3531 words excluding references

Project outline

- Substantive Representation in European and American Legislatures

Background and focus

Representation relates to the essence of input democracy (Beetham and Lord 1998; Scharpf 1999; Moravcsik 2002), since it basically concerns the relationship between the constituents and government; between the *demos* and the *kratos*. In most democracies there exists a widespread normative consensus that politicians at least to some degree should be responsive to their constituents. This is one of the very reasons why we have elections – a mechanism designed to induce preferences into the political system (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987).

Political philosophy has reflected on the basic ideas of representation since the birth of democratic theory (Pitkin 1967; Held 1996). The past half century or so, an interesting – mainly American - literature has emerged, which based on quantitative evidence evaluates the degree to which political behaviour (e.g. Levitt 1996; Erikson and Wright 2000; Bartels 2005; Clinton 2006), political outputs (e.g. Erikson et al. 2002) or political outcomes (e.g. Ansolabehere et al. 2002) vary in accordance with constituency preferences or interests. One might call this literature empirical substantive representation (Pitkin 1967). The aim of the dissertation will be to contribute to this literature by:

- 1) Providing an overview of the various empirical sub-literatures (literature review).
- 2) Applying the methods developed within the study of substantive representation of legislative decisions in the US House and Senate to the European Parliament.
- 3) Contributing to the American frontier on substantive representation studies with focus on the sub-field of *differential* substantive representation of legislative decisions. Special attention will be given to information as a source of differential representation.

Substantive representation of legislative decisions refers to the degree of accordance between the public preferences and legislative behaviour, i.e. do the legislators follow the preferences of their constituents when they vote? The importance of the question is almost self-explanatory, since it lies in the heart of most popular modern conceptions of democracy that government should be responsive and accordingly act “for the people” (Scharpf 1999).

Differential substantive representation of legislative decisions concerns the question of whether all sub-constituencies are equally represented or if legislators are more inclined to follow the desires of certain segments. The debate on differential representation is particularly interesting, since it concerns the degree of political equality/inequality among different groups in our political system. A common normative ideal is that all individuals should be equally represented: “One person, one vote”. However, this is not necessarily the case. For instance, some groups participate more intensely than others and some have greater resources (i.e. abilities) than others in their attempt to influence the legislators. If evidence can be found in favour of differential representation, it has significant implications for policy outcomes, since underrepresented groups almost per definition have less than average influence on the “authoritative allocations” (Easton 1953) in society.

The existing literature

The European literature on representation in relation to the EU is rich and diverse. Many studies have for instance discussed the relative influence of the European Parliament in the perspective of a possible democratic deficit. However, few (if any) have explicitly correlated public preferences with formal measures of legislative roll-calls (Van der Kolk et al. 1997; Norris 1997). This is partly because such measures have not been around as long as in the US (Hix 2001; Hix et al. 2006). Nevertheless, a growing European body of literature utilizes summary roll-call measures to study intra-parliamentary dynamics (e.g. Rittberger 2006; Hix 2001; Hix et al. 2003; Hix 2004). Thus, an obvious possibility for future research is to combine the measures from this recent literature with the methods and study object of substantive representation of constituency ideology on legislative decisions. This is exactly what the second part of the dissertation aims to do.

In an US context, the link general link between aggregate (i.e. state-level) constituency preferences has been examined for decades and is probably of the most developed literatures in American political science (e.g. Miller and Stokes 1963; Erikson 1978; Achen 1978; Powell 1982; Wright 1989; Erikson 1990). Hence, I turn my attention to the developing sub-field of differential representation. In this sub-literature, three particularly important studies have recently been published. First, Clinton (2006) show in a study of the House around the 2000-general election that same-party and non-same-party constituents are almost equally represented in congressional roll-calls. This is even so, when one take their relative size in the districts and an important measurement issue into account (Clinton 2006: 403). Second, Griffin and Newman (2005: 1215) find legislators to be highly representative of voters, while the effect of non-voters is insignificant. Third, an especially interesting study is Bartels (2005), which argues that high income groups are highly overrepresented, compared to low income groups. In addition, Bartels claim that the relationship remains, even when other relevant factors are controlled for. Though all studies are indeed intriguing, there are several methodological as well as theoretical reasons to seek to develop the literature further. For instance, most of the existing studies do not all appropriately take measurement error into account or control for information effects. In addition, the underlying *causes* for a possible differential representation have only scarcely been examined (a notable exception is Griffin and Newman 2005). Here, it is my belief that insights can be gained from studying the information variable as a possible underlying cause. Hence, further studies are needed on differential representation that takes measurement error and information effects more seriously. This is exactly the purpose of the third part of the dissertation.

Methods and methodology

The approach to the empirical part of the analysis is quantitative. The standard method when studying substantive representation is to correlate the mean constituency ideology with a measure for political behaviour using regression analysis. When differential representation is studied, one calculates separate mean ideologies for each group. The data sources for the independent variables are typically surveys, whereas specialized measures of legislative behaviour are utilized for the dependent variable. The below figure summarizes the specific data sources for the two empirical parts of the project.

Table 2: Main data sources

	Data sources for independent variables	**Data sources for dependent variables**
Analysis of the EU parliament	Eurobarometer European Election Studies National surveys	Hix et al. (2007)'s nominate-scores
Analysis of US House and Senate	Annenberg Election Surveys (2000 and 2004) General Social Survey NES Senate Election Study	Poole and Rosenthal (1997)'s DW-nominate and W-nominate scores

Though the intuition behind the study is simple, the results are subject to potential bias from a range of sources which are not always appropriately taken into account in the existing literature. Hence, a major contribution of the dissertation will be to develop appropriate strategies to improve the accuracy of the estimates.

First, there is the problem of representativeness in the surveys that are vital for calculating the independent variables. It is well known that in most surveys low-information/income/participation groups tend to be underrepresented relative to their actual size in the population, since there often is a resource based bias in the willingness and ability to participate as a survey respondent (e.g. NES 1998). Hence, one runs the risk of only capturing the preferences of certain segment of the population. To take this problem into account, post-stratification of the surveys is applied. Additionally, a weight that takes the relative group sizes into account is applied in the analysis of the US.

Second, there is the problem of measurement error. The problem arises, because we cannot estimate constituency ideology without uncertainty. It is well know in the literature that error in the independent variables can result in biased and inconsistent estimates due to the correlation between the variables and the error term (Stefanski 2000; Wansbeek and Meijer 2000: 109; Gujarati 2003: 526-527). The bias will tend to be directed toward zero (Charles 2005), also known as attenuation or dilution bias (Spearman 1904). In the case of the EU, this means that one will underestimate the true representation, unless correctional measures are applied. In the US part of the dissertation, it could mean that some groups get relatively underestimated to others, if they are measured with more error. Hence, evidence of differential representation could merely be a statistical artefact.

Measurement error is taken into account in three ways. First, surveys are applied with substantially larger sample sizes than in most existing studies (80,000-160,000 respondents). Additionally, errors-in-variables regression will be calculated. The basic idea here is simply to model the measurement error statistically by correcting for known reliabilities of the independent variables, since the attenuation is proportional to the error (Fuller 1987; Gibson 2002). Finally, instrumental variables are applied, i.e. variables which are (preferably heavily) correlated with the error prone independent variable but unrelated to the error term of the equation (Erikson et al. 1993). By having access to two almost contemporary studies with large sample sizes (the Annenberg Surveys from 2000 and 2004), it is possible to construct better IVs than in the existing literature. The logic is that the sampling error in the two surveys will be unrelated, while the underlying latent variable probably is stable over the short time span between the surveys. The below figure summarizes some of the main methodological challenges and their possible solutions.

Table 2: Overview of methodological challenges and solutions

Methodological challenges	**Solutions**
Problem I: Representativeness	Application of high quality surveys Post-stratification Weighting
Problem II: Measurement Error	Application of larger datasets (or datasets sample at state level (US) or country level (DK) Errors-in-variables regression 2SLS regression

The product – tentative thesis disposition

The project is likely result in a monograph that covers the three main ambitions of the project, i.e. a literature review, an application of existing methods on the European Parliament and a contribution to the further development of an important newer American sub-literature. Though further effort will need to be done with my advisor to fine-tune the project, the monograph is intended to cover the following themes.

Table 3: Preliminary dissertation structure.

Part I – introduction and general theory:	
Chapter 1	Introduction
Chapter 2	General representation theory
Chapter 3	Previous empirical work on substantive representation (mainly US)
Part II – analyzing the European Parliament:	
Chapter 4	State of the art of studies of substantive representation in the context of the European Parliament
Chapter 5	Empirical analysis of substantive representation in the European Parliament.
Part III – analyzing the US House and Senate:	
Chapter 6	State of the art on differential representation in the US
Chapter 7	Empirical analysis of substantive representation in the US House and Senate with special attention to measurement error and information as an explanatory factor.
Part IV – discussion	
Chapter 8	Discussion (e.g. can *differential* representation be studied in the context of the European parliament?)
Chapter 9	Conclusion

If my advisor recommends me so, I might opt for writing a number of journal quality articles instead of a monograph. The articles will cover different aspects of the three ambitions. For this eventuality, a suggestion for possible articles can be found after the reference list.

Potential contributions and limitations

The potential contribution of the project follows its three ambitions.

First, while many reviews focuses on theoretical aspects of representation (typically following Pitkin 1967), the proposed chapter in the dissertation (or article) will aim to provide a review of the rich *empirical* literature in the field of substantive representation. Apart from serving as inspiration for the remaining of the dissertation, the review will turn special attention to identifying gaps in the existing literature and thereby contribute to outline future research topics.

Second, as for the European analysis, the potential contribution is mainly empirical, i.e. to apply already know methods from the American literature to a European context. This is an important contribution, since many of the previous findings are not tested thoroughly outside the American context. In addition to the empirical importance, a few innovations will be made when applying methods from the American system to a parliamentary system with proportional voting at the national level.

Third, the contribution to the US literature is both methodological and theoretical. By taking measurement error more explicitly into account, existing contributions can be refined, since some of the findings of differential representation seem to be heavily influenced by this important statistical problem (Bartels 2005; Griffin and Newman 2005). Especially, results of differential representation due to participation are likely to be challenged, since there are particularly substantial problems in estimating the ideology (and hence representation) of low-participation groups. Theoretically, the dissertation will thoroughly examine the information variable that has not really been discussed or tested systematically within the field of differential representation.

The main limitations of the project stems from the data availability. For instance, the lack for large panel datasets that have appropriate sample size at state (US) or country (EU) level hinders advanced dynamic analysis of *changes* in constituency ideology to changes in legislative roll-calls. Likewise, the sample size in the cross-sectional surveys limits the range of groups whose representation we can examine. Some group ideologies simply cannot be reliably estimated. However, regardless of the problems and limitations, the existing data sources contains more than enough material to make a substantial contribution based on secondary analysis alone.

Proposed advisor(s):

Preferred supervisor would be Associate Professor Kasper Møller Hansen who has published extensively within my broad area of interest. Hansen has a profound knowledge of the methodological tools which will be needed to be learned and applied in the dissertation. Furthermore, he is the coordinator of the department's methods programme; an attractive venue for teaching during the graduate programme.

As a co-advisor, Professor Robert S. Erikson of Columbia University would be my first choice. Professor Erikson is one of the pioneers of empirical American politics and co-author of seminal contributions on representation such as “Statehouse Democracy” (Erikson et al. 1993) and “Dynamic Representation” (Stimson et al. 1995); just to mention a few. An excellent alternative would be Professor Peter-Kurrild Klitgaard, since his current project on voting behaviour in the Danish Parliament (Parties and Policies in Parliament) would be of obvious relevance for my dissertation. In addition, his broad scholarship within comparative politics and legislative/constitutional institutions is of great interest.

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