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Empirical Research into Political Representation. A Critical Reappraisal¹

1. Introduction

Political representation is an essential characteristic of modern democracy. There is an extensive literature on the concept of political representation that goes back for ages². Most of this literature is of a normative nature. It is concerned with the proper relationship between representatives and represented.

Only during the last decades the literature has been enriched by empirical research into political representation. This kind of research originated in the United States and found its way from there into comparative research, especially in Western Europe. The most influential model in the comparative research on political representation is the Miller-Stokes model, that was introduced in the 1960's³. This model was the source of inspiration for a major comparative research project that was initiated by Warren E. Miller of the University of Michigan in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Booklength reports were published on studies in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and West Germany⁴. Because not all of these studies are

1 This chapter is a revised and shortened version of a paper presented at the XIVth World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Washington 1988.

2 For an overview of the classic views on political representation, see Hanna Pitkin, *The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1967; A.H. Birch, *Representation*, London: MacMillan 1972.

3 Miller and Stokes reported the main findings of their study in three articles: Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, Constituency Influence in Congress, in: *American Political Science Review* 57, 1963, pp. 45-56; Donald E. Stokes and Warren E. Miller, Party Government and the Saliency of Congress, in: *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26, 1962, pp. 531-546; Warren E. Miller, Majority Rule and the Representative System of Government, in: E. Allardt and Y. Littunen (eds.), *Cleavages, Ideologies and Party Systems*, Helsinki 1964, pp. 343-376. The first two articles were reprinted in Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *Elections and the Political Order*, New York: John Wiley 1966.

4 Samuel H. Barnes, *Representation in Italy: Institutionalized Tradition and Electoral Choice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1977; Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1986; Barbara G. Farah, *Political Representation in West Germany: The Institution and Maintenance of Mass-Elite Linkages*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan 1980; Sören Holmberg, *Riksdagen Representerar Svenska Folket. Empiriska Studier i Repre-*

easily accessible, it is not surprising that an overall review of these different studies has never been undertaken. Only the publication of the "French study" by Converse and Pierce has reopened the debate on the virtues of different models of political representation, especially of the Miller-Stokes model⁵. In this chapter I will present a critical appraisal of the fruitfulness of the Miller-Stokes model in comparative research. In the next section I will introduce the model. In section 3 I will evaluate the normative theory on which the model is based, whereas in section 4 some difficulties with the model in comparative research are presented.

2. The Miller-Stokes model

Miller and Stokes presented their model as a simple but ingenious causal scheme (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Connections between a constituency's attitude and its Representative's roll-call behavior

Source: Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, *Constituency Influence in Congress*, as reprinted in Angus Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order* (fn. 3), p. 361.

sentativ Demokrati, Lund: Studentlitteratur 1974; Jacques J. Thomassen, *Kiezers en Gekozenen in een Representatieve Democratie*, Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom 1976.

⁵ See the special issue of *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 12, 1987, pp. 169-241.

It is an ingenuous scheme because the two ideal types of which the empirical validity as a device of political representation can be studied using this paradigm are the two sides of the mandate-independence controversy. The lower path of the model (ACD) presents the deputy who is willing to behave according to his district's will. This role conception is only an effective instrument to enact the will of the district when his perception at least is correlated with the actual will (AC). A pure Burkean role conception of deputies, who think that the will of their constituents should not be decisive for their behavior, can by definition not be an instrument to implement the people's will. However, this does not necessarily mean that such a deputy does not in reality express the will of his constituents. It only means that the role conception in this respect is irrelevant because whether the deputy concerned will vote according to his district's will or not depends on the correlation between his own opinion and the district's will (AB).

However, the explanation of such a correlation lies outside the mandate model, because in these circumstances the deputy is a representative *malgré lui*⁶. Miller and Stokes report that the results of their analysis are different for different policy domains. In the domain of foreign policy there was hardly a correlation between the roll-call behavior of the deputies and their district's will. In the case of social welfare and civil rights, there was a substantial correlation between voters' opinions and the roll-call behavior of their representatives. However, the explanation in these two cases was different. In the case of social welfare influence ran via the upperpath of the model, whereas in the case of civil rights the lower path was involved. Miller and Stokes conclude that it would be wrong to choose for just one model of representation. The strength of the different models depends on the kind of issue. In the case of foreign policy members of the House have hardly enough information to make a sound judgment, let alone that their constituency might judge them on their record on these issues. The situation with respect to the civil rights issue was completely different. Representatives from the southern states in particular could not afford to take a "wrong" stand on this issue on pain of an electoral defeat⁷.

Therefore, in the American context the Miller-Stokes design seems to be a fruitful model. However, there are several reasons to question its fruitfulness in a West-European context in advance. In the next section it will be argued that the normative theory of representation on which the Miller-Stokes model is based, is hardly a viable theory of democracy. In section 4 it will be seen to what extent the Miller-Stokes model is fruitful as an empiried model of political representation.

6 Converse and Pierce, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 504.

7 Miller and Stokes, *Constituency Influence* (fn. 3), p. 55.

3. The mandate-independence controversy: spellbound by Edmund Burke

The objective of most empirical research into the process of political representation is to test the viability of normative theory rather than to find the best explanation of actual behavior. The Miller-Stokes model is no exception to this rule. Converse and Pierce observe that it is "an extremely clever and useful diagnostic tool. It not only has the potential to detect the most famous ideal types of representation, should they ever occur in pure form in nature, but it has the capacity to indicate, on a finely graded scale, the relative degree to which one or another ideal type may be present in a situation."⁸

These most famous ideal types of representation are the two sides of the mandate-independence controversy: should a deputy act according to the will of his constituency or according to his own mature judgment. The intellectual source of this controversy is Edmund Burke's famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774, and in particular this quote: "Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole - where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole."

I'm not sure where Burke's thoughts began to dominate political representation research, but I suppose it was in 1959 when Eulau and his associates published "The role of the representative: some empirical observations on the theory of Edmund Burke."⁹ Much more than Burke himself Eulau c.s. made a distinction between two variables: the focus and the style of political representation. These two perspectives can be presented in a simple two-fold table (see table 1).

The table does not exhaust all possibilities mentioned by Eulau et al. There is a third role conception with regard to the style of representation (politico) and the focus of representation can logically refer to an almost infinite number of entities. But this twofold table is sufficient as a frame of reference to illustrate Burke's conception of political representation and its persistent influence on discussions about political representation.

The focus of representation refers to the interest the representative must defend, local interests of his constituency or those of the one nation. Burke's position is clear: he chooses for the national interest. The style of representation refers to the question whether the representative should act as an agent who takes instructions from his constituents rather than act according to his own "mature judgement". Burke chooses for the latter role conception. Therefore, Burke's position is repre-

⁸ Converse and Pierce, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 506.

⁹ Reprinted in Heinz Eulau, John Wahlke et al., *The Politics of Representation, Continuities in Theory and Research*, London: Sage 1978, pp. 111-126.

sented by entry D of the table¹⁰. The conception he opposes is in entry A: the role conception of a deputy who defends the interests of his district according to the instructions from his constituency. The two logically remaining possibilities are those of the deputy who defends the interests of his constituency without following the instructions from his constituents (B) and the deputy who defends the general interest but according to the views on this of his constituents (C). This last role conception is assumed in the lower path of the Miller-Stokes paradigm.

Table 1: Style and focus of the representative's role

		style	
		delegate	trustee
focus	district	A	B
	nation	C	D

However, the history of the instructed delegate model might lead to the conclusion that it was becoming obsolete even in Burke's days. The idea of an instructed delegate, taking his instructions from his district comes from another time with different ideas about the role of the state. Political theories are more often than not formulated after a certain political practice. This is no different in the case of political representation. Modern parliaments descend from a practice of representation which has little to do with modern mass democracy. The institutions that preceded modern parliaments and the first stage in the history of representative government began in several European kingdoms in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when representatives of important classes or communities within society were invited to give consent to measures by the king, particularly measures of taxation. These institutions emerged in feudal societies where rights, powers and privileges depended on the ownership of land¹¹. Therefore they are an heritage of feudalism, in which the power of the king was ultimately limited and very much dependent upon the consent and the financial support of his vassals who were reigning in their

10 Of course, one should avoid to trap into the fall of too rigidly separated categories. Even though Burke's preference was clear, he felt at the same time that "it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents".

11 See Birch, *Representation* (fn. 2), p. 29.

own estates. These early representative bodies were formed by the representatives of the different regions (however defined) of the country. They were present less to deliberate on national policy than to defend the local interests vis á vis the king. They were representatives just as a diplomat is a representative of his country¹². It is also clear that the first task of a diplomat is to defend the interests of his country. An important function of parliament was also the possibility and the duty of the members to present the grievances of their constituents in parliament. As such parliament was a part of the judicial system. No principal change in the theory of representation was needed as long as a political representative could be viewed as an agent, sent to the national parliament by classes or communities within society to give or withhold their consent to measures of taxation or legislation proposed by the executive¹³. However, the development of the relationship between king and parliament made this theory of representation little by little obsolete. The more parliament succeeded in conquering the sovereignty of parliament above the king, the less parliament became the body of agents of district interests opposite the king. The more parliament became the center of power, the more responsible it became for the national interest and the less welcome purely geographical interests became. In Britain the Tory attitude in the eighteenth century "was the traditional one that the function of MP's was to represent local interests and to seek redress for particular grievances, it being assumed that the king and his ministers had the main responsibility for interpreting the national interest. In contrast, Whig spokesmen insisted that parliament was a deliberative body, representing the whole nation, whose decisions should be more than a mere aggregate of sectional demands."¹⁴

Therefore, Edmund Burke was following in a long tradition when he made his famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774. His conception was nothing less than the logical requirement of a modern nation state. It was also the dominant thought during the French Revolution and found its way to the constitutions of continental Europe during the 19th century. The objections against the instructed delegate model, therefore, can hardly be seen as an infringement of modern democracy. It is more fair to say that these prepared the road for it. The idea of representing geographically defined collectivities to the throne had to yield to a modern conception of popular rule where general individual enfranchisement enabled individual citizens to participate in the rule of the nation.

And yet, it would be a surprising thought to consider Edmund Burke as the father of modern democracy. Of course, he was not. But his conception of parliamentary government was no incident, but a necessary stage in the development of parliamentary democracy.

What is the relevance of this argument for the different possibilities is table 1. The role conception of an instructed delegate can be formed in the first column of the table. This column gives us the option between two different problems. The

12 Ibid., pp. 24-28.

13 Ibid., p. 37.

14 Ibid., p. 38.

first is the role conception of the deputy who defends the interests of his constituency and at the same time follows the will of his constituents doing this. This is the role conception that Burke explicitly rejected and has been rejected ever since, partly because the style of this role conception is rejected: according to Burke and so many after him a parliament cannot fulfil its proper function when the hands of its members are bound by instructions from their constituents. A second, and perhaps even more important reason to reject this combination of roles is that it betrays a conception of representative government that is completely obsolete. Representation of sectional interests will no longer do since the representative's role is no longer primarily to defend the interests of his local district with central government, but to participate in the national policy making and legislative process. Doing this he ought to be guided, not by "local prejudices" but by the "general good". But once one accepts the argument that representatives should serve the general interest of the nation instead of the interest of their constituents, how can one at the same time persist in a delegate role with respect to one's own constituency? This role conception means that one is willing to serve the general interest, but is guided by the vision on this of one's own constituency. For Burke this was undoubtedly a strange position. Living in the age of the enlightenment he believed in a parliament as "a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole - where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole". In his view parliamentary debate was an essential stage in parliamentary decision making among representatives who were free to act according to their "own mature judgment".

Farah, in her attempt to apply the Miller-Stokes model to the West-German political system, argues that a Burkean role conception can hardly be considered democratic, whereas the role conception of an instructed delegate would portray the real democrat¹⁵.

Two observations might be made with respect to this view on representative democracy. First, it betrays a populist view on representative democracy, which it has in common with most of the empirical literature on political representation¹⁶. According to this view a representative democracy is only "a sorry substitute for the real thing"¹⁷, whereas the "real thing" is a direct democracy. Therefore, the ideal of a representative democracy is the identity between the will of the people

15 See Farah, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 251.

16 Luttbeg for instance refers to models of linkage as "any means by which political leaders act in accordance with the wants, needs and demands of the public in making government policy". This definition is based on the view that in a representative democracy "the policies passed by government must reflect both the preferences of the governed and, most desirably, the public's interest". See Norman R. Luttbeg, Political linkage in a large society, in: Norman R. Luttbeg (ed.), *Public Opinion and Public Policy, Models of Political Linkage*, third edition, Itasca: F.E. Peacock Publishers 1978, pp. 1-3.

17 Robert A. Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy, Autonomy vs. Control*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, p.13.

and government policy. Ideally, parliament should take the decisions that the people itself would have taken, had it been able to decide itself.

However, this view on a representative democracy is not the only one possible. In the liberal theory of democracy there is a division of labor between voters and their representatives, which yields a less rigid view on the relationship between the opinions of the voters and the behavior of their representatives¹⁸.

But second, even if one does accept a populist theory of democracy, the instructed delegate model is not the most logical alternative. The radical Rousseauistic view on democracy that was dominant during a short period of the French revolution was extremely hostile to the possible influence of regional interests in the national assembly. In this view the general interest and the will of the people are indivisible, and can most certainly not be considered as the resultant of different interests. Therefore, the new constitutions on the European continent demanded of members of parliament to represent the general interest and forbade them to take instructions from anybody. Originally not only regional interests were considered inimical to democracy but also political parties. However, the introduction of universal suffrage changed the situation completely. The extension of the suffrage forced members of parliament to compete for electoral votes. To do so effectively a certain organization was needed. This organization could be provided by political parties. It has been argued time and again that political parties are the only modern possibility to give any real meaning to the traditional concept of popular government. I don't know any modern theory of representative democracy that considers the instructed delegate model as such a possibility.

Therefore, any modern translation of populist democracy, certainly in the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe, will have to take the prominent position of political parties into account. For the same reason one might question the viability of the normative theories on which the main elements of the Miller-Stokes model are based.

In the next section it will be seen to what extent the model is fruitful as an empirical model of political representation in comparative research.

18 See William H. Riker, *Liberalism versus Populism, A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*, San Francisco: W.H. Freeman 1982; Peter Graf Kielmansegg, *Das Experiment der Freiheit. Zur gegenwärtigen Lage des demokratischen Verfassungsstaates*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta 1988; Dietrich Herzog, Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Repräsentation?, in: Dietrich Herzog/Bernhard Wessels (eds.), *Konfliktpotentiale und Konsensstrategien. Beiträge zur politischen Soziologie der Bundesrepublik*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag 1989, pp. 307-337.

4. The Miller-Stokes model in comparative research

The Miller-Stokes model has been the source of inspiration for a number of studies in different countries. However, even though there was a close cooperation between local scholars and representatives from the University of Michigan in the study design, these studies were never set up as a comparative study in the sense that a group of people has been working together from the initial stage of the study design up to a common or at least a more or less similar publication. Therefore, even though a number of these studies were done by scholars from the University of Michigan (Italy by Barnes, West Germany by Farah, France by Converse and Pierce) they are not similar at all. Only in the case of France and West Germany the full Miller-Stokes design was implemented. In the other countries for more or less similar reasons it was not.

Barnes in his study on representation in Italy decided against a precise replication of the Miller-Stokes design, mainly for two reasons. First, because of the electoral system of proportional representation and second because of the strong role of political parties¹⁹. In addition to this it hardly made sense to study roll-call votes as a dependent variable. First of all because on most votes almost all deputies accept party discipline, but, even more important, because roll-call voting is secret when a substantial minority requests it. As a consequence most of the important and controversial votes are secret. Members sometimes vote against their parties on these ballots, but individual deviations cannot be documented²⁰. Italian members of parliament are elected in multi-member districts. However, Barnes found that constituency explained very little of the variation in representatives' opinions once political party was taken into account. Party differences rather than constituency differences could explain the impressively strong relationship between the opinions of elites and masses²¹. Therefore, one can conclude that implementation of the Miller-Stokes model in the Italian context was neither feasible nor fruitful. For more or less similar reasons the Miller-Stokes model was never applied in the Dutch and Swedish studies. In the Netherlands use of the model was out of the question because of the electoral system of proportional representation which uses the whole country as one single constituency. Members of parliament are elected according to a list system and have no special relationship with a particular district²². In Sweden, it was decided in advance that the Miller-Stokes model was hardly applicable because of the overwhelming influence of party compared to constituency²³.

In the two remaining countries, France and West Germany, the full Miller-Stokes model was applied by Converse and Pierce and Farah respectively. In the

19 Barnes, *Representation in Italy* (fn. 4), p. 16.

20 Ibid., p. 118.

21 Ibid., p. 123.

22 See Thomassen, *Kiezers* (fn. 4).

23 Holmberg, *Riksdagen* (fn. 4); see also Holmberg in this volume.

remaining part of this chapter I will evaluate the feasibility of the Miller-Stokes model in a West-European context on the basis of these two studies. Not because there would be less reasons for a critical appraisal of the other studies, but because I will restrict myself in this chapter to an evaluation of the Miller-Stokes model.

It will be argued that there are three major reasons to be ambivalent about the fruitfulness of the model: the overwhelming dominance of party discipline in most European political systems, the heterogeneity of geographically defined districts in any modern state and the results of research into role conceptions of members of parliament.

4.1. *The problem of party discipline*

The dependent variable in the Miller-Stokes model is the roll-call vote of the individual deputy. A first requirement for the fruitfulness of the model is that there is something to be explained, that is to say that there is a certain amount of variance in the dependent variable that can be measured. In the parliamentary democracies of Western Europe, contrary to the United States, this requirement can hardly be met. As Converse and Pierce correctly observe "... substantial party discipline in voting is a standard feature of most of the world's legislative bodies, and therefore the U.S. Congress, with its relatively weak party discipline, is more to be remarked upon than the French situation"²⁴. Because of the strength of party discipline the measurement of individual roll-call behavior was very difficult if not impossible, both in France and Germany.

In France in the time period of the study, between the beginning of the Third Legislature in May 1967 and the termination of the Fourth Legislature in December 1972, in more than 96% of all roll-call votes, there was no substantive defection in the roll-call vote from the party position²⁵. This means of course that in all those cases knowledge of a deputy's district does not add anything to the explanation of his roll-call behavior once we have established his party group membership. Therefore, it seems to be a legitimate conclusion that direct constituency influence only has a marginal impact above the influence of political parties. This, of course, does not mean that deputies are persistently deviating from their district's opinion. As far as a deputy votes according to his party line, and the majority of the district agrees with that line, he acts according to the will of at least the majority of the district without any deliberate act. However, if such a mechanism would exist, it only confirms the general point to be made, that in cases of general policy, it is ideology and political parties that count first and districts only second.

²⁴ Converse and Pierce, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 552.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 552-554.

In Germany it was even more difficult to use individual roll-call votes as a dependent variable. Farah observes that in Germany "there are three kinds of roll-call votes: the secret ballot, used only in cases of elections of parliamentary officials; the show-of-hands ballot, the most common form of voting; and namentliche Abstimmungen, the only vote which has the deputy's name affixed to it. For the purposes of testing the Miller-Stokes model of representation the latter voting form is the only one that is directly applicable because they are the only votes that can be linked to the district."²⁶

However, during the sixth session of the Bundestag, the period of her study, no namentliche Abstimmungen were recorded. This made it impossible to distinguish the actions of the individual party elites from that of their party. Therefore, Farah, draws the obvious conclusion: "At this stage district-level of representation loses its meaning."²⁷ However for the same reason, it is a mystery to me why she proceeds as she does. To solve the problem that individual roll-call votes were not registered she decided to construct a surrogate measure for the roll-call vote. Because most issues are party specific, she decided to treat the roll-call voting of the elites as party specific. That is, all CDU members were assigned a score of "0", and the SPD members a score of "1". The FDP elites were given a score midway between the two other parties, a ".5"²⁸. Because of this procedure individual deviations from the party's position are by definition impossible. In the case of the French study in about 4% of all votes there was at least a theoretical possibility of a districts' influence over and above the parties' positions. In the German case even this marginal influence is by definition impossible. Therefore, as far as a constituency influence can be measured, this is nothing more than the correlation between district's sentiments and the positions taken in parliament by the party whose candidate was chosen in a particular district. Therefore, I don't see what a positive correlation would say more than that CDU-oriented districts tend to agree more with CDU-policy than SPD-oriented districts. This is not to say that such correlations tend to be high by definition. Quite the contrary, both the French and the German study prove that this is not the case at all. In the German case there is no trace of such a correlation. Farah therefore concludes that "the mandate version of representation does not seem to be operative in Germany."²⁹ At the same time she is puzzled by the findings that emerge with respect to the responsible party model. "On the one hand party voting dominates the legislative process while on the other hand there is nothing in our initial findings to suggest that the German parties act in an accountable or responsible way vis-à-vis the district. The concept of the responsible party system, after all, assumes that there is at least some basic level of congruence between voter attitude and deputy behavior. Our results indicate that there is essentially no relationship between these two terms."³⁰

26 Farah, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 148.

27 Ibid., p. 218.

28 Ibid., pp. 148-152.

29 Ibid., p. 182.

30 Ibid., p. 185.

A similar comment is made by Converse and Pierce. Also in the French case districts' positions on specific issues hardly have any predictive meaning for roll-call behavior. In their final conclusions they argue that a high level of party discipline is consistent with the responsible party model. However, they continue by arguing that it is very doubtful that a system with such a high discipline in which party representatives are accountable to their voters would show such weak traces of district influences. However, I'm not sure this is a logical conclusion.

Farah finally finds that as far as there is any congruence between districts' sentiments and roll-call behavior it is between partisan supporters and the roll-call behavior of their party. She then concludes that this congruence is primarily caused by the fact that citizens are inclined to identify with a party label and by their votes exert some control over the actions of the political parties. And she rightly concludes that in this instance the representational relationship is not linked to a particular geographical area but is defined in terms of a national constituency³¹.

This is precisely the point. Once one takes the high level of party discipline as given, a completely different kind of model, the responsible party model in which not trusteeship but rather a delegate role with respect to party is an essential characteristic seems to be more indicated. This is not to say that the responsible party model is a valid model of political representation. This is still to be seen, but at least in the context of the West-European parliamentary democracies with their high degree of party discipline it has more a priori validity than any model that is based on the relationship between an individual deputy and his district.

4.2. *The problem of district heterogeneity*

The fruitfulness of an approach of political representation in which the representation of geographical districts is essential has been contested on several grounds. The most important doubt is that "it is not very plausible to suggest that they are likely to have common views about such matters of opinion as censorship, capital punishment or the merits of the divorce laws"³². Electoral districts tend to be "so diverse in the kinds of values and beliefs held, that whatever measures of central tendency are used to classify a district are more likely to conceal than to reveal its real character"³³. Of course, it is not a matter of principle but rather of empirical research to what extent this is the case. The civil rights issue in the Miller-Stokes study is a clear example of a case where regional differences of opinion exist and are translated in the roll-call behavior of representatives in the US Congress. However, such differences are exception rather than rule in modern states.

31 Ibid., p. 212.

32 Birch, *Representation* (fn. 2), p. 89.

33 Eulau and Wahlke, *Politics and Representation* (fn. 9), pp. 115-116.

The problem of heterogeneous districts is consequential to both paths in the Miller-Stokes model.

Constituency influence via the upper path of the model not only assumes an independent position of the deputy, but also that the constituency elects a deputy whose opinions are representative for the district's views.

A normative basis for this part of the model can be found in the so-called "descriptive" theory of political representation. This is the most simple theory of political representation one can think of. The legislature is ideally seen as a microcosm of the nation. In the words of John Adams a representative legislature "should be an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should think, feel, reason and act like them"³⁴. It can be seen as the next best thing to direct democracy and therefore as a radical democratic ideology: a "representative sample" will act like all of the people would have done. It is not illogical that most arguments for electoral systems of proportional representation are based on this theory. What better instrument could there be to ensure a microcosm of the voters in the legislature? As a model of political representation the empirical theory is just as simple. By following their own opinion a microcosm of the nation will "act in accordance with the wants, needs and demands of the public in making government policy".

If the legislature is supposed to be a microcosm of all the voters, then what counts is the whole legislature compared to the whole electorate. In other words, it is the distribution of characteristics that counts and not the characteristics of one representative with respect to a particular group of voters, being his constituency or anything else. Of this approach Pitkin observes: "It would be rather awkward to think of a single, isolated representative as a picture or map or even sample of his constituency, although he might be said to "mirror" or "reflect" it"³⁵. And yet, this is in principle the approach of the Miller-Stokes model. The upper path ensures an impact of the constituents of the representative's district on his legislative record under two conditions. First, his opinion must reflect that of his constituents. Second, he must vote according to his own opinion. The problem with this approach is that the deputy is supposed to reflect the opinions of his whole constituency. One might wonder, if this is not an impossible task to perform, given the pluriformity of almost every single district.

Converse and Pierce explicitly refer to this problem. They characterize perfect homogeneity as a pole where representation is inevitable and the case of perfect heterogeneity as a pole where representation is impossible. They think it indisputable that the difficulty of achieving representation is a potent, monotonically increasing function of district heterogeneity³⁶. This raises the question who within the district should be represented. According to Converse and Pierce "the classical

34 Pitkin, *Concept* (fn. 2), p. 60.

35 Ibid., p. 75.

36 Converse and Pierce, *Representation* (fn. 4), pp. 513-514.

answer is, of course, the totality of the district population"³⁷. But then there is the logical problem in the case of a heterogeneous district. They complain "such logical difficulties have not pained democratic theorists very much and rightly so, for representation of the totality of a district is commonly taken to mean representation of the majority of the district when heterogeneity is encountered". I'm not completely convinced this is the only possible answer. A possibly better answer to the same question is to be found on page 616 of the book where the same fact that "the literature on representation is very evasive, and perhaps even schizophrenic, on this question" is explained by the correct observation that "in most such treatments, it has been assumed that the deputy represents the district as a whole, an assumption helped along by a simplistic view of districts as consisting somehow of 'single' interests, such as the 'mercantile' interest". This, I think is precisely the point. Classical theory was not hindered by this problem because it was concerned either with local interests or with matters of general policy where the existence of different factions with respect to the general good was distasteful. However, once one accepts that the major content of a modern conception of political representation refers to matters of general policy it is obvious that representation of a heterogeneous district by a single representative becomes close to impossible. In these circumstances it is hard to see what the meaning of the district sentiment might be unless in a very mathematical way: some measure of central tendency can always be calculated.

If one chooses for the majority of the constituents one leaves the idea that districts as such have to convey a certain message which is not simply similar to its political majority and therefore discernible from the message of a district at the other end of the country with a similar political majority. In that case I can no longer think of a very important reason why political parties were not chosen as the point of reference in the first place.

Converse and Pierce show that French deputies are well aware of the heterogeneity of their districts³⁸. However, in the model this perception is to be represented again by a single numerical value and therefore is subject to the same problems all over again.

4.3. *Role conceptions of members of parliament*

A third reason to be somewhat sceptical about the fruitfulness of the Miller-Stokes model is the available empirical evidence with respect to role conceptions of members of parliament. The lower path of the Miller-Stokes model assumes an influence of the constituency on the deputy's roll-call behavior by way of his perception

³⁷ Ibid., p. 526.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 645.

of the district's will. Two conditions have to be met for this part of the model to work. First, the deputy must behave in accordance with his perception of the district's will and second, this perception must be correct. If both conditions are met at least the data are consistent with an instructed delegate model. However, the explanation of the correspondence between a deputy's behavior and his district's sentiment is by way of his role conception, the conception of an instructed delegate. If such a role conception is not present, it is hard to see how this explanation can be maintained.

The significance of empirical research of role conceptions in this connection has been the subject of a long debate. According to Eulau and Wahlke measurements of role conceptions were never meant to predict legislative behavior³⁹. But I must confess it is beyond my understanding how the role conception of an instructed delegate can explain the lower path in the Miller-Stokes model either when this role conception is absent or when it makes no difference as far as legislative behavior is concerned. The conclusion in all empirical research of role conceptions that I know is unambiguous. Members of parliament who consider themselves as instructed delegates of their constituents or voters are a small minority. The verdict of Converse and Pierce after having compared data from France, the United States and the Netherlands is perfectly clear: "The only thing the three legislatures have in common is that their members appear to give rather short shrift in their legislative decision-making to the majority opinion of voters in their districts."⁴⁰ In Germany only 3% of the members of the Bundestag regarded themselves as instructed delegates⁴¹. Certainly in the European countries these results are not surprising. In most continental European countries a Burkean role conception is demanded by the constitution. But the essential message is that the available empirical evidence does not support the hypothesis that role conceptions belong to the "means by which political leaders act in accordance with the wants, needs and demands of the public in making government policy."⁴²

5. Conclusion

The objective of the Miller-Stokes model is to assess the extent to which the roll-call behavior of individual members of parliament is influenced by the opinions within their home districts. In addition it is designed to explain how such an influence is effected.

39 Eulau and Wahlke, *Politics and Representation* (fn. 2), p. 17.

40 Converse and Pierce, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 675.

41 See Farah, *Representation* (fn. 4), p. 238.

42 Luttbeg, *Public Opinion* (fn. 16), p. 3.

In a West-European context the explanatory power of the model appears to be limited. However, this is not a sufficient reason to argue that it is not a fruitful approach to study the process of political representation. The explicit objective of the model is to assess to what extent political reality is consistent with the normative theory of political representation. If it is not, the explanation might be that the process of political representation is less democratic than it should be. Both Farah and Converse and Pierce are tempted to draw that conclusion. However, such a conclusion is only justified if the normative theory of political representation on which the model is based, is beyond dispute. I have argued that it is not. The instructed delegate model in particular can hardly be regarded as a viable theory of representative democracy in the context of the parliamentary democracies in Western Europe. In the United States the mandate-independence controversy is not irrelevant. In a presidential system the president has his own electoral mandate. It is not vitally important that he is supported by a majority in parliament. Therefore, party discipline can be lenient and individual members of Congress can be sensitive to the feelings of their home district.

However, in a parliamentary system the executive has no other basis than its majority in parliament. This makes party discipline essential for the survival of the government. In this situation political parties and not individual members of parliament are the key actors in the system of political representation. Therefore, models of political representation like the responsible party model that take the key position of political parties into account have a higher *prima facie* validity than any model that is based on the relationship between an individual member of parliament and his constituency. However, this does not imply, as I will report elsewhere, that such models are without problems. A viable normative theory of democracy that can be translated into a model that is consistent with political reality has still to be found.