

Conceptions of Democracy and Styles of Representation Among Legislators in the United States and Germany

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ABSTRACT

Who do elected representatives represent? They are often expected to represent the whole society as well as their party and their constituency, but how do they decide where interests and preferences conflict? There is a wide amount of research on styles of representation among representatives, distinguishing between trustees, party delegates and voter delegates, but most studies focus on system, party and career variables as determinants while individual normative convictions towards democracy are rarely included. Like citizens, representatives can have different understandings of democracy that can be expected to affect their behaviour as democratic actors. Thus, this paper explores how conceptions of democracy – focusing on liberal elitist and populist majoritarian attitudes – affect representatives' styles of representation. The analyses are based on novel data from a survey of legislators in Germany and the United States. Indeed, the results show that the conceptions of democracy play a key role in both cases. While liberal elitist conceptions are associated with the trustee style, populist majoritarian conceptions are associated with the voter delegate style.

KEYWORDS


Democracy; elites; legislatures; representation; survey research

Introduction

Representative democracy is increasingly diagnosed to be in a crisis (cf. Przeworski, 2019) and although this claim remains contested, we can indeed observe a decline in core features of democracy such as political participation as well as trust in political institutions (Krause & Merkel, 2018). Against this background, investigating the relationship between elected representatives and the represented is more important than ever. How do representatives view their role as representatives? How do they go about representing their constituencies? And what determines their style of representation?

Styles of representation have been studied for more than six decades and are most commonly divided into three categories: the independent trustee, the voter delegate and the party delegate (Converse & Pierce, 1986). Research on the determinants of

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these styles mostly focuses on the political system, particularly the electoral system, as well as the party system and the political career of legislators as explanatory variables, thereby assuming that the style of representation is mostly a tactical, rational position legislators adopt in response to their political reality. The influence of legislators' normative convictions, specifically their conceptions of democracy, is mostly overlooked. Investigating this influence is particularly important in the current times, in which both the concept of representation and the concept of democracy are increasingly contested and where existing institutional orders are commonly diagnosed to be in crisis.

Conceptions of democracy have been a growing area of research in recent years where the focus has been mostly on liberal representative conceptions followed by populist and direct notions of democracy (König et al., 2022). These competing conceptions contain clear preferences regarding representation, with the former endorsing independent elite decision-making, while the latter advocates for a more direct realisation of citizens' majority preferences. Assuming that legislators try to avoid cognitive dissonances, one should therefore expect their conceptions of democracy to be highly correlated with their individual style of representation. To investigate this connection, this paper analyses novel data from a survey of German and US legislators in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

The German case and the US case are well suited for this study because of their very different political systems with regards to both the electoral and the party system, which existing research often assumes to bear strong structural incentives for different styles of representation. Therefore, this case selection allows for an investigation of the correlation between conceptions of democracy and styles of representation in two different political contexts, which should increase the validity of eventual findings.

The following section gives an overview of the theoretical background and existing research, including representational roles in general and styles of representation specifically as well as research on conceptions of democracy, resulting in two hypotheses. The third section outlines the data source, the operationalisation of important variables and the methodological approach. Section 4 presents the results of the analyses, examining the correlation between conceptions of democracy and styles of representation. The paper ends with a short discussion of the results and concludes that there is a significant correlation in both political contexts, with liberal elitist conceptions of democracy promoting the trustee style of representation and populist majoritarian conceptions of democracy promoting the voter delegate style of representation.

Theoretical Background and State of the Art

Representation is arguably one of the most contested and evolving concepts in politics as well as in political science. One of the most fundamental works in this regard is provided by Hanna Pitkin who defined representation as 'acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them' (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209) meaning that representatives should be able to make their decisions independently, but that they also should not act contrary to the preferences of the represented unless there are good reasons for it. This somewhat loose definition can and should be understood as the 'outer limits' (Pitkin, 1967, p. 210) of representation. Therefore, it still allows for a wide variety of more specific definitions and, accordingly, various normative ideas of what constitutes good representation to compete with each other.

One side of this debate, which focuses more heavily on the independence of representatives and less on their responsiveness, is usually exemplified by Burke (1777). In his understanding, a representative should always work in the interest of the nation as a whole and, in doing so, should not be obliged to follow specific instructions by the represented. This conception is not just a focal point of normative discussions around representation, but also an important foundation for empirical research on different understandings of representation. Based on Burke, research on representational role orientations differentiates between two dimensions: the question of who is represented – in his case the entire nation – and the question of how the representative represents this group.

Styles of Representation

The foundation for modern research on representational roles was provided in 1959 by Heinz Eulau, John Wahlke, William Buchanan and Leroy Ferguson. They labelled the two dimensions of representational roles as focus and style of representation and contributed a first typology based on empirical results from interviews with legislators. Focusing on the style of representation, they distinguish between the Burkean trustee style which expects representatives to only follow their own conscience and judgements, on the one hand, and the delegate style which views representatives as mere spokespersons bound to the preferences of their electorate, on the other hand. Additionally, they establish a mid-point category – the politico – for representatives who expressed both orientations in their answers to their open-ended questions (Eulau et al., 1959).

This typology posed two problems for further empirical research. First, the three categories are problematic from a theoretical point of view, since according to Pitkin you cannot completely separate a representative from the will of the represented, nor completely bind them to it without leaving the realm of representation (Pitkin, 1967). In this regard, the trustee and the delegate category must be understood as inherently conditional and legislators cannot be expected to behave strictly as one or the other, but rather to express a preference for an ideal form of behaviour. Therefore, a separate mid-point category is not helpful. This is particularly true when the typology is transferred to close-ended question designs, since a midpoint offers an easy opportunity to leave the question essentially unanswered and to avoid potentially socially undesirable answers. This might explain the sharp increase of the share of politicians over the years in surveys that offer this option (e.g. Andeweg & Thomassen, 2005).

A second problem of the Eulau et al. typology is the omission of the role of the party and its leadership in representatives' decision-making. To put it bluntly, the bipolarity of this model reflects competing ideas of parliamentarism in Edmund Burke's times, but is unfit to capture the parliamentary reality of legislators since the transformation towards mass party democracy (cf. Manin, 1997). Philip Converse and Roy Pierce attempted to solve this problem by splitting the delegate category into two poles in their 1986 study of representation in France. They distinguished between voter delegates bound to the will of their constituents and party delegates obliged to follow their party leadership (Converse & Pierce, 1986).

This tripolar classification without a midpoint category has become the most common operationalisation of styles of representation, at least in the European context. Over the years, there have been several studies looking at representational roles and styles of

representation, specifically, among representatives in Europe and beyond, although most of them focused on descriptive findings or the congruence of preferences of citizens and legislators. The earliest findings in the afore-mentioned landmark studies as well as in later research up until the start of this century reported a dominance of the trustee style in US politics (Eulau et al., 1959) while the party delegate style appeared to prevail in continental Europe, for example in France (Converse & Pierce, 1986) or Spain (Méndez-Lago & Martínez, 2002).

Nevertheless, more recent studies with a broader scope have shown a more diverse picture across Europe. Brack et al. (2012) found that representatives did not feel strongly bound by the party position in Belgium, Portugal and even France, indicating a shift away from previous findings. An even broader study by Dudzińska et al. (2014) shows that while the party delegate style is still dominant in a number of European countries, there is another group of countries where the trustee style is most common. The voter delegate style, on the other hand, is not particularly prevalent in any of the surveyed European countries. Looking at a number of similar studies, the results are not unequivocal for each individual country but they mostly show the Trustee or the party delegate style to be dominant in Western Europe while the voter delegate style is usually the exception (Önnudóttir, 2014, 2016; Önnudóttir & von Schoultz, 2021; Sudulich et al., 2020).

When looking at the determinants of the style of representation, most studies take a comparative perspective and therefore focus on characteristics of the political system as explanatory variables. Theoretically, McLean (1991) argued that proportional representation is connected to a microcosm understanding of representation, which can be viewed as somewhat of a blend of descriptive representation and a delegate conception. Majoritarian electoral systems should be related to a principal-agent understanding and therefore promote a trustee style of representation, given that one agent has to represent many principals. Empirical results appear to back this argument. Dudzińska et al. (2014) found that the electoral system had a strong correlation with styles of representation with a majority system being associated with an increased likelihood of the trustee style, although the likelihood also increased with a higher district magnitude. On the other hand, more recent studies by Önnudóttir and von Schoultz (2021) and Sudulich et al. (2020) reported an increased likelihood of the party delegate style with a higher district magnitude. Moreover, they did not find significant correlations of the style of representation with the electoral system itself.

Other studies on roles and behaviour of legislators, not focused on styles of representation specifically, also found correlations with system variables. André et al. (2014) reported the district magnitude to be negatively correlated with legislators' constituency orientations. On the other hand, van Vonna et al. (2014) show the district magnitude to be associated with higher party discipline. Overall, it appears evident that the system context influences representational roles and behaviour of legislators, including styles of representation, but the details seem to be ambiguous, making the search for alternative explanations worthwhile.

A number of these studies also investigated individual effects such as political experience and the usual demographic control variables. Looking at ideological stances, some studies included the left-right scale with regard to the legislators' self-placement or placement in relation to their party, again providing mixed results (Janssen et al., 2019;

Önnudóttir & von Schoultz, 2021; Sudulich et al., 2020). This ambiguity could indicate that substantial political attitudes are not driving representational roles. Instead, it could be worthwhile to analyse the relationship between the style of representation, widely understood as a quite specific attitude bordering on behaviour, and more fundamental attitudes towards democracy itself. One notable contribution indicating such a connection is a study by Lewandowsky (2020) on Greece which links the voter delegate style with populism. However, this finding does not provide insight on conceptions of democracy in a broader sense and has a limited regional scope. This paper aims to expand on that by looking at legislators' conceptions of democracy as a more comprehensive attitudinal pattern and in a comparative perspective.

Conceptions of Democracy

In his 'Theory of Justice', Rawls distinguishes between differing conceptions of justice and a core concept of justice, defined as the common ground of the various conceptions (Rawls, 1977). As argued by Landwehr and Steiner (2017), this framework can also be applied to understandings of democracy. In recent years, there has been a wide amount of research on these different conceptions of democracy among citizens, and to a lesser extent, among elites, but the results are usually difficult to compare due to different conceptions and operationalisations. König et al. (2022) systematically analysed 98 studies over the span of three decades and identified six conceptions that come up regularly. However, two of those can arguably be discarded. First, authoritarian democracy as defined by the authors is not really a conception of democracy, but a rejection of it. Second, the concept of substantive democracy is entirely focused on outcomes and not really on procedural questions. This leaves us with four conceptions of democracy that are particularly prevalent: liberal or representative democracy, stealth or technocratic democracy, direct democracy and populist democracy (König et al., 2022).

Arguably, these can be further grouped into two strands of theory. On the one hand, we see a notion of democracy allowing for little participation of citizens beyond voting in elections. Instead, it focuses on decision-making by elites, considered to be more competent than ordinary citizens. Hence, it endorses the traditional institutions of our liberal representative system as well as more technocratic features, while being sceptical of more participatory innovations. This liberal elitist conception can be understood as a blend of rather classical elitist democratic theory as embodied by Schumpeter (1950), current, more radical takes as put forward by Brennan (2017), as well as more moderate technocratic preferences, most commonly labelled as stealth democracy (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).

On the other hand, we see a populist conception of democracy demanding more direct participation and unchecked majority rule. It is the obvious counterpart to the liberal elitist conception as it is largely based on anti-elitism (Canovan, 1999), which is combined with a strong anti-pluralism, calling for more sovereignty of the people understood as a homogeneous group (Mudde, 2004). In practice, this popular will is usually equated with majority will, making majoritarianism another important pillar of this populist majoritarian conception of democracy (Steiner & Landwehr, 2018).

While these two conceptions are rarely studied next to each other (König et al., 2022), there still is a number of studies including both. An explorative study of citizens'

conceptions of democracy by Landwehr and Steiner (2017) reports a populist majoritarian conception as well as a conception endorsing representative democracy and calling for little citizen participation, which they call the trustee model of democracy, indicating a strong connection with styles of representation. Another study on citizens' conceptions of democracy by Kriesi et al. (2016) focuses on a scale of liberal democracy, but also investigates alternative models of democracy, including direct democracy, finding that some people combine preferences for both. Looking at studies with an elite perspective, these two conceptions are more commonly the sole focus. For example, Heinelt (2013) makes the distinction between participatory and representative democracy in his study of local councillors. Similarly, Engler et al. (2022) differentiate between participatory and liberal principles of democracy in an analysis of party press releases. This paper will also focus on these two conceptions of democracy, differentiating between a liberal elitist and a populist majoritarian one. However, since these conceptions are largely defined by their opposite opinions on the role of the elites on the one hand and citizen involvement on the other hand, they will be treated as the opposite poles of a single conception of democracy continuum.

A legislator's normative conception of democracy and their aspired style of representation can be understood as an interrelated pair of cognitions in accordance with the theory of cognitive dissonance originally put forward by Leon Festinger in 1965. He defined cognition as 'any knowledge, opinion, or belief about the environment, about oneself or about one's behavior' (Festinger, 1965, p. 3). The theory's core tenet is that any person will try to reduce and avoid any kind of dissonance among these cognitions. Today, the mere mismatch between two cognitions is labelled as a cognitive inconsistency while dissonance refers to the discomfort resulting from such a mismatch (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). Based on Festinger's theory, we should expect conceptions of democracy and styles of representation to be consonant with one another. This would lead us to expect a liberal elitist conception of democracy to be associated with the trustee style of representation, while a rather populist majoritarian conception should be correlated with the voter delegate style.

Social desirability could complicate the analysis of this connection by means of survey research. Legislators could be inclined to report a style of representation dissonant with their conception of democracy if they consider their actually preferred style of representation to be socially undesirable. However, we can assume that this would predominantly affect the party delegate style, which might be seen as socially undesirable in times of increased anti-establishment attitudes, particularly in the United States. The alternatives appear to be less socially undesirable with the voter delegate style signalling high responsiveness and the trustee style signalling independent thinking and – in the German case – adherence with the requirements of the constitution. Therefore, analyses of the relationship between the conception of democracy and these two styles of representation should not be heavily affected by social desirability concerns.

Hypotheses

Against the backdrop of the theoretical reflections above, we can expect a correlation between a legislator's conception of democracy as a rather diffuse attitude and the

style of representation as a more specific attitude and an indicator of legislative behaviour. Specifically, one can expect two opposite sets of attitudes – a liberal elitist conception and a populist majoritarian one – to relate to the representational styles of legislators. A liberal elitist conception is expected to be associated with an increased likelihood of the trustee style of representation while a populist majoritarian conception should be connected to the voter delegate style, as shown for example by Lewandowsky (2020).¹

Hypothesis 1a: A liberal elitist conception of democracy is associated with an increased likelihood of a legislator adopting the trustee style of representation.

Hypothesis 1b: A populist majoritarian conception of democracy is associated with an increased likelihood of a legislator adopting the voter delegate style.

Furthermore, one should still expect differences between countries based on the system context and political socialisation of the legislators, as indicated by most of the comparative studies on styles of representation reviewed above. The data allows for a comparison of German and US legislators' conceptions of democracy and styles of representation. Based on the existing research on the individual countries and electoral system determinants in general, one would expect more party delegates in Germany and more voter delegates in the United States.

Hypothesis 2: There is a higher share of voter delegates among US legislators and a higher share of party delegates among German legislators.

Data and Method

To test these hypotheses, data from a 2022 and 2023 online survey of German and US (state) legislators is used. The survey consists of two waves, the German one conducted in 2022 resulting in a sample of 492 state and federal legislators (Landwehr et al., 2023) and the US wave conducted in 2023 resulting in a sample of 361 state legislators (Landwehr et al., 2024). The response rates of the two waves were 20.4% and 5.6% respectively. With regard to selection biases, the German subsample overrepresents newly elected legislators and underrepresents federal legislators (Appendix 1a). There are fewer indicators available for the US population of legislators, but we can observe an overrepresentation of Democratic lawmakers and of women (Appendix 1b). Accordingly, the analysis will use weights to adjust the partisan, gender, and regional biases within each of the subsamples, while seniority will be included as a control variable.²

The key dependent variable of this study is based on three discrete choice items from the survey asking respondents how a legislator should cast their vote if their own position, their party's position and/or their voters' position differ on a matter. The exact question wording is documented in Appendix 2. Legislators were characterised as trustees, party delegates or voter delegates based on which position they preferred above both alternatives.

The explanatory variable, the conception of democracy, is based on an item battery similar to the one used by Landwehr and Steiner (2017). Legislators were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with various statements on democracy on a

Table 1. Items used to measure conceptions of democracy.

Statement	N	Mean	SD
Sometimes it is better when political decisions are made behind closed doors.	791	3.48	1.89
The government should stick to planned policies, even if a majority of citizens opposes them.	763	3.65	1.71
In a democracy, there should be no elites.	821	4.77	2.02
If a large majority of citizens agree, then this indicates that the decision is correct.	804	3.18	1.53
Disputes between different interest groups in our society damage the common good.	791	2.60	1.61

Note: Data: Landwehr et al. (2023) and Landwehr et al. (2024).

7-point-scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Five items were selected that express attitudes towards elites and responsiveness as well as majoritarian and anti-pluralist attitudes (Table 1). While the first two items point towards a liberal elitist conception of democracy, the other three items point towards populist majoritarian attitudes. Another item in the battery, referencing the behaviour of legislators specifically, was purposely left out of the analysis to keep the dependent and independent variables disentangled. A confirmatory factor analysis (Appendix 3) confirmed the expected interrelation of these attitudes. Given the rather diverse mix of attitudes, the fit measures of the analysis are quite respectable. Based on this, the five items were transformed into a continuous Populism-Elitism-Index ranging from 0 to 1 with lower values indicating a rather populist majoritarian conception of democracy and higher values indicating a more liberal elitist understanding.

All models control for the standard sociodemographic variables gender, age and education. Gender was recoded into a binary measure (male/non-male). Unfortunately, age is only available as a grouped variable for the US legislators, so cohorts had to be used for all analyses. The education effects must be interpreted with caution, since education was measured differently in the two waves and the post-graduate degree of US legislators is not perfectly comparable with the doctor's degree of German legislators.³ Furthermore, the models control for seniority by including a binary variable measuring whether legislators are newly elected. Ideology measures, separating the economic and cultural dimension, are also used as controls to disentangle a populist conception of democracy from substantial policy preferences. Since country is used as an explanatory variable, the models do not control for party given the collinearity, but models including party instead of country as a robustness check can be found in Appendix 5.

Given that the dependent variable style of representation is a nominal variable, the analysis uses multinomial logistic regression models. To investigate whether the results remain stable in different political contexts, two separate multinomial logistic models were estimated for the two countries.

Results

As a first step of the analysis, it seems appropriate to look at the central variable, the styles of representation (Figure 1). While there appears to be a similar share of trustees in both countries with about 62% and 51%, there are sizable differences in the distribution of voter and party delegates. In Germany, party delegates outnumber voter delegates by a 3-to-1-ratio. In the United States, the picture is reversed and even clearer. Among US state legislators, the share of party delegates is negligible while voter delegates make

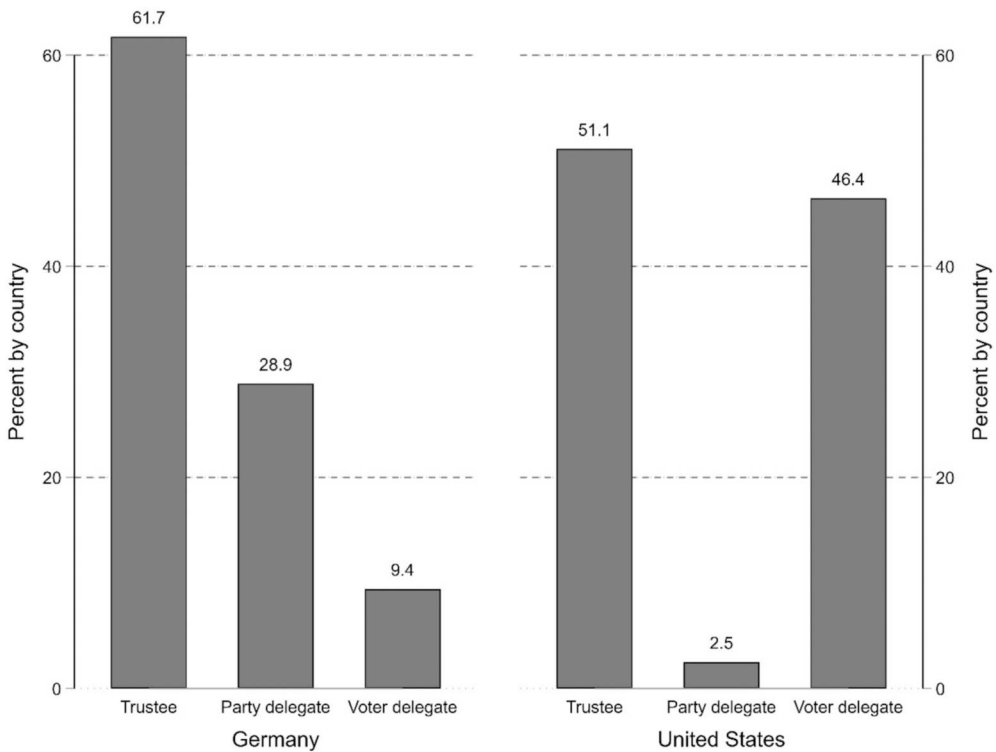


Figure 1. Styles of representation by country.

Note: $N = 312$ and 306 respectively; Weighted within subsamples (see above); the German wave included a don't know option, hence the sharper decrease of N ; Data: Landwehr et al. (2023) and Landwehr et al. (2024).

up nearly half of the sample. This is in line with the discussed existing research on these two and similar countries.

Looking at the distribution of the independent variable, the conception of democracy, over the six German and two US parties, it becomes clear that most legislators are positioned around the midpoint between the liberal elitist conception and the populist majoritarian conception (Figure 2). However, there appears to be a gap between legislators of the older and more established German parties, which lean more towards the liberal elitist end of the scale, and legislators of the German challenger parties and of both US parties, who lean more towards the populist end of the scale.

Overall, this distribution indicates that the conceptions of democracy are much less determined by the political context of the two countries than the style of representation. This makes it unlikely that the two variables are co-determined by the country context and supports the idea of analysing the correlation of the conceptions of democracy with the style of representation.

To test the hypotheses a multinomial logistic regression model was estimated with the style of representation as a tripolar dependent variable, and the conception of democracy measured in the Populism-Elitism-Index as well as country as explanatory variables. Additionally, the model controlled for seniority, ideology, gender, age cohorts, and education. The results confirm the hypotheses (Figure 3). A high score on the Populism-

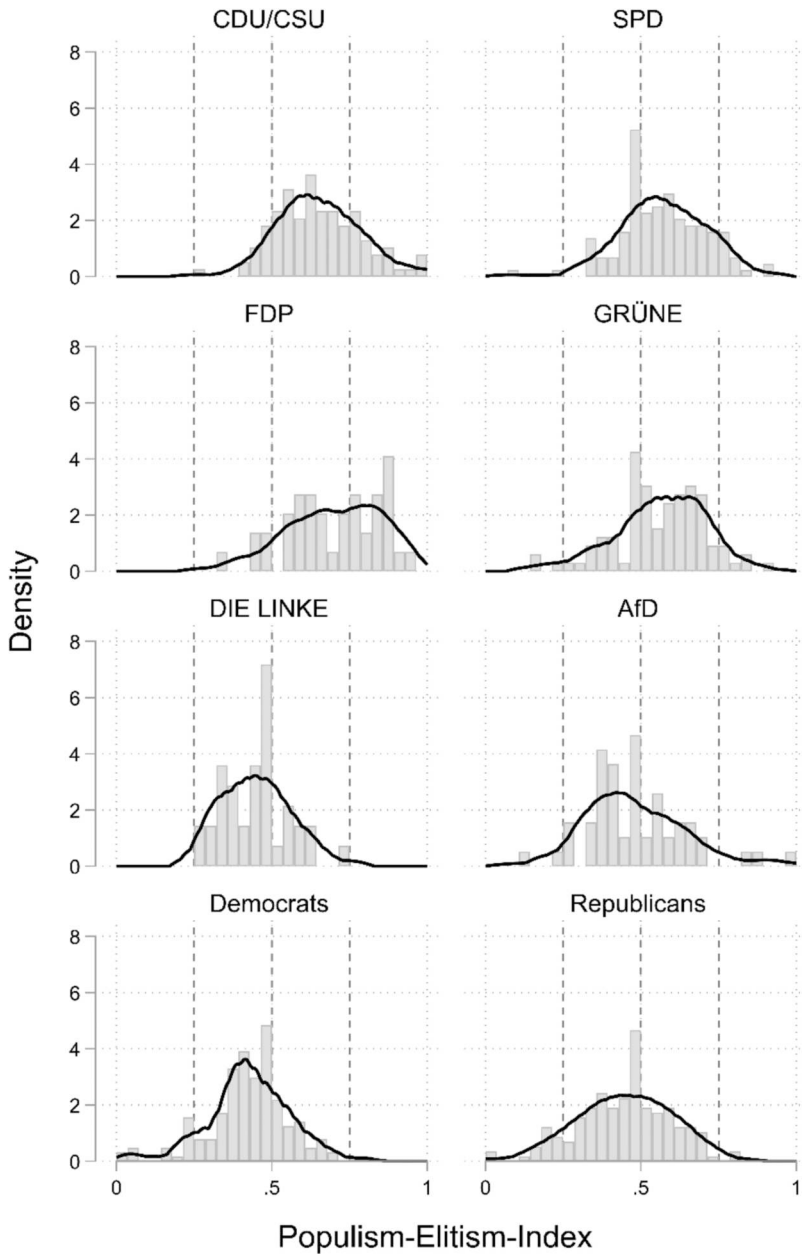


Figure 2. Histograms presenting conceptions of democracy by party. Data: Landwehr et al., (2023), Landwehr et al. (2024).

Elitism-Index, indicating a liberal elitist conception of democracy, is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of the trustee style, while a low score, indicating a populist majoritarian conception, is associated with an increased likelihood of the voter delegate style. The conception of democracy has no significant correlation with the likelihood of the party delegate style. As indicated by the existing literature, US legislators

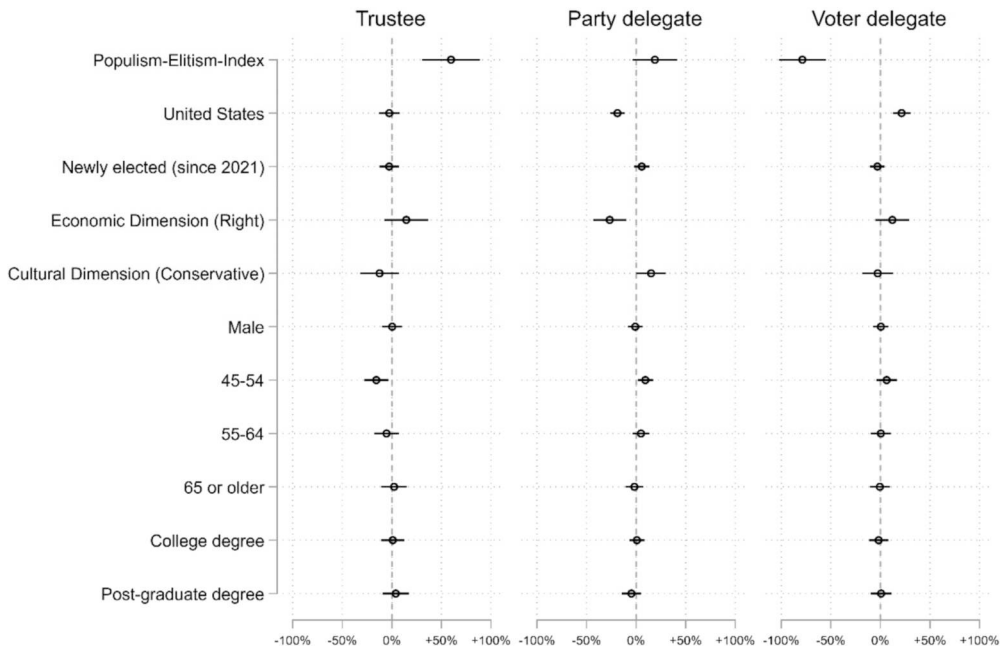


Figure 3. Average marginal effects of the conception of democracy on the style of representation. Note: Multinomial logistic regression model; $N = 570$; R -squared (ML) = .34; Reference for age cohorts: 44 or younger; Reference for education: no college degree; Weighted within subsamples (see above); Regression table in Appendix 4; Data: Landwehr et al. (2023, 2024).

are significantly less likely to follow the party delegate style and significantly more likely to identify as voter delegates than their German counterparts. The control variables barely show any significant effects, except that an economically left-wing position and a culturally conservative position are associated with increased likelihood of the party delegate style. Models controlling for party instead of country confirm the significant correlation of conceptions of democracy with styles of representation (Appendices 5a and 5b).

To illustrate these results more clearly, Figure 4 presents the predicted probabilities of the three styles of representation based on the conception of democracy. While the probability of the party delegate style appears to be relatively unaffected by the Populism-Elitism-Index, the trustee style reaches a likelihood of around 80% when respondents score highest on the index, while the voter delegate style reaches a similar likelihood when respondents score lowest on the index.

To test whether the correlation of conceptions of democracy with styles of representation actually remains stable across countries, another two multinomial logistic regression models were estimated, one for each country. Indeed, the results for the trustee style and the voter delegate style remain significant in both subsamples, while the correlation with the party delegate style is insignificant in both cases (Figure 5). Interestingly, in the US context the correlations appear to be more pronounced, and the US model also reaches a much higher R^2 . The predicted probabilities (Appendix 6b) also point towards more pronounced correlations in the US context.

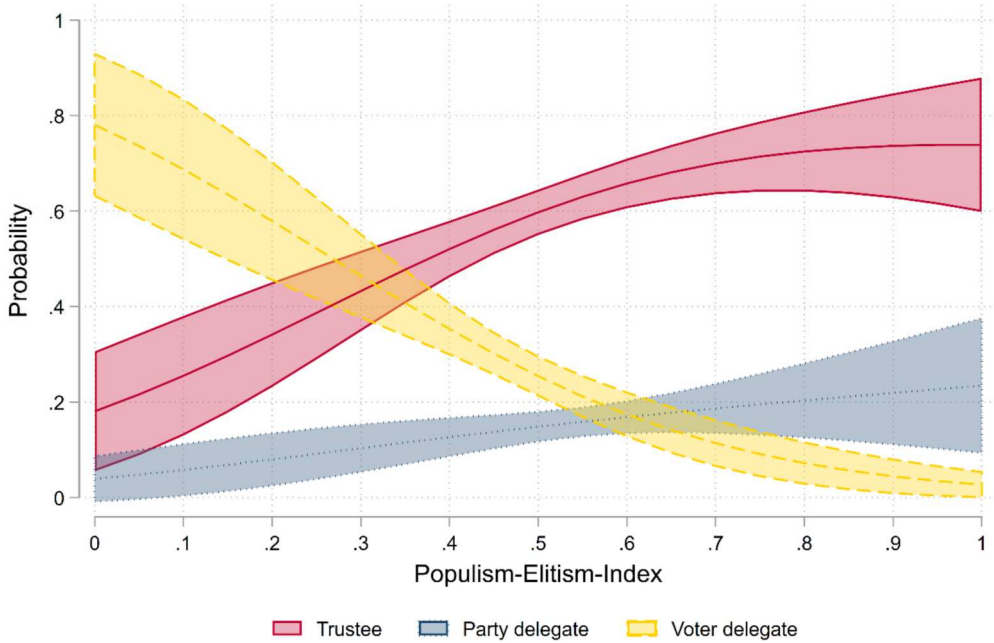


Figure 4. Predicted probability of styles of representation depending on the conception of democracy. Note: Based on multinomial logistic regression model (Figure 3); Data: Landwehr et al. (2023, 2024).

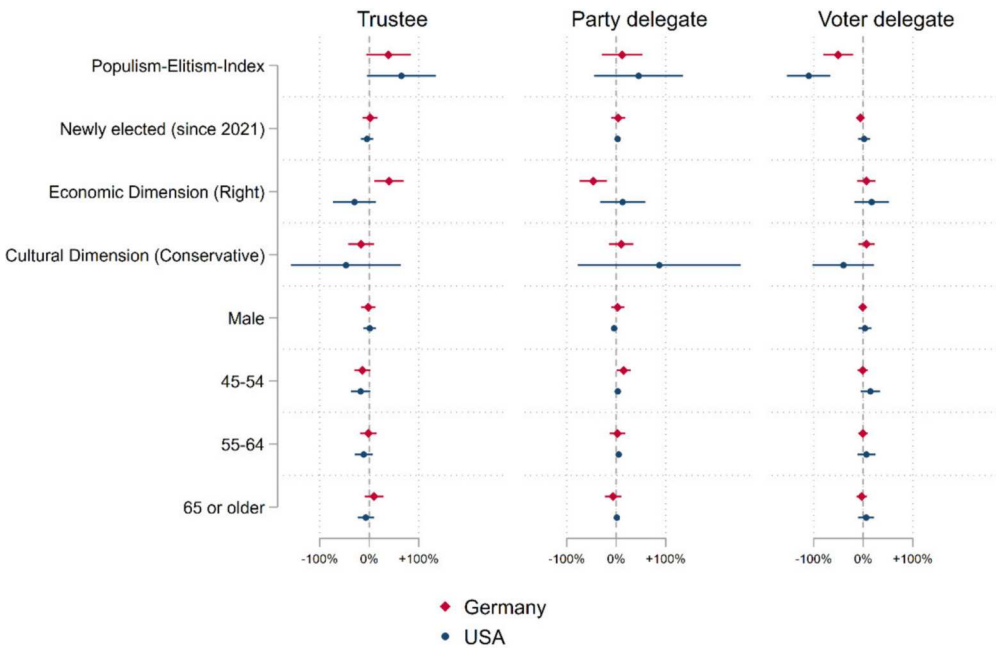


Figure 5. Average marginal effects of the conception of democracy on the style of representation in the two countries.

Note: Two separate multinomial logistic regression models; $N = 287$ and 294 respectively; R -squared (ML) = .15 and .27 respectively; Reference for age cohorts: 44 or younger; Reference for education: no college degree; Weighted within subsamples (see above); Regression table in Appendix 6a; Data: Landwehr et al. (2023, 2024).

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper analysed the connection between legislators' conceptions of democracy and their styles of representation. Based on theoretical considerations and previous research, a strong correlation between a liberal elitist conception of democracy and the trustee style of representation as well as between a populist majoritarian conception and the voter delegate style was the expectation formulated in hypotheses 1a and 1b. The corresponding regression analysis confirmed these hypotheses. Indeed, the trustee style is most likely when legislators score high on the Populism-Elitism-Index, while the opposite is true for the voter delegate style. There were no clear expectations for the party delegate style and the results also did not show any clear connection to the conceptions of democracy.

Regarding country differences, the descriptive results revealed that while more than half of all legislators preferred the trustee style in both countries, there was a clear split regarding the delegate styles, confirming Hypothesis 2. As expected, the other half of US legislators were mostly voter delegates, while the other half of German legislators had a higher share of party delegates. The regression analysis confirmed this finding. This is in line with the existing research on styles of representation which mostly attributes these differences to the different electoral systems of these countries. Of course, this could also be affected by social desirability given the particularly low trust in political parties in the United States.

Interestingly, the analysis also suggested the correlation of conceptions of democracy with styles of representation to be a bit more pronounced in the United States than in Germany. A possible explanation in line with the existing research could be that the United States' political context with weak parties and elections in single-member districts emphasises the conceptual dichotomy between trustees and voter delegates, while in the German case, strong parties and list elections might cause a situation where the trustee style is mostly seen in competition with the party delegate style, thereby weakening the correlations since the party delegate style is neither aligned with nor really contradictory to either conception of democracy. However, these possible political system and context effects cannot be tested with the data this study is based on.

All of these results are of course limited by the scope of this paper and the underlying survey which only included the United States and Germany. More research would be necessary to examine whether these findings with regards to the correlation of conceptions of democracy with styles of representation can be generalised and how they interact with different political systems. Unfortunately, the decreasing response rates in elite research and, more specifically, legislator surveys around the world are an obstacle for that. This underlines the relevance of the presented results which are based on relatively sizable samples of legislators and not just candidates. However, it remains a concern that online surveys like the one used in this study cannot strictly ensure that the survey is completed by legislators themselves. This also requires additional research using more reliable, albeit more costly, data collection methods such as phone interviews.

For the cases of Germany and the United States in particular, one could also interpret these results in the context of the rise of populism, polarisation and anti-establishment sentiments, that is occurring in both Germany and the United States but appears to be stronger or more advanced in the latter. This could have caused a bigger, more polarised

split between liberal trustees in the establishment and populist voter delegates in the United States, while German legislators, at least from the mainstream parties representing the overwhelming majority of legislators, are still largely united in their liberal elitist view of democracy.

Notes

1. There is no hypothesis regarding the party delegate style, since there are no clear expectations for this style based on conceptions of democracy.
2. The German subsample is weighted by party, gender and parliament (accounting for both regional biases and the underrepresentation of the federal level). The US subsample is similarly weighted by party, gender, region and lower or upper chamber.
3. Combining post-graduate degrees and university degrees into one category would increase the comparability but would also place more than 80% of respondents in one category.

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Notes on contributor

Leonard Häfner is doctoral researcher in the DFG-funded project ‘Conceptions of Democracy among Political Elites and Citizens’ at JGU Mainz. E-mail: haefner@politik.uni-mainz.de.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available in the Harvard Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GUVA5P>, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/3H1YYH>.

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