

# The Quality of Representative Claims: Uncovering a Weakness in the Defense of the Liberal World Order

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## **Abstract**

All kinds of actors, elected and unelected, make claims to represent certain constituencies. This paper sheds new light on what this practice of representative claims-making might imply for the legitimacy of the liberal world order. It develops a quality of representation index at the level of representative claims and introduces a novel dataset. First, the paper introduces the information criterion as key benchmark against which to evaluate representative claims. Second, it constructs a quality of representation index based on this criterion and uses it to assess representative claims. Third, multivariate analysis corroborates differences between various makers while controlling for context. Bridging the divide between political theory and empirical political sociology, this paper reveals that the supporters of the current liberal democratic world order make significantly lower quality representative claims than various challengers. A range of new avenues for both theoretical and empirical research ensues.

## Introduction

Political representation is often understood as “acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (Pitkin, 1967: 209). This definition stands at the basis of the ‘standard account’ (Rehfeld, 2006) of political representation, taking a descriptive and principal-agent perspective on citizens and their representatives. To make sure that representatives act in the interest of their constituencies, periodic elections take place giving people the chance to punish or reward representatives. Whether this political representation is *democratic* depends on whether representatives enact policies that people want (Dahl, 1971: 1; Esaiasson and Wlezien, 2017) and whether citizens have control mechanisms available to hold representatives accountable (Strøm et al., 2003; Pollack, 2002). This standard account has led those concerned with democratic political representation to focus on classic institutions of representative democracy – political parties, legislatures and elections – and their relationship with citizens and public opinion.

Three important challenges problematize the standard account nowadays. First, a notion that representative democracy is in crisis has become widespread. Political parties are hemorrhaging membership and turn-out in elections is declining. As Mair (2000: 37) argues: “*at the level of the electorates, there is evidence of an individualisation and particularisation of voting choice, the fragmentation of traditional social-structural identities, and a growing sense of indifference with, and disengagement from, the political world.*” A growing portion of the electorate develops a sense of mistrust of elite politicians, disenchantment with politics and subsequently disengages from politics. This leads to a sense that we have now face ‘the end of representative politics’ (Tormey, 2015).

Globalization presents the second challenge to the standard account. The standard account is premised on the notion of territorial overlap of constituency, representatives and politics. That is, a local, regional or ultimately national constituency votes into office representatives who decide on the authoritative allocation of values for that territorially demarcated group. Globalization, however, seriously undermines this principle. “*Many problems of the standard account [of representative democracy] involve the complexity of constituency in issues such as global warming, disease, and trade, where people are affected by laws and policies to which they are subject but have little capacity to influence.*” (Montanaro, 2012: 1097-1098). This presumed congruence of affected people and their elected representatives no longer exists. The policies of large countries, particularly rich Western ones, have disproportionate effects on the people of small and poor countries. Furthermore, as countries become integrated in globalized markets, their politicians lose the possibility to credibly use a range of policy instruments. Economic stimulus packages, for example, lack

their intended effect in open markets (Hellwig, 2015). If the electoral connection between representatives and voters fails because those voted into office are not be the ones who decide or do not have the means to make the desired policies, it stands to reason to find disenchantment with key institutions of representative democracy. Disaffected with national elected representatives, people look for other actors to represent them. The question arises whether foreign and international actors, such as international civil society groups, international organizations and individual celebrities, can viably represent interests which the classic agents of the standard account leave under-represented (Lievens, 2015; Bray, 2011).

The declining support for classic institutions of representative democracy and rising controversy in the wake of globalization result in an embattled status of the liberal world order. This order consists on the one hand of a marriage between liberal principles of checks and balances, rule of law, human rights and minority protection and the democratic principles of majority rule and collective self-determination. On the other hand, it consists of powerful international organizations that orchestrate global and regional politics and facilitate liberal trade and international patterns of production. Defenders of this liberal world order clearly face formidable challenges from disenchanting citizens, populists, protectionists and authoritarians.

Thirdly, and partially in recognition of the real-world developments sketched above, recent developments in political theory challenge the dominant descriptive and principal-agent models of the standard account of representation. Michael Saward (2006; 2010; 2009) identifies agents like U2 singer Bono claiming to represent Africa in his 'Making Poverty History' campaign as significant unelected representatives. Even if Bono claims to represent a constituency that has not elected him and might not even recognize itself as a constituency, his claims still carry meaning and effect. Drawing on such real-world developments, fueled by a sense that classic representative democracy is in crisis and that globalization is amplifying this, Saward builds on earlier contributions in political theory (Mansbridge, 2003) and develops the notion of the representative claim. "*We need to move away from the idea that representation is first and foremost a given, factual product of elections, rather than a precarious and curious sort of claim about a dynamic relationship.*" (Saward, 2006: 298).

The concept of the representative claim opens up a vast research agenda. Who is claiming to represent whom? Are these claims any good? Do some actors make better claims than others? Opening up the concept of representation in the constructivist sense reveals an abundance of actual representation going on in the shape of claims made by elected and unelected, domestic and international actors. But the follow-up question quickly raised is whether we can say anything about the *democratic legitimacy* of this representation as dynamic process. How legitimate are representative claims? This question is particularly

pressing on issues related to globalization, which present such a fundamental challenge to the standard account of representation and stand at the heart of current political conflict in the West (Kriesi et al., 2008; Hobolt, 2016). Therefore, the central research question of this article is: who is making the best representative claims in debates about globalization?

### **Studying Representative Claims in the News**

The ideal typical representative claim consists of four components: a maker, a subject, an object and an audience (Saward, 2010). The maker is the individual or collective actor making the claim. This maker presents someone (subject) – most often him- or herself – as the representative of a certain constituency (object). Those observing the claim are the audience. For example: “*Antiglobalization demonstrators (makers) set up themselves and their movements (subjects) as representatives of the oppressed and marginalized (object) to Western governments (audience)*” (Saward 2010: 37). While Saward leaves the option open statements made without an audience present qualify as representative claims, subsequent research on representative claims has stressed the public nature of claim-making and the importance of a wider audience present (e.g. Michailidou and Trenz, 2013; Moffitt, 2016: Ch. 6). Without an audience, a representative claim cannot have an impact on politics and society and is therefore meaningless for democracy (Rehfeld 2006).

Hence, it is important to locate representative claims in the public sphere where they contribute to collective will-formation by reaching a larger audience (Trenz 2009; Trenz and Eder 2004). We subsequently need to acknowledge how this public dimension impacts and transforms claims and the practice of claims-making. First, as soon as we locate a representative claim in the public sphere, the question who the audience is becomes more complicated. Take Laura Montanaro’s (2018) example of Oxfam claiming to represent the world’s poor in front of the World Bank. It is unclear whether Oxfam really represents the world’s poor or rather rich people in the developed world who care about the world’s poor. After all, the latter are its key donors. Whether we consider Oxfam to represent the world’s poor or rich donors is not trivial, as it has direct impact on its legitimacy as a representative. Whereas donors can fuel their judgement of a claim through withholding or extending donations, the world’s poor have little means of authorizing or rejecting Oxfam’s claims (Montanaro, 2012: 1105). Secondly, when Oxfam makes a claim in public demanding more action from the World Bank to see to the needs of the world’s poor, is it really talking to the World Bank, or is it rather talking to its main constituency – the donors – showing that it is representing them and indirectly calling for more donations? If it really wanted to talk to the World Bank, Oxfam would not need to make the public detour. It could use its privileged access to lobby World Bank employees in private.

Making the public detour is a frequently used strategy by interest groups and NGOs to mobilize support and raise pressure on policy-makers (Kollman, 1998).

We need to acknowledge that the majority of relevant representative claims are *mediated* representative claims (Michailidou and Trenz, 2013). Journalists decide to cover them in the news because they think they are relevant to their wider audience. From a giant cacophony of claims, journalists and editors select the ones they think are most important based on news value criteria (O'Neill and Harcup, 2009). These claims then become even more important exactly because they make it into the news and reach a much larger audience than the ones that do not. The news coverage of such claims is often a deliberate aim or conscious decision of representatives. Would-be representatives send their claims to journalists as press statements, give consent to interviews, and package public actions such as LiveAid or street protests in ways they know will attract journalists to cover them. Making representative claims is thus more often than not a strategic action: an action packaged in a way to meet news value criteria and maximize the audience. Such strategy and packaging often imply incongruence and ambiguity between actual and intended constituencies as well as between actual and intended audience, as the discussion of the Oxfam example above illustrates.

Ideal-typical representatives claims like the ones Saward uses to illustrate his original argument rarely feature in the news. Merely stating that one stands for a particular constituency often fails to meet the news threshold, because the action is not linked to a particular political issue on which key decisions are currently made. In other words, it lacks relevance in the eyes of journalists and editors. But, this does not mean that the news lacks representative claims. Instead, a recognition of the importance of *mediatized* representative claims means I argue we should conceive of representative claims not in the form of “claiming to stand for constituency X”, but in “claiming policy A, on behalf of constituency X”. The difference between them may be theoretically relevant, but is often merely unconsciously semantic or the result of a representative’s strategy to make her claim more appealing to journalists. It may even be a journalist’s reformulation of the original claim as part of news writing. Note that this is a specification of Saward’s original definition of a representative claim.

As documented by quantitative content analysis projects conducting claims analysis, there are plenty of claims in the form of demands for certain policies in the news (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Koopmans and Statham, 2010; Koopmans et al., 2005; Berkhout and Sudulich, 2011; De Wilde, 2010). Paul Statham (2005: 12) defines a claim as a unit of strategic or communicative action in the public sphere: “[...] which articulate[s] political demands, decisions, implementations, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other

*collective actors in a policy field*” (cf. Koopmans and Statham, 1999). In some claims, the maker explicitly articulates an intended constituency, which will here be considered the operationalization of a representative claim (cf. De Wilde, 2013; Kinski, 2018).

Drawing on the large scale claims analysis projects conducted to date (Koopmans, 2002; Berkhout and Sudulich, 2011), we can conclude that all claims covered in the news contain at least four elements: 1) a location in time and space, accessible to an audience; 2) an actor making the claim; 3) a specific type of action; and 4) a demand concerning a specific policy or political institution. Similarly, we know that claims optionally contain: 5) an addressee in the form of a person or organization called upon to act in order to realize the demand specified in the claim; 6) an object in the form of a group of people claimed to be affected by the claim in passive sense; 7) a frame explaining to the audience what is at stake in the realization of the claim by providing a justification; and 8) the articulation of conflict through the identification of an in-group and out-group (De Wilde et al., 2014; Koopmans, 2002; Berkhout and Sudulich, 2011). Thanks to this literature of empirical political claims analysis, we have a solid basis of eight discursive components on which we can base our criteria of assessment.

### **Mobilization and the Information Criterion**

Is it possible to say something about the quality of representative claims, in terms of their democratic legitimacy? Saward (2010: Ch. 6) presents the *citizen standpoint*, that citizens – not academic observers – are the judges of legitimacy of representative claims. The democratic legitimacy of a claim, in his opinion, depends on whether the intended and actual constituency – those the claimant speaks to and those who consider themselves spoken to – actually feel represented through the claim. If they accept the claim, then it is legitimate (Saward, 2010: Ch. 6). Others argue that academic observers need not rely on surveys among citizens to measure their response. In a first step toward normative assessment of representative claims and their makers, Lisa Disch (2015) elaborates a critical dimension to the *citizen standpoint*. In her argument, the citizen standpoint allows for a critical appraisal of claims in the sense of whether they allow citizens to assess their legitimacy and provide their feedback in consequential ways. Drawing on Disch’s version of the citizen standpoint, I argue, the question is neither a strictly normative “is this claim legitimate?”, nor a strictly empirical “do citizens find this claim legitimate?”, but a critical: “to what extent does this claim provide citizens with the opportunity to determine whether they find it legitimate and the opportunity to give their opinion about it in a consequential way?”. Subsequently, the analytical question to answer is: which criteria does a representative claim need to meet to facilitate this judgement by citizens?

Representation as practice performed through claims ought to be understood as a mobilization effort, and its success at mobilizing a constituency can be considered a key evaluation criterion (Disch, 2011). A good claim thus mobilizes many people, in favour or against it. Expanding on this emphasis on mobilization, this article posits that information is a key criterion by which to assess the democratic quality of representative claims. That is, once we acknowledge that we can judge a claim by the extent to which it stimulates and enables citizens to agree or disagree with it, it becomes logical to argue that a claim should be as explicit and rich in information as possible. The clearer a claimant makes why, and with what intended effect she claims to represent a certain constituency, the easier it becomes for citizens to evaluate whether they support the cause and its champion. As discussed above, we know from empirical research that real-world claims contain anywhere between four and eight key characteristics. That is, four to eight explicit discursive components. In its most simple form then, the information criterion employed here stipulates that ‘full representative claims’ in which all eight key characteristics are discursively explicated are superior from a democratic perspective to ‘partial claims’ which contain fewer discursive components. *Ceteris paribus*, the more complete the claim, the easier it is for citizens to judge its credentials, the higher its capacity to mobilize and thus the higher its quality from a normative perspective.<sup>1</sup> This contribution subsequently proceeds to systematically analyze variation in the discursive completeness of claims, and what causes this variation.

The first type of information that may or may not be contained in a claim is a clarification of *accountability*. In a globalized world characterized by ‘multi-level governance’ (Marks et al., 1996) it is often unclear who is responsible for which policy. Accountability is therefore often vague and the discursive contest between different (would-be) representatives about who is responsible (and to blame) becomes increasingly important. Claims-making with specified addressees reenact accountability in a discursive manner. They are a key instrument to discursively clarify the opaque ‘democratic soup’ (Hendriks, 2009) resulting from multi-level governance. By articulating who should be in charge and accountable for realizing a specific policy demand, makers of claims can cue citizens whom they should hold accountable. The most valuable form of such accountability articulations are those that identify a person or organization that citizens can hold to account, via elections or donations for example. Much more questionable is the scapegoating of minorities and abstract forces. Yet even such articulated forms of accountability might be considered

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<sup>1</sup> Note that this in a way squares Saward’s circle of normative assessment. The information criterion allows us to stay true to Saward’s argument for the citizen standpoint that we should not attempt to construct an independent vantage point of assessment by doing exactly that: creating an independent vantage point.

preferable to no articulated addressees, as they open up the possibility for citizens to evaluate the validity of ascribing accountability to these groups.

The second aspect where a representative claim may or may not contain information is on *justification*. Many representatives do not provide an idea of why they are demanding what they are demanding. They simply state: “I want this policy for constituency X!”. The citizen in the audience then has the possibility to agree or disagree, but the representative does not provide any reason why citizens should agree. Once a representative starts claiming something along the lines of “I want this policy for constituency X, because it helps us realize justice/equality/freedom/etc.” Then the citizen first has a chance to decide whether he or she agrees with the reason given, the goal specified or the value. This can subsequently help in the decision whether the policy demand and the maker of the claim deserve support. As argued by Grose and colleagues (2015), political scientists have long overlooked the explanations given by representatives for why they support or oppose certain policies. Such explanations or justifications can be especially consequential when the representative defends a policy stance not shared by a significant share of his or her constituency and is then used to blunt opposition and to persuade. In other words, justification is a key component of the democratic leadership the constructivist turn in representation studies points to as essential for democratic legitimacy. Justification alerts citizens to the importance of an issue given a shared goal or value, it challenges pre-existing ideas and preferences held by citizens and it provides reasons why citizens are (not) getting what they want. Advocates of deliberative democracy have long argued that justifications ought to be provided for the reasons spelled out above (e.g. Ackerman and Fishkin, 2002; Fishkin and Luskin, 2005; Kuyper, 2016). As Habermas argues, a free public sphere where all can be heard provides the stage for a process of deliberation where the best argument wins (Habermas, 1991; Habermas, 1993). This is so important to collective democratic will formation, that Rainer Forst (2007) speaks of a ‘Right to Justification’ - *Das Recht auf Rechtfertigung* – as a key component of democratic legitimacy. Rousiley Maia builds upon this to argue that unelected representatives can make a key contribution to democratically legitimate representative democracy, especially when they provide justifications for their demands (Maia, 2012). Sofia Näsström (2015) further argues how the principle of equality ought to be our main concern amongst the universe of possible justifications. “*The relevant question to ask is whether the claim is committed to the principle of equality*” (Näsström, 2015: 10). Such an argument resonates with Habermas’ (1993) distinction between moral, ethical and instrumental justifications. While ethical and instrumental justifications outdo no justification by specifying a value or goal shared by a number of people, moral justifications carry the advantage that they are universal, and thus resonate with everyone. Moral principles like justice, freedom, democracy and equality, are so fundamental and widely held that one would have a



hard time finding anyone who does not care. As such, a claim that makes an appeal to a moral justification contains superior mobilization power.

From an agonistic perspective of democracy, claims ought to articulate *conflict* rather than aim to reconcile it (Mouffe, 2005). Providing a stepping stone towards consensus through deliberation is not the sole purpose of a representative claim and arguably not even its highest normative aim. Emphasizing consensus as ultimate democratic goal or even perceiving democracy as a realization of a holistic and united *voluntee generale* provides a false and dangerous image of what politics is all about (Crick, 2000). Mouffe's key argument in support of conflict is that the political world inherently carries within itself the possibility of developing a Schmittian type of antagonism. The world would then be divided into friends and enemies with each side trying to eliminate the other. To avoid this violence-prone scenario, we must cherish a state of agonism. Agonism features conflict between adversaries who try to defeat each other, but who do not challenge the other's right to existence (Mouffe, 2005). It follows that an articulation of conflict in an agonistic sense ought to be preferred in representative claims over the presentation of a claim as not conflictual or 'good for everyone'. Partially, this is already done if the representative articulates a constituency he or she claims to represent. The portrayal of collective political identity in this way automatically demarcates an out-group from an in-group. But it can be done even more explicitly if the representative articulates the issue or decision at hand as a zero sum game in which some conflicting interests or values are at stake and the final decision always entails defeat for one group if there is victory for the other. Such discursive conflict construction is a key part of making a representative claim. It mobilizes a constituency to support the representative and engage actively in the issue at hand.

What can we expect to find in real world public political debates in terms of the quality of representative claims? Since this is the first study to undertake a systematic, rigorous, quantitative normative assessment of representative claims and the first to develop and deploy the information criterion to do so, there is no existent body of literature to draw hypotheses from. However, we can sketch some general expectations. First, it makes sense that actors and organizations who are directly accountable to the public through elections have a strong interest in making high quality representative claims to mobilize and maintain sufficient support. This would be the case if partisan actors function as rational vote-seeking machines (Downs, 1957). Thus, partisan actors running for office or occupying office can be expected to make higher quality representative claims than other actors engaged in political debate. Amongst those other actors not facing (re-)election, those who can be held to account by other means such as through donations and membership can be expected to make better representative claims than actors not accountable in any clear way according to the same rational choice theory. But we also know that political actors' behavior is

considerably influenced by the institutional surrounding in which they operate (March and Olsen, 1984). Representative claims made in parliamentary plenary debates have been shown to deviate considerably from claims made in newspapers because of the operating logics of these different institutionalized forums (De Wilde, 2014). Since the quality of representative claims as conceptualized above depends on the provision of information to the public by the maker, it stands to reason that institutional environments in which representatives have more opportunity to provide information in their claims yield better representative claims. Thus, we can expect the claims made in parliament – where representatives have the opportunity to speak for minutes – to be superior to those made in mass media, where journalists and editors often boil down claims to mere sound bites.

## **Data and Method**

To measure the quality of representative claims, this paper relies on representative claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; De Wilde, 2013) as a specific form of quantitative content analysis. We focus on five issues that can be considered particularly challenging to the classic model of state-bound representative democracy and the standard account of political representation. The five issues are climate change, migration, human rights, trade and regional integration. They are all related to globalization in the broad sense of focusing on border-crossing human interaction and its consequences. Each features domestic and foreign political actors making authoritative decisions in opaque accountability settings that affect constituencies at national and international level. Since the quality of representation in such policy issues can therefore be considered particularly problematic (Bray, 2011; Näsström, 2015), they are imperative to study. Besides all being related to globalization and involving challenging problems to representation, these five issues have very little in common. The inclusion of these five issues serves to prevent a bias in the findings as a result of focusing on one particular policy question.

The dataset contains representative claims made in 16 left and right newspapers from the USA, Mexico, Germany, Poland and Turkey and in plenary debates in the European Parliament and the United Nations General Assembly on these five issues. Coding was structured by a detailed codebook and involved twenty-six variables: a) Year, b) Source, c) Claimant Type, d) Claimant Scope, e) Claimant Function, f) Claimant Nationality, g) Claimant Party, h) Action, i) Addressee Type, j) Addressee Scope, k) Addressee Function, l) Addressee Nationality, m) Addressee Party, n) Addressee Evaluation, o) Issue, p) Problem Scope, q) Position, r) Intervention, s) Object Function, t) Object Scope, u) Object evaluation, v) Justification, w)

Conflict Frame, x) Claimant Name, y) Addressee Name and z) Origin.<sup>2</sup> In short, it measures WHERE, WHEN, WHO, HOW, directed at WHOM, claims WHAT, for/against WHOSE interests and WHY. In total, the dataset contains 6.018 representative claims made between 2004 and 2011. The reliability of all variables used in the analysis is well above the normally accepted threshold of agreement of .7 (Lombard et al., 2002: 593). For further details on the coding scheme, the sampling strategy and the inter-coder reliability results, see (De Wilde et al., 2014).

To operationalize the quality of representation, each of the three components indicating variation in the quality of a representative claim – accountability, justification and conflict – are assigned values ranging from zero to three. Zero indicates complete absence of the component in the claim and three indicates the strongest contribution to democratic legitimacy. Accountability is operationalized through the addressee variable: whether the maker of a claim articulates a specific actor, organization or group who is to turn his or her policy demand into reality. If the maker directs his or her claim to an elected or electable addressee, the claim receives a value of three on this component, if the maker identifies an addressee accountable through non-electoral means such as a civil society organization, the claim is assigned a value of two on this component. If there is a non-accountable addressee, such as ‘the elite’ or ‘the European Union’, it is assigned a value of one. The value zero is assigned when there is no addressee. The assignment of numbers reflects the ease by which citizens can pass judgement on those articulated to be accountable. On justification, the claim is assigned a value of three if there is a universal moral justification such as ‘equality’, two if there is a particularistic ethical justification, one if there is an instrumental justification such as ‘to stimulate progress’ or ‘because we have to’, and zero if there is no justification. The more universal the value, the more likely it is of wide interest to the audience and thus to trigger mobilization. Finally, on conflict, a claim is assigned a value of three if the claim articulates a struggle influenced by elections such as class conflict or domestic center-periphery conflict, a value of one if there is an articulation of conflict without electoral influence, and a value of zero when the claim does not articulate conflict. Again, higher numbers reflect the ease by which citizens can inform their political response based on the representative claim. Subsequently, a simple additive Quality of Representation index (QoR) ranging from zero to nine is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Quality of Representation index [0-9]} = \text{Accountability [0-3]} + \text{Justification [0-3]} + \text{Conflict [0-3]}$$

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<sup>2</sup> Only claims in which the object evaluation was either positive or neutral have been retained for analysis, to focus exclusively on a strict interpretation of what representative claims are.

Note that the representative claims loading on the QoR are all *claims*, not just any statements in public. For example, a statement by a scientist that “global warming is happening” would not count as a claim and is therefore excluded from this analysis. It is a statement of fact, not a policy demand. As an example of a representative claim scoring low on the QoR index, consider the following: “*Two prominent senators on trade issues [Sen. Max Baucus, D-Montana and Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minnesota] yesterday filed legislation to reauthorize and expand the federal program aimed at helping manufacturing workers who have lost their jobs because of international trade.*”<sup>3</sup> (QoR = 0). It is a legislative act in which its makers (two senators) demand a policy (federal program) for an intended constituency (manufacturing workers) on a globalization-related issue (international trade) in front of an audience (Congress). But there is no articulation of who is responsible, what higher purpose is served or which opposition forces need to be bested. In contrast, consider the following example. Bavarian Minister of Social Affairs Christine Haderthauer presented an academic study on migrant integration, concluding that Bavaria was doing well. It solicited the following response: “*‘It is unacceptable to pat yourself on the back like this’, argued Renate Ackermann, Social Affairs expert for the Greens, ‘barriers to integration must be removed as soon as possible, because immigrants and their children are doing considerably worse than citizens with German roots in terms of employment, poverty, and education.’*”<sup>4</sup> This claim also contains a maker (Renate Ackermann), demanding a policy (more integration) for an intended constituency (migrants and their children) in front of an audience (the Bavarian state parliament) on a globalization-related issue (migration). In addition, the claim clearly addresses an electorally accountable actors (the Bavarian government) an electorally accountable actor, articulates a conflict that citizens can influence through elections (contrasting the Green opposition to the government) and provides a moral justification (stressing the aim for equality between migrants and citizens of German descent) (QoR = 9). Finally, consider the following example: “*Global warming could reverse decades of social and economic progress in Asia, where the threat of lack of food begins to appear and more than 2 billion people live along coasts vulnerable to the phenomenon, says a report by Oxfam and Greenpeace.*”<sup>5</sup> Here a maker (Oxfam and Greenpeace) provides a policy demand (action against climate change) through negative judgement of the state of affairs on a globalization related issue (climate change), in support of a transnational constituency (2 billion Asians) with an instrumental justification (safeguarding social and economic progress) without allocation of authority or

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<sup>3</sup> Claim coded in “Bill seeks to extend help for workers; Loss of jobs to trade eyed”, Washington Times, 5 January 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Claim coded in “Zuwanderer machen Bayern jünger“, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 8 October 2010 [author’s translation].

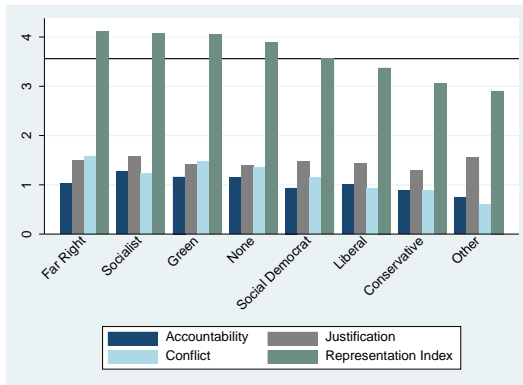
<sup>5</sup> Claim coded in “El cambio global revertirá décadas de progreso en Asia”, La Jornada, 20 November 2007 [author’s translation]

articulation conflict (QoR = 2). All 6,018 claims have a value on the QoR, ranging from 0 to 9 with a mean of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 2.41.

## Findings

In the following, I will first discuss the descriptives from different perspectives. How do the claims of different political parties score on the QoR index? What kind of claims do non-partisan actors make? Do national actors make claims with more information than international actors? Does it matter in which medium a claim is featured? Any variation in the overall quality of representative claims along these dimensions may shed new light on the challenges the liberal world order faces. Should there be no systematic variation, then the idea to measure the quality of claims in this way has little traction in the debate about democratic legitimacy. Following a descriptive overview, we therefore conduct a multivariate analysis to isolate differences among makers, controlling for a variety of contextual factors.

Graph 1: Distribution of QoR Scorings by Party Affiliation of Maker



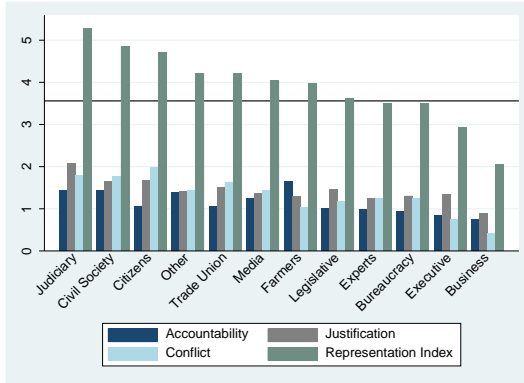
In partisan terms, it is clearly noticeable how fringe parties on both the left and the right outperform mainstream parties. Far Right, Socialist and Green parties appear to make the best representative claims. In

comparison, the Social Democratic, Liberal and Conservative mainstream parties are close to or below the total mean. Note finally the underperformance of other partisan actors. These are mostly elected or authoritarian partisan representatives from non-Western countries, to the extent that their nature defies classification in the main Western political party family typology.

These initial findings are both surprising and disturbing. While there is a substantive literature on the rise of far right populist parties in the West, the data presented here sheds new light on their success. Could it be that part of their success, and that of other fringe parties, lies in the mobilizing power of their claims? The answer to this question is beyond the present paper, but the data present here clearly show a difference in the practice of making representative claims across parties. Parties that represent ideologies critical of the current liberal world order (Steger, 2005) – either because they argue it is not cosmopolitan enough or because they argue in favor of renationalization – tend to produce more informative claims than parties deeply associated with the world as it is organized today.

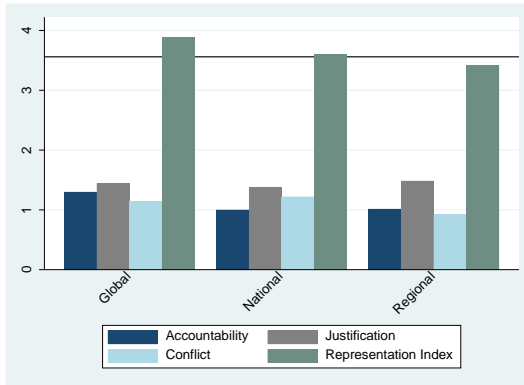
Unelected representatives tend to have no party affiliation. Graph 1 shows that unelected representatives in make above average representative claims. Ranked from making on average the best representative claims to those making the worst, we find that the judiciary, civil society representatives such as spokes persons for Amnesty International, Greenpeace or Doctors Without Borders, and individual citizens outperform other types of claim makers. Thus, they perform a key role in representative democracy. Classic interest groups such as trade unions and farmers' associations also provide comparatively informative claims. Further special attention should be directed to representatives of the judiciary and ordinary citizens as good representative claim makers. No other category of claim makers provides justifications as well as the judiciary does while citizens outperform all other claim makers in terms of articulating conflict. Business representatives, experts and executive actors, make claims of low value in comparison.

Graph 2: Distribution of QoR Scorings by Function of Maker



This analysis shows that elected representatives do not fall into one group in terms of the quality of representative claims they make. While parliamentarians perform above average, government representatives in the executive perform very poorly. Again, we see that actors most closely associated with the liberal world order – executives, experts and business representatives – are outperformed in making representative claims by actors who are typically critical of the status quo, like civil society actors and trade unions.

Graph 3: Distribution of QoR Scorings by Scope of Maker

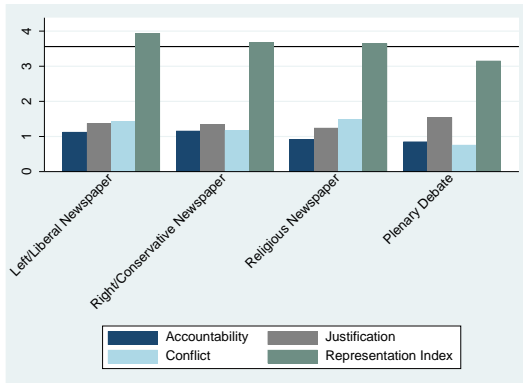


Could it be that these differences are in fact a by product of the location and contextual factors of the claims? To investigate, we now turn to the territorial level at which the maker of a claim operates – national, regional or global – and the forum in which the claim features – newspapers of political orientation and plenary debates. Clearly, differences in the quality of representative claims made by global, regional and national actors exist, with international actors slightly outperforming national ones. The idea that national actors make better claims because they are more likely to be electorally punished should thus be reconsidered. As the world turns into a system of multi-level governance, we observe political actors at all levels taking up democratic concerns and articulating highly informative and thus mobilizing representative claims.

When investigating the quality of representation across different institutional forums, there is no support for the expectation that plenary parliamentary debates feature higher quality representative claims than newspapers. The averages on the index in all sources are very close to the total mean. Even if journalists and editors reduce the complexity of a claim to sound bites, it appears little of the crucial information for the quality of representation is lost. If anything, plenary debates feature lower quality claims than newspapers. It appears contextual factors have an effect on the quality of representative claims, with claims on the global stage outperforming national ones and claims reported in left or liberal newspapers outperforming plenary debates. To be sure, however, we will now conduct multivariate analysis.

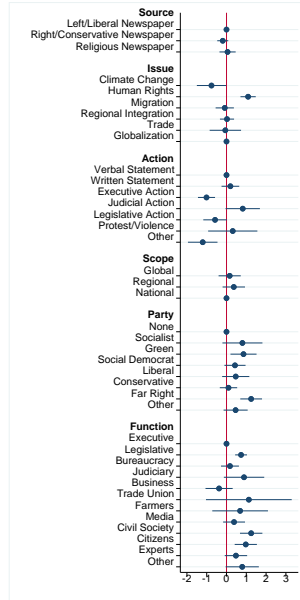


Graph 4: Distribution of QoR Scorings by Forum



The data is nested in the sense that each claim is made in one of seven public spheres: UN General Assembly debates, European Parliament debates or the mass media of Germany, Turkey, the USA, Poland or Mexico. These very different contexts in which claims are nested might have effects on the way claims are made. From a theoretical point of view, a fixed effects panel model is the optimal model, since I have not theorized any correlation between meta level variables and the quality of representation. To check for the statistical validity of such model choice, I compared a normal OLS regression to fixed and random effects GLS models. A Breusch and Pagan Lagrangian multiplier test reveals no random meta level effects ( $\chi^2 (1) = 0.00$ ,  $\text{prob} > \chi^2 = 1.00$ ) which indicates a normal OLS regression is possible and no random effects model required. However, a modified Wald test for groupwise heteroskedasticity test reveals significant variance between the groups. The probability for homoscedasticity is negligible ( $\chi^2 (7) = 99.58$ ,  $\text{prob} > \chi^2 = 0.00$ ). Furthermore, a standard Hausman test reveals the better fit of a fixed effects model ( $\chi^2 (33) = 294.67$ ,  $\text{prob} > \chi^2 = 0.00$ ). Thus, a fixed effects model with robust standard errors to compensate for heteroscedasticity is statistically the optimal model. Graph 5 below shows the result of this model, in which the claims of makers of different parties and types can be compared while controlling for various contextual factors.

Graph 5: Fixed Effects GLS Regression Models on Quality of Representation



$R^2$ -within = .159;  $R^2$ -between = .006;  $R^2$ -overall = .129; N = 6018; BIC 26934.6

The model shows the main findings of this study as follows. The initial effects of the source in which a claim features disappear in multivariate analysis. Claims in different kinds of newspapers do not deviate from each other significantly. Plenary debates have been omitted from the model for reasons of multicollinearity, but we can interpret their effects in terms of the nature of the makers of the claim later. There is, however, no major difference in terms of size of the effect between forums on the quality of

representative claims. We see that claims on human rights score higher on the representation index than claims on climate change. Thus, globalization related issues that have a clear bearing on human individuals tend to yield highly informative claims in terms of representation than abstract, technical, scientific or purely economic issues. Furthermore, we find that executive actions such as migrant deportations yield lower quality claims than most other types of actions. On the other hand, legal actions such as court rulings or lawsuits tend to score high on the QoR index. This also makes sense since such actions will require clear identification of the affected parties and their standing and justification at least to identify the relevant laws that have a bearing on the case. By including these control variables, we thus avoid a conclusion that a particular maker of claims generates higher quality claims than others because he or she tends to talk about an issue that has a clearer human interest dimension than others or because he or she tends to present claims in forms that allow for more elaborate provision of information.

Most importantly, when controlling for such contextual factors, the analysis reveals striking findings about the quality of claims by different actors. The findings clearly show that global and regional actors do not underperform in comparison to national level actors. The implications of this are far reaching. It implies that global civil society and representatives of international organizations make claims that are as good as those of national representatives. The idea that these are distant, unaccountable technocrats needs to be rethought if you follow the constructivist turn in representation and the logic of assessment presented here. If this is a surprising finding, the effects of partisan affiliation of claim makers are even more surprising. Clearly, actors at the extremes of the new structural conflict over globalization (Kriesi et al., 2008; Hooghe and Marks, 2018) – Greens and the far right – make higher quality claims than those in the mainstream middle. When we combine this with the function of claim makers, the picture becomes even more compelling. Legislative actors – parliamentarians, backbenchers and opposition members – clearly outperform executive actors like government ministers in terms of representation. Even controlling for the function they occupy, the Greens and the far right make superior representative claims in comparison to representatives of social democratic, liberal and conservative parties. The Green and far right partisan advocates of people in the Western world who are – or consider themselves to be – losers of globalization (Fligstein, 2008; Teney et al., 2014; Kriesi et al., 2012; Kriesi et al., 2008) may thus make a key contribution to revitalizing representative democracy. There appears to be a negative correlation between the extent to which an actor is associated with the liberal world order and how high they score on the QoR index. Key supporters of the liberal world order like mainstream political parties, executives, bureaucracy, experts and business representatives make claims that score lower than those of challengers: fringe party

representatives, trade unions and civil society. These findings hold when controlling for a variety of contextual factors.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusions

Political theorists have recently reconceptualized what one of its key underpinning principles – political representation – means (Saward, 2010; Disch, 2011; Kuyper, 2016; Montanaro, 2018). This reconceptualization is partly driven by the challenge that globalization presents to the classic state-based standard account of representation. Rather than focusing on descriptive representation or principal-agent relations, the new constructivist perspective sees representation as a dynamic process between representatives claiming to represent certain constituencies and responses from the audience and the intended constituencies either supporting or denouncing such claims. This raises the question whether we can discern a difference in quality of representative claims.

Building on the ‘citizen standpoint’ developed by Michael Saward (2010) and elaborated by Lisa Disch (2015), I argue that we can provide a normative assessment of representative claims based on the information criterion. Attention is directed at relevant information that a representative claim can, but need not, contain. As documented by empirical representative claims analysis projects, such optional information lies in the attribution of accountability, the provision of a justification, and the identification of the conflicting sides. The article introduces a quality of representation index based on the presence and values of these three key claim components and proceeds to analyze globalization debates in the UN General Assembly, European Parliament, German, US, Mexican, Polish and Turkish newspapers on the issues of climate change, human rights, migration, trade and regional integration between 2004 and 2011.

As indicated in descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis, representative claims made by actors closely associated with the liberal world order contain significantly less information and are thus of lower quality than those made by challengers. This paper documents how the actors revitalizing representative democracy through high quality representative claims include international civil society organizations like Oxfam, but also far right and Green parties, as well as trade unions and individual citizens. Challengers of the liberal world order – not its proponents – are in this perspective making the best contribution to representative democracy.

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<sup>6</sup> To control for artificial effects due to the way the QoR index is calculated, I ran robustness checks on the full model with various other operationalizations. The findings remain robust.

From the constructivist perspective of representative claims-making, democracy is far from dead or over in the age of globalization (cf. Tormey, 2015; Keane, 2009). Many actors in the public sphere – elected and unelected – frequently engage in making representative claims and a large number of them are of high quality. Those of us who would like to see representative democracy thrive need not despair, there is high quality representation going on. However, this article presents a wake-up call to defenders of the liberal world order. The low quality of their claims in public debate might contribute to the crisis of legitimacy of the system they stand for. If defenders of liberalism want to defend the status quo, executives, experts and business representatives may need to make more mobilizing claims. They need to articulate more clearly who is responsible for what, to what end, and as part of which societal struggle.

Clearly, this contribution advances theoretical arguments that deserve further scrutiny. To enable rigorous empirical analysis, very clear criteria have been defined and quantified to differentiate the quality of representative claims. The information criterion as such, the identification of three factors of variance therein, their equal treatment as well as the exact weighing of different values on these factors can all be questioned from a normative theoretical perspective. Hopefully, the precise operationalization here triggers such theoretical debate about the quality of representative claims. Also, the effects of claims on audiences requires further study. This article theorizes that highly informative claims carry more mobilizing potential, but this has yet to be tested in solid empirical research. Research on representative claims and their relation with democracy is still in its infancy. Be that as it may, the empirical observation presented here that there is substantial and significant variation in the nature of representative claims made by different actors should trigger further academic thinking about the respective quality of these claims and their effect on the legitimacy of liberal democracy and the liberal world order.

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## Appendix: Full Regression Results

	model1 b/se	model2 b/se	model3 b/se
SOURCES			
Left/Liberal Newspaper	0.000 (.)		0.000 (.)
Right/Conservative Newspaper	-0.264 (0.13)		-0.190 (0.11)
Religious Newspaper	0.040 (0.20)		0.053 (0.17)
Plenary Debate	0.000 (.)		0.000 (.)
ISSUES			
Climate Change	-0.851* (0.33)		-0.759* (0.30)
Human Rights	1.153** (0.21)		1.091*** (0.16)
Migration	-0.066 (0.23)		-0.089 (0.19)
Regional Integration	-0.059 (0.20)		0.025 (0.15)
Trade	-0.258 (0.43)		-0.059 (0.32)
Globalization	0.000 (.)		0.000 (.)
ACTIONS			
Verbal Statement	0.000 (.)		0.000 (.)
Written Statement	0.244 (0.22)		0.195 (0.18)
Executive Action	-1.334*** (0.17)		-1.011** (0.18)
Judicial Action	1.081 (0.53)		0.819 (0.35)
Legislative Action	-0.570 (0.30)		-0.578 (0.24)
Protest/Violence	0.634 (0.45)		0.315 (0.51)
Other	-1.306* (0.36)		-1.202** (0.30)
SCOPE			
Global		0.190 (0.25)	0.160 (0.23)
Regional		0.319 (0.27)	0.368 (0.23)
National		0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
PARTY			

None		0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
Socialist		0.861 (0.51)	0.804 (0.41)
Green		0.911* (0.27)	0.858* (0.27)
Social Democrat		0.457 (0.29)	0.428 (0.22)
Liberal		0.520 (0.33)	0.465 (0.28)
Conservative		0.096 (0.26)	0.100 (0.18)
Far Right		1.141** (0.29)	1.245** (0.22)
Other		0.411 (0.34)	0.460 (0.25)
FUNCTION			
Executive		0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
Legislative		0.890** (0.16)	0.735*** (0.12)
Bureaucracy		0.484 (0.23)	0.175 (0.18)
Judiciary		2.302* (0.66)	0.885 (0.42)
Business		-0.653* (0.25)	-0.376 (0.28)
Trade Union		1.081 (0.80)	1.128 (0.88)
Farmers		0.771 (0.59)	0.688 (0.57)
Media		0.832 (0.36)	0.381 (0.23)
Civil Society		1.843** (0.33)	1.246** (0.23)
Citizens		1.700** (0.35)	0.973** (0.23)
Experts		0.582 (0.34)	0.476 (0.23)
Other		1.208 (0.53)	0.794 (0.34)
constant	3.397*** (0.22)	2.561*** (0.37)	2.552*** (0.30)
R2-Within	0.124	0.076	0.159
R2-Between	0.037	0.091	0.006
R2-Overall	0.119	0.066	0.129
N	6018	6018	6018
BIC	26616.1	26934.6	26372.6

\* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001