

CHAPTER ONE

Representation and Accountability: Intellectual Foundations of EAST PaC

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Theory tells us that by conditioning their ballots on policy outcomes, voters can use elections to control politicians. Presumably, politicians anticipate that they will be sanctioned for poor party-performance and thus have an incentive to implement policies – through their own efforts, or through parties and other political units – that correspond to the preferences of the electorate. Does the system of repeated elections function as a mechanism of electoral control, and if it does, what factors influence its effectiveness?

In the Electoral Control project, we consider this question in a broad context of studies on parliamentary elections. This chapter sets out the intellectual foundations of this project (see also Introduction, this book) and thus the rationale for collecting the EAST PaC data. We consider the two main and interrelated concepts that have guided the project from the beginning: representation and accountability.

REPRESENTATION

To address whether elections are a mechanism of electoral control, we begin with a discussion of representation. The literature on political representation is vast and multi-disciplinary as it includes views of political scientists, sociologists, psychologists, and area studies specialists, among others. When it comes to pinpointing a foundational post-Second World War work on political representation, Hanna F.

22 J.K. Dubrow, A. Kurowicka, N. Palaguta, and K.M. Słomczyński

Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation*, published in 1967, is a leading text.

In her seminal book, Pitkin presents a typology of various theoretical approaches to representation. She begins by introducing the notions of authorization and descriptive views on representation. According to the authorization view, also referred to as the formalistic type of representation, a representative is granted a previously absent right to perform a limited range of actions within certain bounds. Keeping within the bounds means that the representative performs the function of representation. Stepping outside of them indicates representation failure. The represented are, at the same time, responsible for the actions of representatives that they granted the right of representation to (Pitkin 1967: 38–39).

Some subtypes of descriptive representation, or “standing for” type of representation, include proportional representation, which is considered to be a strong reflection or even replication of the population structure on a smaller scale and assumes representation of all of its groups (Pitkin 1967: 61–62). Theorists who hold this view often use the metaphor of a representative body as a portrait of the constituency they represent. Representation of this type calls for a particular methodology. Representation by sample involves randomly choosing a group from the whole population. This method assumes that such kind of non-biased selection allows for representation of the population by a small group of representatives (Swabey 1937: 25 as quoted in Pitkin 1967: 74). Griffiths's and Wollheim's (1960) theory of descriptive representation suggest that a representative has to share distinct similarities with the represented (188).

To reduce representational inequality, many governments, political leaders, social justice advocates, and researchers champion the concept of descriptive representation. Proponents of descriptive representation assert that those elected officials who resemble the demographic and experiential characteristics of their constituencies have sufficient empathy to evaluate and construct representative policy (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Young 1990). In this sense, political structures encourage representation by empathetic demographic insiders. In contrast, delegative representation makes no provisions for demographic representation, relying instead on the stewardship of sympathetic demographic outsiders (Birch 2001). In practice, descriptive

representation attempts to ameliorate inequitable social conditions by providing historically marginalized groups with opportunities to become political elites. In so doing, proponents assert, descriptive representation safeguards the interests of the disadvantaged.

Descriptive representation, while perceived by Pitkin as limited, has proved to be an important point of reference for contemporary theorists working on the exclusion of marginalized groups based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other factors. The most important of these include Will Kymlicka who in his *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1995) argues for group rather than just individual representation; Anne Phillips who in *The Politics of Presence* (1995) explains the importance of representation of diversity in society, and Melissa S. Williams who in *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (1998) explores patterns of group-based advantage and exclusion that tends to be ignored by individual representation. The criticisms of traditional concepts of representation expressed by those and other thinkers focus on the conflict between group fairness of representation and individual proportional representation fairness (e.g. Urbinati and Warren 2008).

Descriptive representation is more of a concept than a theory, designed to stimulate praxis rather than merely academic research. Addressing inequitable political representation, theoretical debates focus on the tenability and “philosophy and ethics” of descriptive representation as a governance solution, especially in the light of the current state of disadvantaged group representation (Chaney and Fevre 2002: 897). Thus, it refers to both an ideal and a reality; the ideal being the governance solution, the reality being the degree to which the legislative body represents the demographics and experiences of the citizenry.

Descriptive representation has been criticized on various grounds (for a review, see (Mansbridge 1999)). Most common is that descriptive representation would not lead to substantive representation, such that demographic qualities bear little to no relationship to deliberative capabilities (Mansbridge 2000: 101). Others argue that by overemphasizing group differences through claims of supra-representational abilities, descriptive representation erodes the bonds among legislators whose job it is to produce policies for all, rather than a demographic subset, of their constituency (Bird 2003).

Many other complaints focus on the difficulties of implementing descriptive representation. Choosing which groups from a multiplicity of genders, races, ethnicities, religions, age groups, physical handicaps, and social classes are worthy of descriptive representation could be so complex that random or arbitrary assignment to legislative bodies is the only reasonable way (Andeweg 2003: 149; Kymlicka 1995). Some fear that implementation of this form of representation would lead to a selection of less qualified legislators drawn from, among other places, the bottom of the talent pool. Akin to this is the argument that descriptive representatives vary as much within their group, including multiple social identities such as Muslim lower class woman, or young Silesian émigré, etc., as they do between groups. In its implementation, descriptive representation oversimplifies a complex set of demographics, leaving some subgroups underrepresented, thereby undermining the very purpose for which it was intended.

Counter to these criticisms, most proponents assert that descriptive representation is not a call for an exact microcosm of the citizenry, “such that children represent children, lunatics represent lunatics” (Bird 2003: 2). Instead, the goal is (a) substantive representation through making the legislative body demographically closer to the citizenry and (b) situation specific, in that selection of groups in need of representation should be made after careful, rational deliberation and under particular conditions (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999).

Symbolic representation is based on a notion of symbol, which does not contain a meaning by itself, but one which is attributed to it by social convention. Thus a symbolic representation is only in place, when it is believed in (Pitkin 1967: 100).

Substantive representation, referred to by Pitkin as “acting for” representation, assumes that the actions and the goals of representatives should coincide and there is a primacy of represented over representative in a way that only the latter is accountable. (Pitkin 1967: 163–165 in *Celis et al* 2008: 100). *Celis et al* (2008) further explain two different types of substantive representation and the major differences between them by highlighting the role of represented and representative. Under the first type of representation, the representative has no possibilities of actions beyond those granted them by the represented. Under the second type, the representative has more possibilities for independent actions than that strictly authorized by the represented. Pitkin argues

that there is a difference in how the representative should act in different circumstances: if representatives are more experienced and are able to propose rational, well grounded solutions in the national interests, they should act more independently. Their actions however should be limited in cases of explicitly conflicting interests with the represented or when significant differences in interests of the represented and the state occur, and in cases where both the represented and the representatives have sufficient experience and information to decide upon an issue (*Celis et al* et al 2008: 100–101).

While extremely influential, Pitkin's typology could stand some improvements, especially for the ever-changing circumstances of democratic representation. It was expanded on by, among others, Mansbridge (1999 and 2003), who discusses the traditional model of representation and adds three more models, whose features suggest that they should be judged according to a different set of criteria than the traditional one.

The types of representation proposed by Mansbridge (2003) are Promissory (traditional) representation that follows the classical principal-agent format and assumes that the agent (the representative) fails to meet their obligations to the principal (the represented) and that the represented will try to make representative accountable through the promises that the representative makes (515). According to Mansbridge this type of representation uses a "forward-looking concept of power" (515). In contrast, Anticipatory representation is a result of the idea of retrospective voting, under which representatives look forward to the expectations of their voters on the next election but not to those promises they made for the elections they have already won (2003: 515). According to Mansbridge, there is no moral attitude of the agent in aiming to meet their previous promises to the principal, but rather there is a careful anticipation with the goal of reelection (2003: 518). This new model of representation based on the idea of retrospective voting and rejection of the traditional principal-agent model has important consequences for the way the quality of such representation is judged. As Mansbridge (2003) explains,

"replacing morality with prudence in the incentive structure of anticipatory representation leads us to judge the process with new normative criteria. It makes us shift our normative focus from the individual to the system, from aggregative democracy to deliberative democracy, from

26 J.K. Dubrow, A. Kurowicka, N. Palaguta, and K.M. Słomczyński

preferences to interests, from the way the legislator votes to the way the legislator communicates, and from the quality of promise-keeping to the quality of mutual education between legislator and constituents” (518).

One of Mansbridge’s great contributions to the literature on representation is her critique of previous representation theories and the development of a new one, what she refers to as “gyroscopic representation.” Gyroscopic representation is based on an idea of representation from different from classic accountability models: “The representatives act like gyroscopes, rotating on their own axes, maintaining a certain direction, pursuing certain built-in (although not fully immutable) goals” (2003: 520). Representatives are not expected to be accountable before the voters, like in traditional models, but rather to follow their goals (2003: 520). They are guided by some general principles and logically grounded necessities trying to meet voters expectations, comply with moral standards and demonstrate required proficiency levels (2003: 520–1). While a focus on the characteristics of an individual candidate is more typical of the American political context, the European model precludes politicians’ orientation towards the interests of the party that consists both of their own beliefs and of the line of the party as a whole. The party member is responsible for his disobedience before the party and the party before the citizens (2003: 521).

The Surrogate model of representation is a type of representation which “occurs when legislators represent constituents outside their own districts” (2003: 515). Under the circumstances where the representative is not controlled by financial or power instruments, accountability of the representative to the represented is absent. In cases where financial control is possible, voters are able to control representatives through the ordinary mechanism of representation and by electing representatives that would act according to pre-determined patterns pursuing their goals (“as in gyroscopic representation”) (2003: 523). This type of representation occurs, for example, in the case of minority groups having a “surrogate” representative elected from one constituency who “speaks for” an entire group, as in the case of the US Senator Barney Frank who represented the interests of the LGBT. It is often seen as a possible answer to some problems inherent in the limitations of the traditional model of a territorially-based representation (cf. Urbinati and Warren 2008).

According to Mansbridge, the last three should be judged according to different criteria than the traditional one; multiple criteria of assessment have to be applied as there are many ways of representation. “The criteria are almost all deliberative rather than aggregative. And, in keeping with the conclusion that there is more than one way to be represented legitimately in a democracy, the criteria are plural rather than singular” (2003: 515). As a result, those three types of representation do not fit into the “mandate”/“delegate” vs. “trustee” dichotomy.

Another crucial shift in the theories of representation was initiated by Michael Saward (2006, 2010). He argues that representation is not exclusively a process of choice of representatives by the represented – where representatives remain static – but that it also involves an active process of making “representative claims” (2006: 298) that singles out the representatives who wish to be chosen. Future representatives highlight the need to represent the interests of a group, geographic unit, or some other bounded territory by framing the existence of their special needs that should be represented. The process of making claims is not limited to political life only, as “interest group or NGO figures, local figures, rock stars [and] celebrities” (2006: 306) also take part in the process (Saward 2006 in *Celis et al* 2008: 101–102). Saward’s approach is yet another significant attempt (following Mansbridge 2003) to redefine representation so that it is more congruent with the trends in contemporary democracies and politics, discussed in Urbinati and Warren (2008).

ACCOUNTABILITY

Issues of representation and accountability are closely linked. We briefly present various approaches to electoral accountability and theories that use this term to describe features of various democratic systems.

One of the most comprehensive and widely cited texts on accountability is *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* edited by Adam Przeworski, Susan C. Stokes, and Bernard Manin (1999). This collection includes such key theorists as James D. Fearon and John Ferejohn and provides an overview of many issues crucial to the topic. The first chapter of this book written by the editors provides an informative take on two concepts of representation that highlights the connection between representation and accountability.

Manin et al (1999) discuss two different concepts of representation: mandate and accountability. The mandate model occurs under three conditions: (i) interests of politicians coincide with those of the voters; (ii) politicians want to be elected and reelected and expect that it will happen if they implement policies they promised in the campaign; and (iii) to avoid losing the elections, politicians want their promises to be credible in the future (Manin *et al* 1999: 31–33). This vision is idealistic as it ignores other potential incentives for politicians. This mandate model also brings to the fore one of the crucial problems of representation: the potential incongruence between voters' interests and preferences. Sometimes politicians face a choice between doing what they consider to be in the voters' best interests and the expressed wants of the voters. According to Manin (1997), in current democratic systems, "politicians are not legally compelled to abide by their platform" or are "subject to binding instructions," which means that there is no legal way for the voters to force politicians to fulfill their promises (Manin *et al* 1999: 38). Historically, this is because: representatives were expected to deliberate and consult experts; voters do not always trust their own judgment; and conditions (the facts on the ground) may change. The only way of sanctioning politicians at voters' disposal is the institution of periodic election, in which they can be held accountable.

The accountability model assumes that voters may control elected officials by having them anticipate that they will be held accountable for their past actions. Incumbent politicians are considered accountable when the electorate is able to assess their actions and punish or reward them during the elections according to the results of their activity (Manin *et al* 1999: 40). The following conditions are necessary for this type of representation to occur: voters vote for the incumbent only when the representative acts in the best interests of their constituency, and the incumbent chooses policies necessary to get reelected (40).

The standard view on accountability assumes retrospective voting, according to which the electorate would observe the performance of previously elected political parties and punish them if they do not meet their expectations (Ashworth 2012: 187). According to V.O. Key (1966: 61), citizens assess politicians' activity retrospectively in any case, even during elections: while it seems that the population votes for the future benefits, indeed voters choose on the basis of previous

knowledge of what politicians in question did before; citizens do not vote for political promises made for the future.

Morris Fiorina (1981) wrote about how mechanisms of electoral accountability are incorporated in voting decisions of individual voters. He argues that citizens evaluate and make decisions based on the performance of the politicians' past performance, and estimate prospective actions the politicians will likely make in future. Manin *et al* (1999) note that such theory of accountability only works under the assumption that voters have complete information. Complete information is rare, as it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to accurately judge politicians, and politicians do not know what they need to do to assure their reelection (1999: 42–43). Consequently, in their view, information asymmetry provokes a situation in which accountability does not lead to representation (Manin *et al* 1999: 44). Manin *et al* conclude by stating that rather than voting according to the pure mandate model (use the vote to choose the better candidate) or to the pure accountability model (use to vote to sanction the incumbent) voters try to use their vote for both purposes (1999: 45).

There are various definitions and approaches to accountability itself, and one of the most influential definitions of accountability can be found in Fearon's (1999) chapter, "Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance." Fearon suggests that an agent A is accountable to principal B, if "(i) there is an understanding that A is obliged to act in some way on behalf of B and (ii) B is empowered by some formal institution or perhaps informal rules to sanction or reward A for his/her activities or performance in this capacity" (1999: 55).

Besley (2006) in his "Principled Agents: The Political Economy of Good Government," points out the importance of distinguishing between formal (*de jure*) and real (*de facto*) accountability. According to Ashworth (2012: 184), accountability leads to such relations between politicians and voters that the position of politicians can be influenced through the institution of elections. Besley wrote that the institution of elections determines the rules of representation, but it does not guarantee reelection of the politician that meets the formal requirements of accountability. Instead, reelection depends on the politicians' performance that meets voters' requirements. In weak democracies, where politicians have lower incentives to meet voters' needs

30 J.K. Dubrow, A. Kurowicka, N. Palaguta, and K.M. Słomczyński

or where voters possess very limited information about their representatives, incumbent politicians are less accountable than in stable democracies. Thus, the level of accountability may be a benchmark for democracy assessment (see also Markowski 2006).

A commonly employed theory of accountability is related to the concept of political agency. Besley (2006: 98) argues that electoral accountability arises from a principal-agent relationship between voters and political actors. Elections are meant to solve two major incentive problems: monitoring, which refers to the fact that politicians may act only in their own interests and thus control over them is necessary to reward or punish them accordingly; and there is selection, which focuses on the necessity of choosing the most competent politicians and/or those whose motivations are congruent with those of voters (Besley 2006: 99). Besley (2006) further comments on the aforementioned problem of retrospective voting. In the political agency model “voters are learning from past actions and use Bayes’ rule to update their beliefs”, and that is why the difference between retrospective and prospective voting vanishes (2006: 106).

Ashworth (2012) points out two basic elements of electoral accountability. First, voters decide to keep a politician in power. Second, a politician who tries to meet voters’ expectations and two policy-making periods: in the first one the incumbent is in office, he or she chooses an action, and the voter decides how to vote, followed by the second period in which whoever won chooses an action again, only this time with no election at the end (the game ends at this point) (2012: 184–5). Ashworth (2012: 185) explains that incumbent’s behavior is conditioned by the incentives as they will adjust their behavior in order to be reelected. Consequently, the greater the incentive, such as perks, salary and other benefits, the greater responsiveness to the voters, and when there is no incentive (e.g. term limits, no possibility of reelection), the incumbent will not be responsive. According to the voter’s reelection rule (Ashworth 2012: 185), the incumbent is reelected when performance meets some standard. In most contemporary literature, this “standard [is] determined in equilibrium by the voters’ desire to choose better-performing politicians in the future” which stands in contrast to more traditional approaches, in which all politicians were identical and thus there is no reasonable scope for selection (see also Barro 1973, Ferejohn 1986, Austen-Smith and Banks 1989).

Besley (2006: 103) elaborates further on some modeling issues crucial for various conceptions of accountability: the nature of the uncertainty, the motives for holding office, the nature of accountability, and retrospective voting. In terms of uncertainty, Besley (2006) focuses on the types of politicians and the question whether they themselves know their own types. "A model of uninformed politicians is more in tune with the celebrated Holmstrom (1999) 'career concerns' model in which individuals put in effort which reveals their type to the 'market'. Persson and Tabellini (2000) develop a political agency model along these lines, in which voters and politicians are symmetrically informed" (Besley 2006: 103). Crucially, voters are generally poorly informed about the best policy, and may be uncertain about the exact policy implemented, and the wisdom of a given policy is often unclear for some time (Besley 2006: 104). As for the motives for holding office, Besley enumerates "ego rent," material gain, public goods concerns, as well as possibly a "legacy effect" (Maskin and Tirole 2004). Besley (2006) argues that the agency models work best with individual directly elected politicians: mayors, governors, presidents, where the basis of accountability is clearly defined relative to responsibilities (2006: 105).

According to the view of Barro (1973) and Ferejohn (1986), moral hazard creates a situation under which politicians acting according to their goals may be to some extent constrained by institute of elections and the theoretical expectations of their voters. In this situation incumbent politicians would have to decide on how prudent they should be in terms of rent seeking (Besley 2006: 106–107). Besley and Prat (2006) address adverse selection model under which the voters need to make a choice of an appropriate incumbent politician, who has no influence on their choice. This model does not consider that, under normal circumstances, politicians have the means to manipulate information flow (Besley 2006: 107; theories that combine elements of both models include those of Banks and Sundaram (1993) and Austen-Smith and Banks (1989)).

Others pay attention to the differences in behavior of politicians in terms of policy choice (Besley and Case (1995a); Coate and Morris (1995); Fearon (1999) and Rogoff (1990)). They highlight that some of them intending to perform well and to be reelected on this ground may adopt more sophisticated policies that cannot be adopted by politicians with lower standards of governance, but the latter ones may try

32 J.K. Dubrow, A. Kurowicka, N. Palaguta, and K.M. Słomczyński

to form alliances with the former, so that they would look better in the eyes of electorate (Besley 2006: 107).

Referring to the political agenda model by Persson and Tabellini (2000), Besley explains that it is related to the “career concerns model” of Holmstrom (1999) because neither the electorate nor the representatives do not possess full information on the level of representative performance. Decision making is oriented to the future benefits available after the elections take place (Besley 2006: 107). The career concerns model is also a basis for models created by Ashworth (2005) and Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2006, 2008). Besley highlights that “This kind of approach also gets away from some of the signaling issues as the politicians do not know their own types. For some applications (for example where a type is some kind of competence issue) this may be natural. However, when preferences are part of the type, this is a less plausible assumption” (Besley 2006: 108).

Besley (2006: 108) summarizes his typology of accountability models by stating that the agency models have a positive impact on accountability because the behavior of politicians is regulated by their own incentives to adopt better decisions. The exception to this rule occurs when politicians are discouraged from doing what is in the voters’ best interests because they know they will not be rewarded for it: this is the case when the voters’ interests and preferences are incongruent, e.g. when it comes to long-term policies. Besley explains this further in connection with the moral hazard models of accountability, when he notes that under the condition of information asymmetry, when politicians have more information on their performance, political decisions may be adopted in a way that would please the electorate with little regard to the results of the policy (2006: 136).

Ashworth (2012) offers an alternative yet complementary typology of accountability models. He presents pure moral hazard models, in which the prediction is made by selecting the equilibrium that maximizes voters’ payoff (see also Seabright 1996, Persson et al. 1997, Shi and Svensson 2006, Bueno de Mesquita 2007, Fearon 2011). Those are criticized in Fearon (1999) who “shows that the set of equilibria of the pure moral hazard model is often not robust to allowing candidate heterogeneity” as even a small difference between candidates can change the outcome if it is relevant to the voter (Ashworth 2012: 186).

There are some prominent examples of models with assumptions about candidate heterogeneity as proposed by Fearon. The spatial policy making model (based on Fearon 1999) argues that both the incumbent and the voter have ideal points in policy space. The incumbent chooses an action in this space, but the voter is uncertain about where the incumbent's ideal point is, as it may be close to the voter's or it may be more extreme. The program can be implemented (based on de Janvry *et al* 2010) efficiently or with corruption/graft. The voter wants efficiency but does not know what the incumbent prefers, while the incumbent has all the information. The constituency service (based on Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita 2006) is when the incumbent must allocate effort to constituency service and other activities. The voter observes the quality of service, which depends on many factors, such as oversight, competence, and others. The voter knows that the incumbent wants to spend less time on oversight, but the voter does not know the competence level of the incumbent.

The issue of potentially misaligned incentives is explored by Ashworth (2012) with two examples of models in which this occurs: the multitask model and the pandering model. The multitask model used by Holmstrom and Milgrom (1991), Lohmann (1998), Ashworth (2005), Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2006), and Gehlbach (2007), and Daley and Snowberg (2011) is based on the assumption that the incumbent has multiple tasks in various arenas and the choice of which to focus on depends largely on the incumbent's own preferences. If those preferences align with those of the voters and if electoral incentives were not in play, the incumbent would do exactly what is best for the voter. However, since the incumbent does want to win reelection, they will likely take actions with the highest impact on voter's beliefs about their type. This leads to a distortion between high-impact actions and the optimal actions for the voters' interests (Ashworth 2012: 188–9).

The pandering model derives from the “reputational herding” literature from Scharfstein and Stein (1990) and is adopted for elections by Coate and Morris (1995), Canes-Wrone *et al.* (2001), Maskin and Tirole (2004), and Besley (2006) (Ashworth 2012: 189). It has its roots in the *ex-ante* uncertainty about which policy is best for the voters. It also relies on the imbalance of access to information, as the incumbent tends to have more data on which policy is best but cannot share it. In

this scenario if the voter believes the incumbent to be the good type, the incumbent will still be reelected based on this conviction. However, if the voter is uncertain about the incumbent's type, an unexpected policy choice may cost them the election. As a result, the incumbent has incentives to make the popular decision, but not the best decision; they pander to the voters. This problem might be controlled if there is enough time to resolve this uncertainty, which suggests that the problem is exacerbated close to elections (Ashworth 2012: 189). Indeed, according to Canes-Wrone and Shotts (2004) presidential budgets tend to be closer to the voters' preferences right before an election (quoted in Ashworth 2012: 189). Ashworth (2012: 189) argues that some possible solutions to multitask and pandering problems should be based on weakening the link between the tempting actions and reelection. Those include limiting transparency as proposed by Prat (2005) and Fox and Van Weelden (2012) and term limits Ashworth (2005).

When discussing empirical evidence for the models, Ashworth (2012: 190) presents Healy and Malhotra's (2009) work on two approaches to natural disasters: disaster preparedness and relief spending, finding that relief spending is rewarded electorally. Their conclusion is that voters behave in an irrational way and that situation results in reduction of public welfare as politicians will not invest in preparedness. There are two alternative explanations to the conclusion put forward by Healy and Malhotra. The first is based on the multitask model, according to which relief spending influences voters' beliefs about the candidate type, while levels of damage depend on so many factors that they blur the image of the candidate. If taken in this light, Healy and Malhotra's evidence can be proof of voter rationality in the multitask model (Ashworth 2012: 190). The second alternative conclusion is proposed by Bueno de Mesquita (2007) who claims that relief effort is more visible than prevention, and thus there is less chance of corruption while choosing this action, which increases community welfare (Ashworth 2012: 190–1).

Access to information is one of the most important variables in accountability; the most basic claim is that an increase in information should result in an increase in responsiveness. Incumbent politicians and voters are connected by the flow of information: information changes the perception of voters and voter opinion impacts the behavior of politicians (Ashworth 2012: 191). Another problem is

incumbency advantage. Ashworth (2012: 192) argues that “the selection mechanism implicit in political agency models predicts an incumbency advantage. Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2008) show that, assuming incumbent elections and open seat elections get comparable coverage, this incumbency advantage is larger when media coverage is stronger. And, indeed, Snyder and Stromberg find that the incumbency advantage is larger in more congruent districts.”

One of the roles of challengers in a democratic system is as a source of information on the incumbent’s performance, whether it is in the form of a direct revelation (Ashworth and Shotts 2011) or via an indirect channel, such as in the case when the very fact of entry into the race provides information (Gordon et al. 2007; Ashworth 2012: 193). Incumbents with a challenger should be more responsive to voters, but this claim turns out to be difficult to check, as the incumbent typically runs unopposed only in very specific circumstances, e.g. when he or she is in a very strong position. This has been analyzed in research on retention elections for judges in Kansas by Gordon and Huber (2007), who found that there was a significant incentive for the incumbents to be more punitive; this suggests that increased responsiveness may under certain circumstances lead to rather problematic results (Ashworth 2012: 193). The level of partisanship in a district complicates matters. Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2006) suggested that, in less partisan districts, incumbents would focus on constituency service rather than policy making, a proposition checked empirically by Dropp and Peskowitz 2012; Ashworth 2012: 194).

Simple models of accountability become complicated when multiple agents are involved. Simple models work best with individually chosen politicians who have clearly defined responsibilities. It is more complex in the case of multiple agents which “could be legislators who jointly pass legislation in a legislature or they could be thought of as the acts of a bicameral legislature, with agents located in each chamber” (Besley 2006: 159). This type of situation is described by Persson and al (2000) who discussed the unifying nature of agenda setting powers in a parliamentary system versus a presidential system: “A parliamentary system unifies agenda setting powers while a presidential system diversifies it. The latter tends to reduce rent extraction and tends towards smaller government” (Besley 2006: 164). In addition, term limits can impact responsiveness to voters (Ashworth 2012: 194).

The involvement of third parties – media outlets and the branches of government – also influences accountability. The research on this topic includes Ashworth and Shotts (2010) proposing a model with a media outlet as a third party, Fox and Stephenson (2011) on judicial review, Fox and Van Weelden (2010) on a situation with a veto player who has an incentive to appear competent, and Fox and Jordan (2011) on the possibility of delegation to another bureaucrat (Ashworth 2012: 197–8).

Most studies on parliamentary elections have two major shortcomings. First, they have focused on electoral success by limiting analyses to “winners” and not realizing that “losers” are equally important for the entire electoral process. From a formal point of view “who wins” and “who loses” are inseparable dual problems. Only operating on the full set of candidates for a particular election can one properly assess the determinants of winning and losing. The second shortcoming stems from ignoring the “history” of elections despite the fact that, for voters, the decision for whom to vote is usually based on the assessment of the past performance of candidates’ political parties. In consecutive elections the reappearances of “old” candidates and appearances of new ones on the political party lists are crucial for the winning/losing outcomes as is well documented in the fragmented studies.

A Game Theoretic Approach to Electoral Accountability

We briefly summarize the game-theoretic approach to elections that was an intellectual impetus for our project (see Fearon 1999; Banks and Sunderam 1990, and Ferejohn 1986). Our contribution consists of connecting this approach with characteristics of the parties and electoral systems. The model represents the interaction between politicians and voters as a “principal-agent” relation. Voters are the principals, and they elect their agents, politicians, to implement a policy. Voters are uncertain about the policy chosen by the politicians and about the politicians’ preferences. In short, they are simultaneously confronted with the problem of “moral hazard” and the problem of “adverse selection.” As a result, voters have to perform two tasks in a single stroke: they have to induce politicians to implement a good policy, and they have to sort between good and bad politicians. To accomplish all this, voters have only the right to vote the representatives of the party out of office and to replace them with the challenger. This is the essential problem of electoral control.

The central result of the model is that, in the equilibrium, voters condition their voting decision on policy consequences. This is not just a matter of simple retrospective voting: Voters use their information about policy consequences to update their beliefs about the party representatives. If they conclude that these people are more likely than their challengers to be “good” then they elect them. Otherwise, they opt for the challengers. In short, when voter evaluation of policy consequences is high, voters elect the representatives from that party because good policy consequences indicate that they are likely to be “good” and thus likely to behave well in the future. Conversely, when voter evaluation of policy consequences is low, voters elect the challengers because bad policy consequences indicate that the party representatives are likely to be “bad” and thus behave poorly in the future. By using their past information prospectively, voters induce “bad” incumbents to behave better. In the equilibrium, “bad” incumbents implement policy that is between the “bad” party representative’s ideal point and the voters’ ideal point. In short, by sorting politicians, voters also sanction them. In the model, sanctioning is a byproduct of sorting.

In addition to this central theoretical insight, the model generates two comparative static results. The first result is that the reelection threshold set by the voters depends on the quality of information that voters have about the policy selected by the incumbent. In the equilibrium, the reelection of party representatives threshold is a decreasing function of the variance. The second result is that the reelection threshold depends on voters’ beliefs about the quality of the challengers (non-party representatives). When voters believe that the challengers are likely to be good, they set a higher standard for the party representatives. Conversely, when they are convinced that the challengers are likely to be “bad,” they become more lenient towards the party representatives. In the equilibrium, the election of party representatives threshold is an increasing function of beliefs.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we summarized the main concepts and theories of representation and accountability which are central to electoral control. Since we are primarily concerned with modern democracies, the

38 J.K. Dubrow, A. Kurowicka, N. Palaguta, and K.M. Słomczyński

notions of representation and accountability are theoretically and substantively related.

There are a variety of approaches and perspectives, but all of them deal with the basics of the ballot box: voters choose candidates and parties, parliamentarians represent their constituencies, and everyone pursues their interests through the system of electoral laws in an environment of imperfect information. The hope is that democracy will withstand the pursuit of divergent interests and that good governance will prevail.

Two other key ideas that interact with representation and accountability are democracy and political inequality. Their interrelationship is the subject of Chapter Two.

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