral promises and their passage to effective public policies (Klingemann et al., 1994; Schedler, 1998; Pierce, 1999).

In Miller and Stokes’s (1963) seminal paper, as well as in Powell’s (2019) study and many others in between, responsiveness is centred on the issue of *policy* responsiveness and the underlying ideological orientations. Miller and Stokes wanted to see the relative impact of the orientations of the voters in each *constituency*, in relation to ‘party discipline’, on the ideological orientations of the Congressmen and, subsequently, on their voting behaviour in Congress. They found that there is a robust correlation between the dominant orientations in each *constituency* and the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of Congressmen in terms of civil rights, but much weaker in terms of social protection (*social welfare*) and even weaker in the field of foreign policy. However, as Eulau and Karpis (1977) have argued very convincingly, the responsiveness of elected officials to voters is not limited to the question of public policy and ideology alone.

Current challenges and strains for liberal and democratic political representation

There are several signs of a crisis of democratic liberal representation. As reported in the entry «Defective democracies» by Wolfgang Merkel in Part V of the *Encyclopedia*, liberal democratic regimes (like pure autocracies) have been in decline since the mid-1990s and constitute only a minority of political regimes worldwide. Today (the most recent data comes from 2022), the world is dominated by hybrid regimes (defective democracies/illiberal democracies and defective authoritarian regimes). As stated by Wolfgang Merkel:

The ongoing de-democratisation of political regimes worldwide over the past two decades is due to the decline of liberal democracy on the

one hand and closed autocracies (until 2019) on the other. Both trends are fuelling the rise in defective democracies and autocracies. At present, there is little to suggest a reversal of the trend towards liberal democracies. A precise analysis shows that we are living in an age of defective political regimes.

(Lührmann & Merkel, 2021)

From what has been said above, it seems important to finish the substantive part of this general introduction to the *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Representation* by inventorying the signs and the roots of the erosion of liberal and representative democracy in the Western hard core, as well as elsewhere. In some cases, the signs of the crisis are both indicators of the crisis and explanatory factors for it. The signs of crisis are manifold, but due to limitations of space, we can naturally only summarise here those that seem to us to be the most important. Along these lines, we think that many of them can perhaps be synthesised in the idea of ‘a double withdrawal of voters and political parties’ from the usual central terrain of representative democracy, a thesis defended by political scientist Peter Mair (2013, pp. 17–98). On the part of the voters, this withdrawal translates, in the first place, into a generalised decline in electoral participation, although not linear in time and with significant variations between different countries, as well as a very pronounced drop in party militancy. Although they are not the only ones, these are crucial features of the withdrawal of citizens from the democratic public sphere, particularly in view of the importance of elections in structuring the link between voters, elected representatives and *policy-making* in liberal representative democracies and the decline of ‘party democracy’. Of course, the most optimistic underline that, along with the decline in voter turnout, there has been an increase in non-electoral political participation; therefore, there is a citizen retreat from conventional politics but not from politics *tout court* (see, for example, Rosanvallon, 2006, pp. 24–27; Tormey, 2015).

As for the withdrawal of political elites, especially party elites, from the central terrain of representative democracy, this phenomenon has several dimensions. On the one hand, the ‘parties on the ground’, i.e., party organisations as part of civil society and as a vehicle for its representation in political

systems, have become much weaker. This is due, among other factors, to strong political professionalisation and partly the decline of party militancy, along with the fact that parties are no longer present on the ground all the time but are most active during the electoral period. Parties have come to depend more on professionals of all kinds (specialists in polling, political communication, public policies, etc.) for the functions of representation and communication, diminishing the role of the party itself as an agent of representation.

But while ‘parties on the ground’ have weakened substantially, degrading their representative function, the ‘parties in the institutions’ have strengthened their position significantly. In other words, parties continue to be essential to the functions of recruiting political elites and in party government. Moreover, the degradation of the representative function, along with the maintenance or even reinforcement of the functions of the parties in institutions, has led to a tendency towards self-referencing of political parties and elites, as they are increasingly isolated from society. This has led voters to perceive party organisations as being outside society, them versus us, and thus feeds into citizens’ perceptions of a certain oligarchisation of parties and of the political elites.

There are multiple factors that explain the crisis of liberal and democratic political representation. Micro, meso and macro factors are important, national and/or international in scope, with a clear primacy for macro and international factors, which are schematically outlined below. According to Richard Rose (2014), the major difference between national party government and party government in a world of interdependence is the presence of transnational influences on policy-making and policy outputs, which means that, at least partly, national parties and national governments do not fully control domestic policy-making and outputs. The general consequences of these major changes in party government in a world of interdependence vis-à-vis national party government are schematically described by Simon Tormey (2015) in four remarks. Firstly, there is a ‘feeling of loss of state sovereignty’: states are discredited as not being capable of governing themselves and dominating national politics and policies. Secondly, there is a ‘sense of loss of the aura of national politicians’ among the citizenry: a disbelief in national politicians as being able

to effectively define and shape policy. Thirdly, there is a 'feeling that national politicians are less and less representative of the people': that politicians increasingly have to match their actions to the visions and needs of multiple actors and agencies, both internally and externally to the states. Fourthly, there is among the citizenry a 'general feeling of loss of power, of loss of influence, of loss of control': a feeling of the fading and erosion of representative democracy. There are several entries in both Part V and VI of the *Encyclopedia*, namely post-democracy, counter-democracy, the growth of non-majoritarian institutions, Europeanisation and the democratic deficit, multilevel governance, the winners and losers of globalisation and the growth of inequalities worldwide, among many others, that further substantiate the signs and, especially, the explanatory factors in the crisis of liberal and democratic political representation.

The structure of the book

The *Encyclopedia* is divided into six parts, each addressing a critical dimension of political representation. The chapters within each section range roughly from 2,000 to 4,000 words, ensuring in-depth yet accessible discussions on key themes. Each chapter covers the core of the literature on political representation in a clear, easy and accessible manner.

Part I, Historical and Philosophical Roots of Modern Political Representation, delves into the origins of political representation, tracing its development from classical political thought, such as that by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, to modern democratic governance. It examines the history of democracy and turning points, such as the French and American Revolutions in the eighteenth century, foundational theories of representation, the evolution of representative institutions and the philosophical underpinnings that continue to influence contemporary debates on political legitimacy and authority.

Part II, Classical and Outstanding Modern Representation Studies, highlights seminal twentieth-century contributions to the study of political representation. This section includes analyses of key thinkers, landmark studies and significant theoretical advancements that have shaped contemporary understandings of representation. It revisits classical works, such as *The Politics of Presence* by Anne Phillips and *Constituency Influence in Congress*

by Warren Miller and Donald Stokes, and explores how modern research has refined and expanded these discussions.

The third section, *Part III*, Conceptualisation and Measurement of Political Representation in Contemporary Political Science Research, focuses on the methodological aspects of studying representation. It covers different conceptual approaches, operational definitions and empirical strategies used to measure political representation. Topics include gender representation, imperative mandates, policy congruence and responsiveness.

Part IV, Electoral Institutions, Parties, Party Systems and Political Representation covers institutional mechanisms that shape political representation, particularly electoral systems, party structures and party systems. It explores how different electoral arrangements influence representation, the role of political parties in shaping policy outcomes and the impact of party systems on democratic responsiveness and governance.

Part V, Current Challenges for Political Representation: Domestic Level, focuses on contemporary issues that liberal democracies (and other political systems) face from within. These pressing challenges include growing inequalities, fake news, right-wing populism and the double exit of citizens and parties from the electoral arena.

Part VI, Current Challenges for Political Representation: International Level, extends the discussion beyond national borders, exploring the complexities of representation in global and transnational contexts. Topics include the role of international organisations, migration and the strain of globalisation on national politics.

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