

## From Theory to Practice: Political Representation in France

International Workshop “Changing Modes of Parliamentary Representation”  
IPSA – RC08 – Legislative Specialists

*First draft – Please do not quote*

### Introduction

France is characterized by a low level of civic involvement largely because of the inner weakness of its system of interest intermediation. Neither voluntary associations nor pressure groups nor political parties play an important role as points of access to the political system (Gabriel/Kerrouche/Keil 2011). Party-related and social participation have remained low in France, particularly in comparison with the countries in the neighborhood (Bréchon 2006: 65-78; Schain 2008). Such a configuration may explain why the topic of a crisis of representative democracy is especially acute in France (Rosanvallon 2002). One of the facets of this crisis lies in the divorce between citizens and elected representatives which is illustrated by the fact that only about one third of the French population trusts the deputy of their constituency and even fewer do so regarding MPs in general (28.3 %) <sup>1</sup>. One can also underline other symptoms of a crisis of representative democracy in France: in addition to the growing lack of confidence of citizens in politicians, French MPs are often criticized for their inability to mirror the population in terms of age, gender, level of education, occupation, and ethnic background (Costa/Kerrouche 2007).

That being said, understanding representation in France implies to underscore the very important constraints that apply to parliamentary representation under the Fifth Republic.

A first set of restrictions is linked to the features of the political system itself, since the constitution of 1958 was deliberately designed to weaken the parliament. One of its

---

<sup>1</sup> Other studies have shown that it is indeed possible to deeply mistrust politicians as a class and to have confidence in particular representatives or the institutional structures (Norris 1999: 12; Bréchon 2004: 50-51).

main objectives was to fight against the governmental instability that characterized the Third and Fourth Republics and the 'partitocracy'. The Constitution has thus limited the legislative and control powers of the parliament and provided a strong rationalization of the French parliamentary regime: concretely, the government was given many tools in order to be able to overcome parliamentary obstruction or fragmentation. The domination of the executive branch and the bipolarization have been reinforced by the direct election of the President (starting in 1962), making him the major actor of French political life. Each citizen was called to define himself as a left-wing or right-wing elector, since the second round of Presidential election usually confront the two main left-wing and right-wing leaders (with the exception of 2002, when the conservative President Jacques Chirac was opposed to the extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen). Since 2002, legislative elections are organized immediately after each Presidential election; citizens are thus encouraged to confirm their first vote by giving to the new President a clear-cut majority at the National Assembly. Accordingly, the current situation of French MPs is thus paradoxical. On the one hand, the parliament they belong to is considered – by both politicians and scholars – as a weak institution that should be reinforced (Chandernagor 1967 ; Birnbaum/Hamon/Troper 1978 ; Masclet 1979 ; Belorgey 1991). But, on the other hand, despite this weakness and the new constraints derived from the European integration and the devolution process, the National Assembly remains the main arena of political debate in France. Hence, despite a real crisis of confidence in representative democracy, legislative elections still mobilize citizens: they create a strong political competition and a high level of participation. Let's also add that, even if there is an extensive reflection over concepts such as direct and participative democracy and civil dialogue since the beginning of the 2000s, the centrality of the Parliament in the French political system is not challenged.

However, French MPs prove to be very active in their respective constituency, where they are considered as key-actors and powerful political entrepreneurs. This strange situation derives from a whole range of factors. The first one is the relative weakness of the National Assembly, which does not motivate MPs to participate in parliamentary work. The second factor is the *cumul des mandats*. Despite two laws, that have limited the possibilities for an MP to accumulate elected positions, more than 90% of French deputies are doing so, at local or regional levels. Holding several mandates, in most cases inside their constituency

or at a scale including it, allow MPs to secure their political career. Finally, the electoral rules and the very high number of constituencies (577) - and thus their limited average size – encourage and allow MPs to develop a whole range of networks on the ground with various categories of actors: local political leaders, citizens, civil society representatives, socio-economic actors, media people... Concretely, local investment of MPs' appears to be very important and to contradict the principle of National Sovereignty.

Such situation put into questions the concept of political representation that is among the most important topics in the analysis of modern democracy. Most scholars in the study of political representation refer to the differentiation made by Pitkin (1967): defining representation in a *formalistic way*, it can either be conceived as authorization, "the giving of authority to act" (Pitkin 1967: 11), or as accountability that is "the holding to account of the representative for his actions" (Pitkin 1967: 11). Beyond these meanings, representation can also be seen as a *standing for*. In this case Pitkin distinguishes descriptive and symbolic representation. The former describes representation as "the making present of something absent by resemblance or reflection, as in a mirror or in art" (Pitkin 1967: 11). Approaches that conceptualize representation as descriptive representation argue that representing "depends on the representative's characteristics, on what he *is* or is *like*, on being something rather than doing something" (Pitkin 1967: 61). Symbolic representation, however, requires "no resemblance or reflection [...] and the connection to what is represented is of a different kind" (Pitkin 1967: 11). Finally, representation can also be conceived as *acting for*. In this case the focus lies on the "substance of the activity itself" (Pitkin 1967: 11). That is why scholars of political science also use the term "substantive representation" (Campbell et al. 2009: 172).<sup>2</sup>

A further classification – that focuses more on the behavior of deputies – distinguishes between representatives as trustees and as delegates. Following the mandate view the representative is considered to be a "delegate" who acts on explicit instructions from his constituency (Converse/Pierce 1986: 493). According to the independence view, representatives are seen to be "trustees" who follow their own opinion (Burke). The mandate-independence controversy can be considered as the central classical debate in the literature

---

<sup>2</sup> Pitkin (1967) asserts that the state of representation theory is confused. But she states that this is rather a reason for abandoning the concept than to "specify all the varieties of its applications to various contexts" (Pitkin 1976: 8).

on political representation. Pitkin (1967/ 145) summarizes the debate as follows: "Should (must) a representative do what his constituents want, and be bound by mandates or instructions from them; or should (must) he be free to act as seems best to him in pursuit of their welfare?".

In the case of France, the combination of the legacy of Rousseau's theory of the general will, the Jacobins' view on the unity of the Nation's territory and representative body lead to emphasize a consistent set of thoughts and claims about the independence of the legislative power from any other estate. French institutions, political culture and history are favouring a very abstract conception of representation. MPs are supposed to embody collectively the French Nation: from a constitutional and legal point of view, they are not allowed to mention their constituency or to plead for local interest. French National representatives are called to decide collectively, by following their own will and ideas, without taking into account the public opinion trends or specific situations within constituencies. French MPs are trustees, and not delegate, that enjoy a very wide autonomy of behaviour, speech and vote. They are called to give a priority to their own conception of general interest or, to certain extent, to the programme of their political party, and not to echo citizens' wills and demands. This tradition is also calling for direct contacts between MPs and citizens through the banning of any kind of intermediate organization, such as lobbies, corporations or even political parties. The French Constitution has thus always forbidden a delegate practice of elected official positions<sup>3</sup>; the article 23 of the National Assembly's internal rules also prohibits the creation of groups of MPs based on private, local or professional interests, that implies a binding mandate. Parliamentary representation is also paradoxical from the point of view of principles, since there is a very important gap between theory and behaviour.

Since those distinctions are rather theoretical, the goal of this paper is to empirically compare the relationships between French citizens and their representatives (as well as the role they give to interest groups) within representation processes by studying citizens' and MPs' views on that topic. Such a survey is possible because of the data we gathered.

---

<sup>3</sup> "No Member shall be elected with any binding mandate", article 27 of the French constitution.

## Data

The data we use in our paper was gathered through two surveys that were conducted within two complementary projects. On the one hand, in the research project LEGIPAR, 230 deputies of the French Parliament answered in face-to-face interviews a detailed quantitative questionnaire based on the representations, perceptions and values of the deputies (between September 2009 and February 2011).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand a citizen mass survey regarding French citizens' view on political representation was run for a French-German research project on representation (Citizens and Representatives in France and Germany - CITREP)<sup>5</sup>.

Two types of data will be used in this paper. More precisely, data about the issue under study were collected according to two complementary approaches: observational and experimental. In the observational approach, we asked several questions about what should MPs do and about what they are doing. Respondents answered with the knowledge of the purpose and the dimensions of the investigation. In the experimental approach we design an experiment with random assignment regarding a member of parliament endorsing amendments proposed by an interest group. In the experiment two features randomly change: the political leaning of the MP and the type of interest group. Respondents must evaluate whether MP's behaviour is justified or not without the knowledge of the purpose and the dimensions of the investigation. Experiment allows the researcher to go beyond discourse to understand the attitudes of the respondent regarding representation – using the MP - interest group relationship as a test case. The experiment is a way to investigate the various attitudes towards the representative link thanks to a concrete case with practical consequences.

In the first part of this paper we will analyze in a comparative manner French citizens and MPs views on representation in general and on the local and national dimension in par-

---

<sup>4</sup> It was not necessary to weight the data as the proportion of sex, political orientation and experience of the MPs, as well as concerning the question of multiple office holding reflected very well the whole population of French MPs.

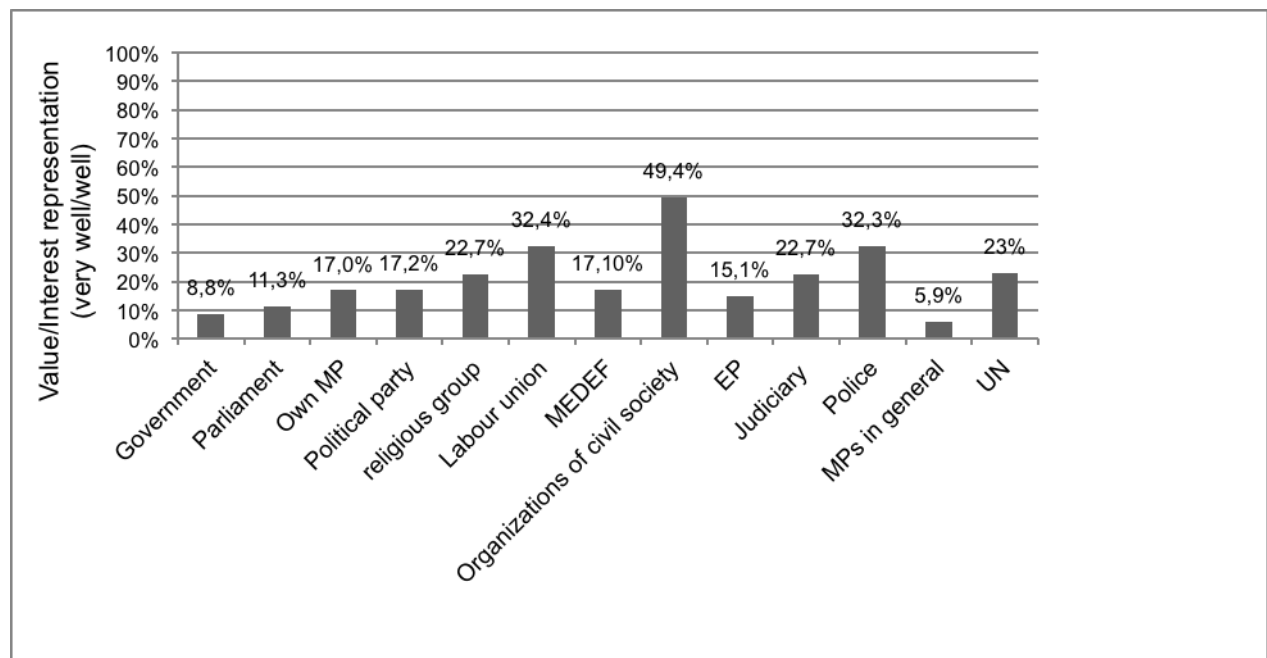
<sup>5</sup> The survey was on the field at the same time (November 2010) in France and Germany and done by the same company (TNS-Sofres). In France, the sampling was done according to the INSEE regional sample. In order to identify the relevant households and persons, random walk was applied. The sample is 1.000 randomly selected respondents in France.

ticular. In a second step, we will include the place given to interest groups by not only using an observational approach but also an experimental one.

### I) At the roots of the crisis of representation: citizens' and representatives views on representation

Our results clearly show that French citizen don't feel represented in first instance by the traditional representative actors or institutions– the deputies or parliament– but in a far stronger way by new political actors. About half of French citizens state that they feel very well or well represented by organizations of civil society. Among them labor unions or employers' organization (MEDEF) received a higher score than Parliament or MPs in general.

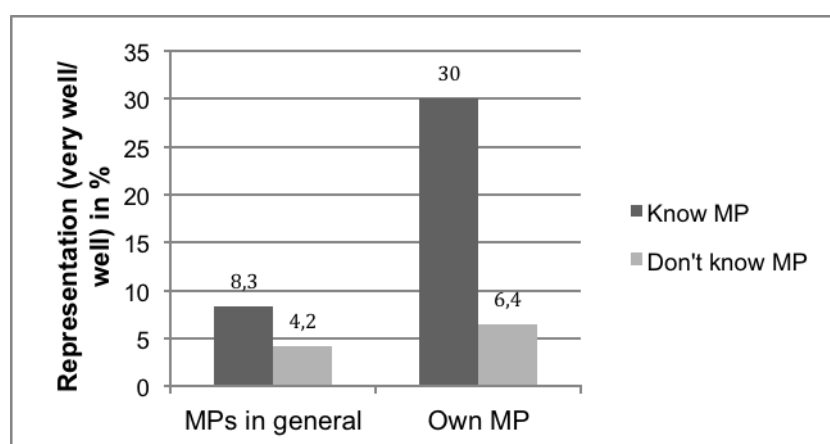
Figure 1 - Feeling of being well represented by the different actors and institutions (in percent)



Several analyses have shown that regarding trust we have to differentiate between politicians in general and particular representatives (Norris 1999: 12; Bréchon 2004: 50-51). If we also do so regarding the feeling of being represented, we can observe the same differ-

ence: only about six percent of the French citizens think that they are (very) well represented by the deputies in general (almost two third don't think so). 17 percent however think that they are very well or well represented in their interests and values by the MP of their constituency. And around half of French citizens (55.7 %) do not think that their interests and values are well represented by their own MP (but, we have to underscore that 20.3 percent chose the category "don't know"). The knowledge of their own MP by the respondents is nevertheless limited: 40 percent of the respondents state that they know the deputy of their constituency, 60 percent don't know him/her; amongst those who pretend to know their MP, one third is not able to give his name or give a wrong answer.

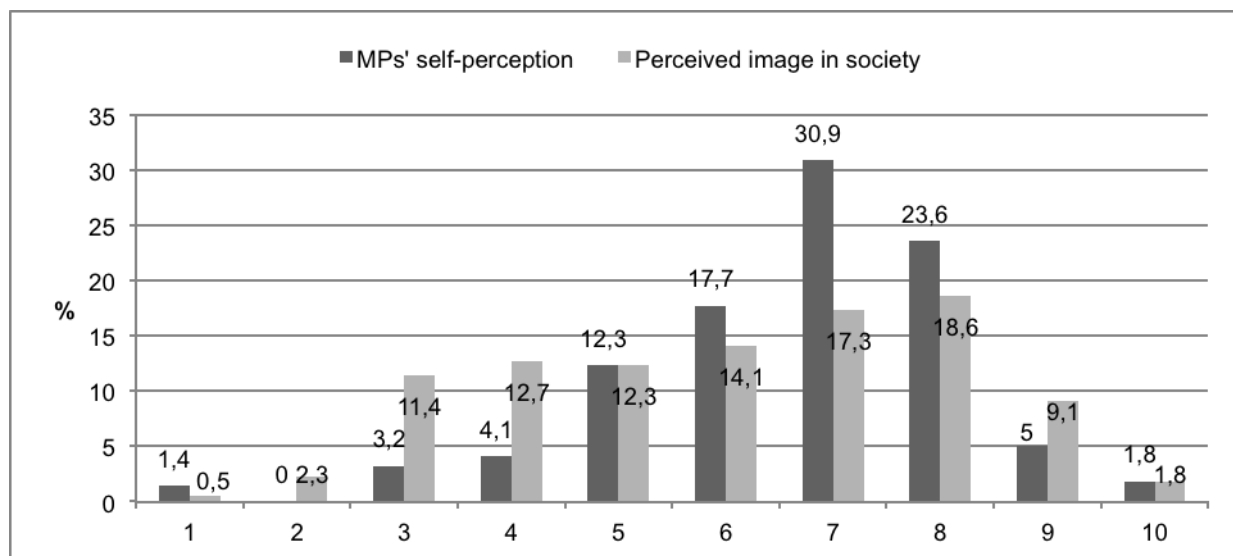
Figure 2 - Feeling of being represented by MPs in general and by the MP of the constituency (in percent) controlled by the indication that the person knows the MP of his/her constituency



When we look at our data on the disaggregated level, we can observe that about one third of those who pretend to know the deputy of their constituency also feel very well or well represented by him or her; among those who don't know their deputy this is the case for only 6.4 percent (Cramer's  $V = .37^{***}$ ). We can also observe that knowing the MP of the constituency seems to have an effect on the feeling of being represented by MPs in general (Cramer's  $V = .14^{**}$ ). There seems to be thus a generalizing effect.

In our study studies on French deputies, we clearly discovered that the latter are aware of the distance between them and those they ought to represent. Deputies positioned themselves on a higher level in society than they though citizens might place them (differences are highly significant).

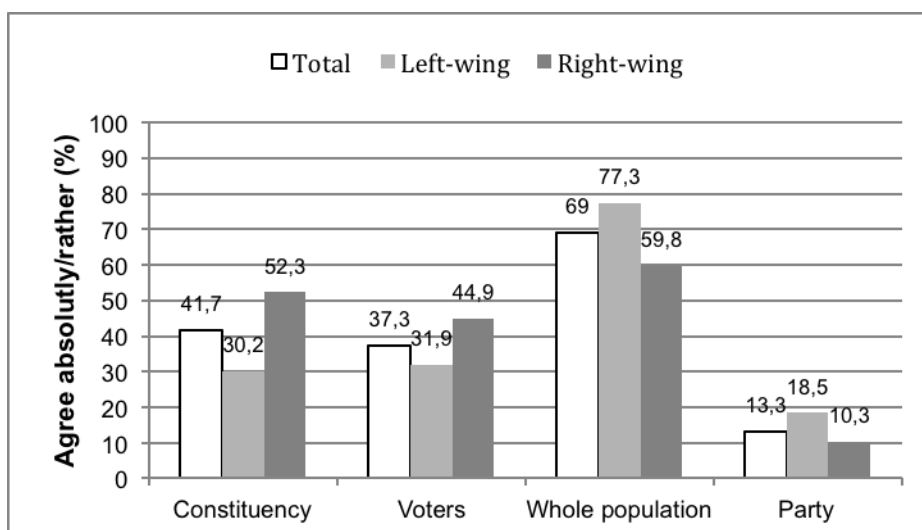
Figure 3 - Place of MPs in society



Question wording: "The problem of a distance between French citizens and politics, and in particular politician, is often topic of debate. The place that MPs have in society is therefore often questioned. On the following figures, the step 1 of the ladder means the lowest place in society, step 10 the highest. Could you please indicate, first, on which step you put MPs; and, second, on which step you think the French citizens put the MPs."

After having shown the significant level of distrust between citizens and MPs, investigating the conceptions of the nature of the representative link between citizens and MPs will give us enlightening insights about why there is a crisis of representation.

Figure 4 – MP's conception of representation

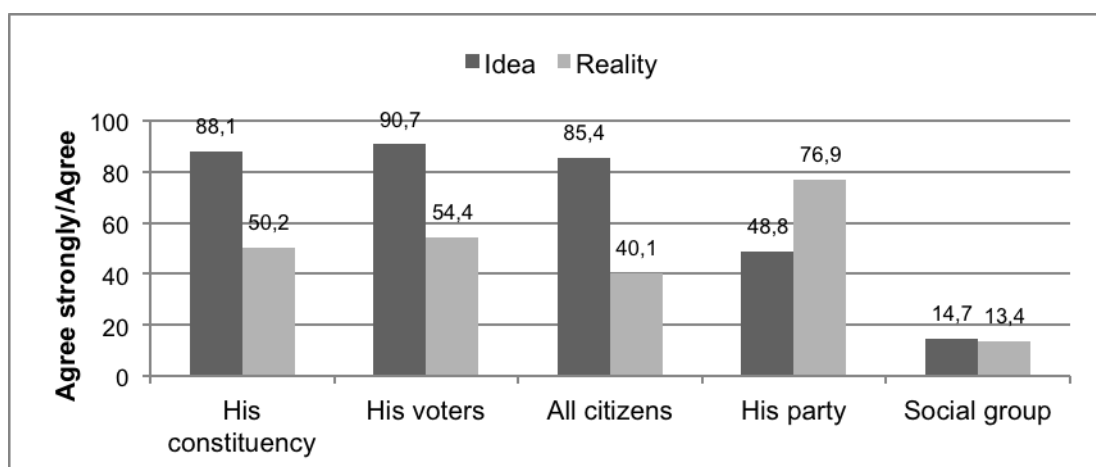




Asking MPs in our survey who deputies represent first and foremost<sup>6</sup>, 69 percent agreed to the statement that the deputy represents above all the whole French population. The MPs views on representation are thus congruent with the French doctrine of national sovereignty and the generality of the parliamentary activity. The MPs mention in second the MP's constituency with 41.7 percent (which underscores their local involvement) and their voters with 37.3 percent. The MP's party reaches the weakest score (13.3%). When we distinguish between left- and right-wing MPs, we observe a clear significant difference regarding the constituency (.005): while about the half of the right-wing MPs agreed on that statement, only 30.2 percent of the left-wing deputies did so. Conversely representing the party is more agreed amongst left-wing MPs (due amongst others to selection processes, strong role of the party).

When asking the citizens whom MPs should represent in first instance, the picture is rather different but also less clear.

Figure 5 – Voters' conception of MPs' actual and ideal representation



First citizens cite at a higher level all the items: the MP's voters (90.7%), the constituency (88.1%), the whole French population (85.4%) and the party (48.8%). If the party is clearly less as who the MPs should represent first, there is a very small difference (around 5 points) between the three first answers. Contrary to French MPs who seem to be in line with the French doctrine of national sovereignty, French citizens value at the same time the general interest and the electoral linkage. Furthermore French citizens also claim a difference

<sup>6</sup> "Please give a note from 1 agree absolutely to 5 don't agree at all for each of the following statements: 1. The deputy represents above all his constituency and his region; 2. The deputy represents above all his voters; 3. The deputy represents above all the whole French population; 4. The deputy represents above all his party."

between their conceptions of representation and reality. 90.7 percent would like to have the MP represent first and foremost his voters, but only 54.4 think that MPs do so in reality. It is interesting when comparing MPs and citizens views on this topic, that only 13.3 percent of the deputies state that they should represent at first instance their party, but almost 80 percent of the citizens think that this is the case for their MPs (although the majority doesn't appreciate this). These results show clearly that there is a clear gap between theory (MPs are supposed to embody collectively the French nation) and citizens' conflicting idea of representation (both general interest and electoral linkage). Such a mismatch could be a reason for the often-quoted "crisis of representation".

We can observe these different conceptions of the deputy's mandate regarding the question of the most important task of an MP: A vast majority of MPs have chosen a "national" activity in first row (69.6%); in second row, however, the majority chooses a "local" activity (74.0%) (only 12.3% haven chosen two national activities in first and second row). MPs views are thus congruent with the French doctrine of national sovereignty and the generality of the parliamentary mandate. But also balance between national and local dimension of their mandate. We can observe that they attribute great importance to the local dimension of their mandate, important to have strong ties to the constituency (electoral rules, multiple office holding).

But when we asked the French citizens of the most and second most important task of an MP, only about one third (34.3%) chose a national activity; whereas the majority favors a local activity (65.7%)<sup>7</sup>. In second row, the majority still chose a "local" activity (69.1%). These results depart from to the balanced view of the MPs about their most important task and emphasize the local expectations of the citizens towards their MPs. Following the French citizens the concerns of their constituency have to be the first preoccupation of a MP. 30 % of the respondents chose local task as most important, choose also local task as second. 23,3% of the respondent chose a national task first and a local one as second. 17.1 % chose in the converse order. Finally only 13.8% of the respondents chose national activities as first and second task. Very few people think that a French MP should have purely national activities. By contrast a majority of the respondents (57%) expects the MP to solve constitu-

---

<sup>7</sup> We have to underscore that amongst those that choose a local task as the most important task of an MP, the majority thinks that an MP should first and foremost solve the problems in the constituency.

ency's problems as at least one of the two main tasks of the MP. Beyond the local involvement of the MP, respondents also greatly value once again the electoral linkage: 45% of them state that defending the interest of the constituency is one of the two main tasks of the MP.

If there is a conflict between voters' opinion and MP's opinion, 91 percent of the MPs state that the MP in such case should follow his own opinion, only 9 percent follow voters' opinion. Conversely 82.4 of the respondents answered that the MP should follow his voters' opinion. The same proportion of respondents indicated that MPs should follow voters opinion over party's opinion in case of conflict between both opinions. MPs and citizens one again differ regarding representation. In fact the represented wants their MP to act as a delegate of the voters (not of the party) when the representatives wants to act as trustee. These situations are not theoretical given that half of the respondents think that they occur sometimes or often.

One explanations for these differences could be that French MPs seem to feel very free vis-à-vis the citizens: the vast majority of the interviewed deputies (70.4 percent) assume that they feel rather or completely free vis-à-vis their voters (compared to 24 percent vis-à-vis National assembly, 48.9% political group, 54.4% government<sup>8</sup>)<sup>9</sup>.

Thus MPs considered their role as a trustee, representing the whole nation with first a national focus whereas the citizens stresses on the fact that an MP should act as a delegate of his own voters and constituency. They value electoral linkage and local tasks when MPs emphasize on general will and national task first. These conflicting understandings and expectations regarding the representative link do not explain the whole crisis of representation. Nevertheless they are some of the key components of it.

## **II) Testing the robustness of attitudes towards representation: MPs and interest groups**

In order to analyze the relationship between French citizens and their representatives as well as the interest groups, we generate several hypotheses. Given the previous results and

---

<sup>8</sup> Very high number of missings regarding degree of freedom vis-à-vis government (35.7% DK or NA).

<sup>9</sup> When taking into account party affiliation, there are significant differences regarding National assembly with right-wing and without party affiliation feeling more free towards parliament (Cramer's  $V=.20^*$ ) and left-wing MPs feeling much more free vis-à-vis the government (Cramer's  $V=.34^{***}$ ), but probably because right-wing government.

the features of MPs-interest groups relationships, our analyses are lead by four general hypotheses:

1. General will hypothesis: Citizens have in general negative attitudes regarding the fact that a MP supports interest groups;
2. Electoral linkage hypothesis: Citizens consider more legitimate an MP helping interest groups from his own constituency;
3. Type of interest group hypothesis: Helping charity organizations is considered to be more legitimate by citizens than helping big companies;
4. MP's party affiliation: The MP's party affiliation affects the level of approval.

In order to test these hypotheses, we designed an experiment with random assignment of the following features: the interest group may be a big company, big company from MP's constituency, a charity organization, a charity organization from MP's constituency; the MP is presented as a MP, a leftwing MP, or a rightwing MP.

The "survey experiment" was designed following the work of P. Sniderman (1996). The experiment is an "individual decision making experiment" (Morton 2010) where respondents chose a candidate without the knowledge of the purpose and the dimensions of the investigation. Our study first investigates the "effects of a cause" (Morton 2010): what are the effects of the types of interest group and of the MP's party affiliation on the level of approval of MP – interest group relationship by the respondents? The experiment assumes two *treatment variables*: the type of interest group and the MP's party affiliation. We expect these variables to have a causal impact on our dependent variable, the citizens' attitudes towards the relationship between MPs and interest groups. In order to test the two Treatment Variables, we used two *manipulated variables*: the distinction between big company and charity and the level – local or general – for the type of interest group as well as the party affiliation and lack of party affiliation of the MP for the political feature. The values of the two manipulated variables were randomly assigned by CAPI procedures. Random assignments were independent between variables<sup>10</sup>. In a second stage we will focus on the causes of the effects of the types of interest group and of the MP 's party affiliation on the level of approval of MP – interest group relationship by the respondents.

---

<sup>10</sup> There is no significant over-representation of any relevant variable in the various cases of the experiment.

In the experiment, the respondents listened to a short description of the situation:

When a bill was discussed in Parliament, a (*leftwing member, rightwing member, member*) of Parliament received a (*big company, big company from MP's constituency, charity organization, charity organization from MP's constituency*). This (*big company, big company from MP's constituency, charity organization, charity organization from MP's constituency*) gave him amendments to defend in the Parliament. The MP has accepted to introduce these amendments. Do you think that his decision is:

1. completely justified
2. rather justified
3. rather not justified
4. not at all justified

Applied to the experiment, the general hypotheses lead us to the following expectations:

- *Effects of causes*

- hypothesis 1.a - Interest group trust hypothesis: respondents should have more positive attitudes towards charities than companies;
- hypothesis 1.b - Electoral linkage hypothesis: respondents should be more positive about interest group from the MP's constituency than other interest groups;
- hypothesis 1.c - General will hypothesis 1: Respondents should be less positive about interest group from the MP's constituency than other interest group.

- *Causes of the effects*

- hypothesis 2 - Interest group political perception hypothesis: leftwing leaning respondents should have more negative attitudes towards the relationship between MPs and companies than rightwing respondent;
- hypothesis 3.a - Political support hypothesis 1: leftwing (rightwing) leaning respondents display more negative attitudes towards rightwing (leftwing) MPs than rightwing leaning (leftwing) respondents regardless the type of interest group involved;
- hypothesis 3.b - Political support hypothesis 2: omitting MPs party should affect significantly the result among the groups of leftwing and rightwing leaning respondents;
- hypothesis 4 - Independence hypothesis: when respondents value more independence from interest group, the level of approval of MP helping a big company should decrease;
- hypothesis 5 - Independence hypothesis: when respondents value more the defense of the interest of the constituency, the level of approval of MP helping interest groups from the constituency should increase;
- hypothesis 6 - General will hypothesis 2: when respondents value more general interest of the society over special interests, the level of approval of MP helping a interest groups should decrease.

### Effects of the types of interest group and of MP's party affiliation

Table 1 - Proportion of respondents' approval of the MP's behavior (in percent)

	Completely or rather justified	N
Leftwing MP/big company	48.5	68
Leftwing MP/charity	68.7	67
Leftwing MP/company from his district	62.7	59
Leftwing MP/charity from his district	66.7	66
rightwing MP/big company	38.8	80
rightwing MP/charity	65.3	75
rightwing MP/company from his district	52.2	69
rightwing MP/charity from his district	64.1	78
MP/big company	28.1	64
MP/charity	65.4	78
MP/company from his district	49.3	67
MP/charity from his district	71.4	49
Total	56.5	820

Our analyses show that, regardless the MP's party affiliation, respondents consider in general more legitimate an MP helping a charity than a company. Around two-third of the French citizens considered "completely or rather justified" the fact that an MP accepts to propose amendments/bills coming from charity. We can therefore conclude that the relationship between interest groups and MPs are not illegitimate *per se*, but the type of interest groups involved is the key point in understanding citizens' attitudes towards the relationships between interest groups and MPs. Helping a big company (46.2%) by endorsing its amendments is less approved than helping a charity (66.6%)<sup>11</sup>. This higher approval for the charity is systematic, regardless with the other features of the experiment.<sup>12</sup> When the party affiliation of the MP is omitted, the level of support for an MP taking up big company's amendments is at its minimum with 28.5%, i.e. less than half the level of approval for the charity. The enduring distrust towards companies or at least the weaker level of trust in

<sup>11</sup> Chi2 significant at .000

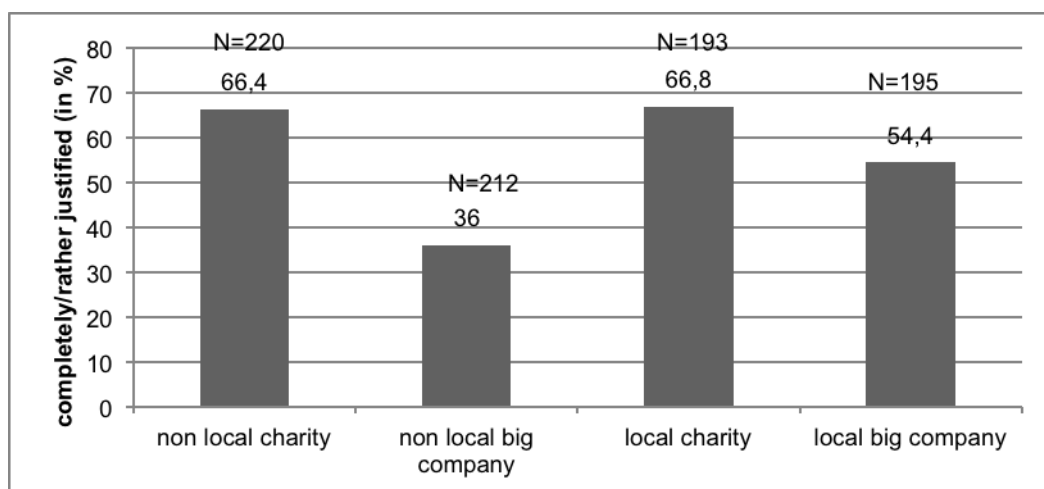
<sup>12</sup> Despite the small size of the sample, the hypothesis 1.a - endorsing charity interest is more approved than big company interest - is significant respectively at .008 for a "leftwing MP" with a difference of 20.2 points, at .000 for a "rightwing MP" with a difference of 26.5 points, and at .000 for a MP without any party affiliation with a difference of 37.3 points.

companies than in charity in France helps to explain the important difference in approval of endorsing amendments from two different types of interest groups.

We can therefore conclude that the mere fact that an MP helps an interest group is not a problem *per se*. It finally depends on the interest group. From a broader perspective about representation this is a very interesting result: either, beyond speeches, the pursuit of general interest is not the root of the attitudes regarding MPs-interest groups relationships or only organizations considered as pursuing the general interest are legitimate. A way to answer this question is to study if and how an MP helping locally based interest group is accepted.

So our question focus on whether or not endorsing amendments from interest groups from the MP's constituency are more accepted? If the main respondents' attitude towards representation was that MPs represented the whole nation and the general interest, we would expect a lower level of approval of an MP helping locally based interest groups. Conversely if the main respondents' attitude towards representation was that MPs represented their constituency and voters, we would expect a higher level of approval of an MP helping locally based interest groups. Helping charity is still highly approved but it doesn't matter if the charity is locally based or not. Given the already high level of approval associated to charity, it means at least than defending local interest is not perceived negatively.

Figure 6 - Approval of endorsement of amendments by charity or company



The differences are far more striking regarding defending economic interest groups. Helping local big company is approved by 54.4% whereas helping a big company is only approved by 36%<sup>13</sup>. We can therefore conclude that regardless of MP's party affiliation, at least half of the respondents approved defending the locally based economic interest. The differences in approval are statistically significant and in absolute terms, ranging from 13.4 to 20.2<sup>14</sup>. Endorsing amendments from locally based big company is clearly more legitimate – not less – than helping a big company. The distrust in big companies is compensated by the legitimacy of defending constituency interest. Consequently when locally based, the difference of approval between helping big company and charity shrinks spectacularly. Despite being still significant, the approval difference is nearly divided by two for an MP without any party affiliation and for a rightwing MP. Indeed, the difference reaches the insignificant level of 4 points in the case of a leftwing MP.

Hypotheses 1.a and 1.b clearly do not support the idea that respondents reject helping interest groups. Indeed the majority of respondents find “completely or rather justified” the fact that a MP endorses interest group amendments. Estimated by an experiment focusing on the relationships with interest groups, attitudes towards representation are not based on the idea that MPs only represent the whole nation and the general interest. There is a big gap between theory and practice or more precisely between the philosophical foundations of French Republic and real attitudes of French citizens regarding the meaning of representation. Both hypotheses conversely points out the fact that MPs-interest groups relationships depends first of all on the legitimacy of the interest groups. Big companies are distrusted by most of the citizens, charities are trusted. So helping the latter is approved by a large majority of the respondents when the former is not. Studying the legitimacy of the interest groups also reveals that the French citizens' attitudes toward representation value linkage with the electoral constituency and its interests. It is the reason why local roots are enough to significantly alleviate the distrust towards the big companies and legitimate, for at least a majority of the respondents, the endorsement of big company interests by a MP.

We run a logistic regression with the manipulated variables as independent variables confirms our descriptive results.

---

<sup>13</sup> Chi2 is significant at .002.

<sup>14</sup> The hypothesis 1.b - endorsing locally based big company interest is more approved than big company interest - is significant at .05 for a “rightwing MP”, at .06 for a “leftwing MP” with a difference of 14.2 points and at .007 for a MP without any party affiliation.



Table 2 - logistic regression of the effects of the experimental features on the approval of endorsing amendments

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Odds Ratio	P> z	Odds Ratio	P> z
big company	.4261069	0.000	.3148176	0.000
from the constituency	1.405833	0.019	1.002515	0.990
leftwing MP	1.401099	0.065	.440456	0.047
rightwing MP	1.056325	0.753	1.086689	0.636
big company from the constituency	"	"	1.906735	0.027
Correctly classified	62.07%		62.32%	
Number of obs	820		820	

The answer that the endorsement of the interest group amendment is “rather or completely justified” are more likely if the MP is a leftwing one (odds ratio<sup>15</sup> of 1.4, p=.065) compared to a MP without any party affiliation. When the MP is a rightwing one, there is not any significant difference compared to a MP without any party affiliation. Approval of MP’s help of interest group is less likely if the interest group is a big company (odds ratio of .43, p=.000). If the interest group is from the MP’s constituency (odds ratio of 1.41, p=.019), the approval is also significantly more likely. Nevertheless the second model presented table 2 shows that the positive effect associated to localized interest group is specific to the big company. When an interactive variable controlling specifically the effect for a big company of the MP’s constituency, the general effect vanishes (odds ratio of 1.00, p=.99). The approval of helping a charity does not depend on whether or not the charity is from the MP’s constituency. Conversely the likelihood of approving a MP endorsing amendments from the MP’s constituency is higher (odds ratio of 1.91, p=.027).

<sup>15</sup> The odds ratio is formally, everything else equals,: (number of approval of a leftwing MP / number of respondents answering on a leftwing MP)/ (number of approval of a MP / number of respondents answering on a MP). So in this case, a odds ratio of 1.40 means that the numerator is 40% more important than the denominator.

### *The causes of the effects of the types of interest group and of MP's party affiliation*

Finally, in order to investigate the causes of the effects or of the lack of effects, we estimate several hypotheses.

The impact of political ideology should be controlled in any analysis of the attitude towards MPs – interest group relationships. We hypothesize that the legitimacy of the various interest groups varies according political ideology of the respondent. Particularly the distrust towards big companies is usually higher among leftwing leaning citizens than rightwing ones. Thus according to the interest group political perception hypothesis, we expect that leftwing leaning respondents are more negative about companies than rightwing respondent. Our analyses show that 44.5% of the leftwing respondents approved MP's behavior when big companies are included in the experiment whereas the level of approval among the rightwing respondents in the same situation reaches 60.6%<sup>16</sup>. Whether the big company is local (17%) or not (12.9%) does not affect significantly the difference in the level of approval between leftwing and rightwing respondents. The interest group political perception hypothesis is supported by the evidence. Thus the legitimacy of the interest group is a significant factor that is related to political ideology. In this case we can even observe congruence between citizens and MPs: in our French MP-study, rightwing MPs are in general more willing to support a bill coming from a big company than left-wing MPs<sup>17</sup>.

We also assume that the respondent's judgment of MP's behavior depends also on the MP's characteristics that are relevant for the citizens, in particular the congruence between MP's and respondent's party affiliation (political support hypothesis 1). Thus at a first level, we expect that leftwing leaning respondents are in general more negative about rightwing MPs than rightwing leaning respondents, and vice versa. Based on the respondents' self-placement on a left-right scale, we build a proxy variable dividing the respondents in three groups: left, center and right. When the MP is presented as a rightwing one, the level of approval of the leftwing respondents (48.7%) is lower than the one of the

---

<sup>16</sup> Chi2 significant at .029.

<sup>17</sup> A part of the present experiment was replicated during the interview with the French MPs. The results show a strong support for charity organizations (89.6 percent of the 106 MPs who answered to our question versus 72.5 percent from a big company) and a significant negative difference between left-wing and right-wing MPs in the level of approval in case of big company (-26,5; p=.019).

rightwing respondents (63.3%). Whatever is the interest group in the question, the difference is always negative, reaching its climax (-34.2 points) regarding a big company. Conversely, leftwing respondents (61.1%) approved in general more often leftwing MPs than rightwing respondents (55.3%) even if the difference is less important given the comparative reluctance of leftwing respondents to approve helping big companies.

At a second level, if we assume that the judgment about MP's behavior depends on the congruence between the respondent's and the MP's partisanship, omitting MP's party should affect significantly the level of support of an MP among all groups of respondents (political support hypothesis 2). Our analysis shows that leftwing respondents approved less often an MP without any party affiliation (48.7) than a leftwing MP (61.1)<sup>18</sup>. This trend holds regardless the type of interest group involved (biggest difference with 22.9 percent regarding big company). Similarly a difference among the rightwing respondents appears when the level of approval of an MP without any partisan leaning (63.3%) is compared to a rightwing MP (68%) even if the difference is less impressive.

Finally we test the simultaneously the various hypotheses in a multivariate logistic regression. The independent variable is still the answer that the endorsement of the interest group amendment is "rather or completely justified".

**Table 3 - logistic regression of the causes of the effects of the experimental features on the approval of endorsing amendments**

	Odds Ratio	P> z
big company	.5428681	0.348
from the constituency	.9568244	0.843
leftwing MP	4.070768	0.011
rightwing MP	1.298666	0.614
big company from the constituency	.4300083	0.278
Left-Right position	1.10331	0.177
L-R position* big company	1.104141	0.177
L-R position* leftwing MP	.8286226	0.043
L-R position* rightwing MP	.9786692	0.807
big company from the constituency * constituency interest	1.298145	0.038
big company *independence	.8480606	0.043
general interest	.9193524	0.208
Number of obs	725	
Correctly classified	63.31%	

<sup>18</sup> Chi2 significant at .024.

The model presented in table 3 includes all the variables testing the various hypotheses regarding the causes of the (lack of) effects.

When we thus include all these variables, we can observe that only one variable testing the effect of a cause approach is still significant but highly significant. Being a leftwing MP is associated with more approval in endorsing amendments from an interest group compared to an MP without any party affiliation: the odds ratio show that, everything else equals, the likelihood of approving a leftwing MP is 4 times more likely than for a MP without any party affiliation. Additionally the more rightwing a respondent is, the less likely an approval of a leftwing MP's behavior is (odds ratio of .83,  $p=.043$ ). So as expected party affiliation of the MP and left-right position of the respondent are relevant factor to understand the citizens' attitudes towards MP - interest groups relationships. Nevertheless no other political features are relevant. Left-right position does not affect significantly the approval of MP's behavior when the MP has no party affiliation or is a rightwing one. The other features of the experiment are no longer significant when the logic underlying their effects are tested.

The types of interest groups are no longer significant when various explanations regarding attitudes towards interest groups are introduced. First aspect, when the interest group is a big company, the likelihood of approving MP's behavior decreases when the importance for the respondents increases that MPs are independent from interest groups (odds ratio of .85,  $p=.043$ ). Nevertheless, the effect is limited only to big company. Charities are not perceived as interest group. Everything else equals the left-right position is not statistically significant to predict approval regarding big companies. Second aspect, when the interest group is a big company from the MP's constituency, the likelihood of approving MP's behavior is higher when the importance for the respondents increases that MPs represent the interest of his constituency (odds ratio of 1.30,  $p=.038$ ). The hypothesis about electoral linkage is supported by the evidence. Conversely being attached to the fact that the MP should value general interest of the society over special interests is not significant. Even if many respondents state that MP should defend the general interest, when they assess concrete situations regarding MPs and interest groups, they do not base their judgment on this perspective.

## Conclusion

The professionalization process at work across the entire population of French MPs under the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic is a clear tendency (Costa, Kerrouche 2009). For the vast majority of MPs politics becomes their main occupation, and at length their sole form of professional activity. The decentralisation process, which has devolved many prerogatives to the local level, has accentuated this trend towards political professionalization, bolstered by the increased financial independence of MPs made possible by the 'cumul des mandats' allowing several sources of remuneration to be received at once.<sup>19</sup>

The professionalization of a House thus brings in its wake a successive institutionalisation of that Parliament and a 'closure' phenomenon is set in place which gradually forms an invisible screen, buffering MPs from outside shocks. The risk, clearly illustrated in this paper results, is obviously that of increased separation between citizens and their MPs. There is a strong divorce in the conception of representatives, who act and conceive themselves as trustees and citizens that favours of a delegate fully involve in his/her constituency problem, and have clear expectations regarding MP's relationships with interest groups.

## References

- Birnbaum, Pierre/Hamon, Francis/Troper, Michel 1978 : Réinventer le gouvernement. Paris : Flammarion.
- Belorgey, Jean-Michel 1991 : Le Parlement à refaire. Paris : Gallimard.
- Bréchon, Pierre 2004: Crise de confiance dans les élites politiques. In : Cautrès, Bruno/Mayer, Nonna : Le nouveau désordre électoral. Les leçons du 21 avril 2002. Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, 47-69.
- Bréchon, Pierre 2006 : Comportements et attitudes politiques. Grenoble : Presses universitaires de Grenoble.
- Campbell, Rosie/Childs, Sarah/Lovenduski, Joni 2009: Do Women Need Women Representatives? In: British Journal of Political Science 40, 171-194.
- Chandernagor, 1967 : Un Parlement pour quoi faire ? Paris : Gallimard.
- Converse, Philip E./Pierce, Roy 1986: Political Representation in France. Cambridge/London : Harvard University Press.
- Costa, Olivier/Kerrouche, Eric 2007 : Qui sont les députés français ? Enquête sur des élites inconnues. Paris : Presses de Sciences Po.

---

<sup>19</sup> The law fixes a ceiling for the amount of remuneration an elected representative may receive. This ceiling corresponds to one and a half times the sum of parliamentary remuneration.

- Costa, Olivier/Kerrouche, Eric 2009 : Representative roles in the French National Assembly : The case for a dual typology ? In : French Politics 7, 219-242.
- Gabriel, Oscar W./Keil, Silke/Kerrouche, Eric 2011 : Political Participation in France and Germany. ECPR Press.
- Morton, Rebecca B./Williams, Kenneth C. 2010 : Experimental political science and the study of causality : from nature to the lab. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967: The concept of representation. Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London : University of California Press.
- Masclat, Jean-Claude 1979 : Le Rôle du député et ses attaches institutionnelles sous la Cinquième République. Paris : LGDJ.
- Norris, Pippa 1999 : Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Governance. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rosanvallon, Pierre 2002: Le peuple introuvable: histoire de la représentation démocratique en France. Paris: Gallimard.
- Sniderman, Paul 1996: The Clash of Rights: Liberty, Equality, and Legitimacy in Pluralist Democracy. New Haven: Yale University Press.