The nature of political representation in Spain: An empirical analysis of the perception of voters and MPs.

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1. Introduction

Political representation has been studied mainly from a theoretical perspective. As Marsh and Norris (1997: 159) state: “a comprehensive exploration of representation requires data from those who are supposed to represent and those who are to be represented”. The difficulty in obtaining these type of data partly explains the scarcity of empirical studies.

As a result, the study of political representation has been dominated by deductive approaches. The inductive use of empirical analyses so as to revise theoretical and even normative models has been very limited and the necessary dialogue between induction and deduction has not been achieved so far. The difference between normative and positive theory is less distinct than in other contexts, but this similarity is to a certain extent artificial given that it is the result of a lack of empirical analyses. In addition, when they have been done, the purpose of these empirical analysis has not been “to develop a causal model of political representation that can explain as much as possible of the empirical reality of the process of representation, but to assess to what extent political reality is consistent with the normative ideal” (Thomassen 1994: 237).

The empirical analysis of political representation is therefore a fairly recent phenomenon, which has developed parallel to the greater availability of survey data necessary to carry out analyses on the perceptions and attitudes of representatives and voters. The analysis presented in this paper is mainly based on survey data. These data make possible the study of different aspects of political representation in Spain that have not been studied before due to the lack of comparable survey data on the views of representatives and of those being represented. The two surveys upon which the core of

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1 This paper will soon be published as a chapter of the book edited by Antonia Martínez which contains a collection of chapters dealing with the Spanish lower chamber (Congreso de los Diputados). We would like to thank the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas for making available the two surveys upon which this paper is based. These are CIS Studies 2240 “Citizens and politics”, conducted in April 1997 with a sample size of 2,500 and CIS Study 2250, administered to Spanish diputados (members of the lower chamber) from September to December 1997. The response rate was 50% and a weight was applied so that the sample reflected the distribution of seats in the chamber.

2 Esaiasson y Holmberg (1996:4) point at other reasons that explain the lack of empirical analyses such as the prevalence of theoretical and normative concerns: a “it is more tempting to test the viability of a normative theory rather than to find explanations for actual behaviour”.

3 There are other studies of parliamentary elites which mainly analyse socio-demographic data (see Morán 1989, Baras 1997, Jerez 1997) but also other topics such as the political careers of MPs (see Botella 1997). There are also several studies that focus on citizen perceptions and attitudes towards Parliaments (see Montero 1989, Delgado, Martínez& Oñate 1998).
the analysis is based were administered to citizens and parliamentarians with a large number of questions in common.

These type of data can be studied to study different aspects of the process of political representation. Katz (1997) singles out three varieties of studies about parliamentary representation. Firstly, those that analyse whether parliaments are socially representative of the polity as a whole and the extent to which parliamentary elites reflect social differences as well as the consequences of the similarities/differences. The second type studies the correspondence of views between representatives and their constituents (1997: 211) on different issues. Katz distinguishes a third variety that has problematized the concept of representation, exploring the way parliamentarians conceive of their roles. He refers to this focus of analysis as “representational roles”.

The data available for this paper makes it possible to combine the two latter approaches. Thus, the main aim of this paper will be to analyse the way Spanish MPs\(^4\) conceive of their role as representatives, but also to see the correspondence between their views on this matter and those of citizens. Having two sets of data, one stemming from the deputies and another from citizens will allow us to undertake a joint analysis on the perception of deputies about the way they carry out their tasks as representatives, and the way this performance is perceived by citizens.

We are interested in answering questions such as: what or who do Spanish MPs represent in Parliament?, what are the groups they take most into account when making decisions?, what are the views of parliamentarians about voting behaviour in Parliament, about party cohesion and other questions that affect they way they perform their job, and ultimately the nature and quality of political representation?. Finally, what are the views of citizens on these issues?.

Before addressing these questions we will briefly put the Spanish case in the context of the theories of political representation that study the development of its concept throughout history. We will also go through some important aspects of Spain’s recent political history that are relevant to put in context the empirical discussion developed in the subsequent sections of the paper.

2. Spain as a party-state: the role of parties in the political system

Pitkin (1967), and more recently other authors such as Manin (1997), have studied the different meanings of political representation and the transformation experienced by this

\(^4\) The analysis refers only to the members of the lower Chamber, the Congress of Deputies (Congreso de los Diputados).
concept over the centuries. This historical account covers the passage from a medieval to a modern conception of political representation by which the individual parliamentarian went from being a delegate instructed by a constituency to develop the role of a trustee who was supposed to represent the interests of the nation according to his own judgement of the best way to do it. In that latter phase individual parliamentarians became the most important actors in Parliament.

The enfranchisement of the whole electorate acted as a catalyst for the organisation of mass parties. Political parties gradually gained in importance and control over the process of representation. However, as Thomassen points out (1994: 250), the theories of political representation had difficulty in incorporating this new phenomenon to their theories. As parties acquired importance the role of individual parliamentarians changed: they increasingly co-ordinated their actions and decisions with other parliamentarians of the same party and electoral politics turned more and more into a competition among parties, rather than a competition among candidates, even in those places where the electoral system allowed for some personal representation. The (responsible) party government model became dominant. Its main characteristics were: political parties that offer comprehensive programs to the electorate, discipline and cohesion within parties to facilitate the implementation of these programs once in office and the existence of a rational electorate who is able to distinguish among the different programs and choose according to their preferences as well as to introduce evaluative (retrospective and/or prospective) considerations in their voting decision (Thomassen 1994: 252, Manin 1997).

The historical process of transformation of political representation described by Manin and other authors is based on the analysis of countries like the United States and Great Britain, both characterised by a gradual political development characterised by the absence of sudden breaks from one phase to the other. In these cases we can expect the weight of historical legacies from previous phases to exert some inertia to changes in the way political representation was conceived in subsequent phases. From this perspective it is partly the weight of inertia that facilitates the gradual transformation of the conception of the role of parliamentarians, and in general, that of political representation. Some aspects of political representation are gradually replaced by others in a process that combines the need to adapt to a changing environment with elements of inertia to this very same transformation.

This does not mean that the models of representation that characterise each of the historical phases cannot be applied to countries with an unstable political development. On the contrary, it is interesting to study the concept of representation that is developed in countries that enter democratic life directly in a different historical phase. In those cases we can expect to find a purer manifestation of each of the elements of the concept of political representation.
representation adopted, given the little or non existent weight of inertia from previous conceptions of political representation.

Spain is one of these cases of political discontinuity and late development of democracy. The enfranchisement and participation of wide masses in politics proved problematic throughout the 19th and first part of the 20th century and the democratic regime of the II Republic gave way to a long dictatorship that finished in the mid 1970s. The transition to democracy took place in the 1970s and was characterised by the collaboration of reformist Francoist elites in favour of change with forces of the opposition with the common goal of establishing a democratic regime.

Mair (1996: 41) has studied the main differences and similarities between the two major waves of democratisation, those occurred at the first decade and those at the final decade of the twentieth century (among which the Spanish one). Although, as Mair notices, these two waves share the agency of political parties in the development of democracy as one of their important defining traits, there are differences between the two in this respect. While in the first wave parties were asserting their existence in the second they were already central organisations in established Western democracies. In the countries of the “first wave”, democratisation was accompanied by the development and greater presence in the State of political parties, while in the second phase, democratisation was promoted by parties whose presence in the political system under construction was hardly questioned.

Parties occupy a prominent role in the institutional system designed in the 1978 Spanish Constitution. In the transition to democracy parties were still weak organisations: except the Communist Party one could hardly speak of organisational structures for the rest of Spanish political parties. However, in spite of this relatively weak presence in society, party elites had a major role in the design of the new institutional system included in the 1978 Constitution.

There are different indicators of the relevance of parties. They are the main actors in the process of political representation: they make the lists of candidates for the elections and their parliamentary groups are the main actors of the legislative process. Except for local elections, where independent candidates are still fairly numerous, in the rest of elections it can be said that parties monopolise political representation. This is also the result of choices made at the time of transition when it was agreed that closed and fixed lists of candidates were the best option for an inexperienced electorate and also the option that would contribute most to the consolidation of political parties (Ollero 1994, Montero 1997).

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5 For an account of the organisational development of political parties in Spain see De Esteban&López Guerra (1982), Gunther et. al. (1986) and Gangas (1994). Pradera (1992) focuses on the relevance of parties in the Spanish political system.

6 See Liebert (1988) and Santamaría (1994) for an analysis on the relevance of parliament in the transition and consolidation of democracy in Spain.
Political parties receive public funding from the state to cover their electoral and ordinary expenses. Another indicator of the relevance of parties in the institutional system is the fact that parties, via their parliamentary groups, participate in the appointment of some of the members of the most important Spanish institutions such as the Constitutional Court, the Higher Council of the Judiciary, or the administration board of Spanish public TV and the main bodies of other important institutions.

Thus, Spanish political system clearly became, at least from an institutional perspective, a party government, and some authors even use the expression party-state. However, this presence at the State was not accompanied by a similar presence among the electorate given that parties were from the beginning characterised by their low membership levels.

There is nothing novel in stating that parties play a central role in the process of political representation in Spain or that parties are more important than individual politicians. Many studies have already done so. However, few analyses have actually questioned the “partyness” of political representation, and even fewer have examined empirical data coming from deputies and citizens to support their arguments and explore the precise manifestations of this domination of parties. The following pages will analyse survey data that will help us to answer this and more questions regarding political representation in Spain.

3. Political representation in Spain: the views of MPs and voters

3.1. The nature of political representation

Eulau et al. (1959) distinguish two variables that help us to characterise the dominant model of political representation: the focus and the style of representation. In the following lines these concepts will be defined and applied to the Spanish case.

3.1.1. The focus of representation

The focus of representation refers to the interest representatives primarily defend, those of their constituency or those of the nation. The distinction could be made in more general terms between universal and particular interests, i.e. the nation vs. the interests of any particular group, defined in territorial, ideological terms or using other criteria.

One of the most important transformations of representative government was the passage from the medieval model of representation to the concept of representative

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7 García Pelayo (1986: 90) is the Spanish author who has studied most how this definition suits the Spanish case.
mandate according to which parliamentarians represent the general interest, not just those of the voters that had voted for him/her or those of their constituencies. Under the delegate conception of representation parliaments were the forum where spokespersons from different parts of the country gathered and spoke for the interest of their districts, whereas according to the new conception of representation, parliamentarians represent the whole nation and are not linked to any particular group of individuals or to their districts. The focus of representation is different in each of these models of political representation. The consolidation of political parties added a new possible focus of representation: the partisan one.

**Graph 1. The focus of political representation**

The Spanish data show that most MPs (42%) declare to represent all Spaniards (see graph 1). However, there is also a numerous group of deputies that have a “localist” conception of their representative role and consider they primarily represent all voters in their constituency (28%). The answers given by MPs to other questions in the same survey point at the prevalence of a *localist* conception of representation. For instance, when asked to grade their activities according to their importance, a large percentage of MPs place first the task of representing the interests of their province or their region before that of representing the nation (see graph 2).

In any case, whether it is the province/region or the whole nation, a non partisan conception of representation seems to prevail among MPs when defining their representational role, given that in both questions most MPs chose options that involve all voters, either of their constituency or of the whole country. Only a minor group of deputies
have a partisan view of representation, and declare to represent the voters of his/her party (17%) and fewer say they represent their party.

Graph 2.

There are clear differences among the members of different parliamentary groups with regard to the conception of the focus of representation. The deputies of the governing right-wing party (Partido Popular), it is more frequent to find support for the universalistic model of representation (53% of its members declare to represent all Spanish citizens). Among the Socialists this is also the most popular response, but comes down to 39% and the figures are clearly lower in the rest of the groups (22%) and in the Catalan Nationalists group (10%). Localist representation (“province/region”) is the second most mentioned option by the members of the Socialist and Popular Parliamentary Groups (28 and 27% respectively) and by the members of “other parliamentary groups” (33%).

The members of the Popular Party group are those with the least partisan conception of representation. Around 19% of its members say they mainly represent their party or its voters, while this percentage goes up to 30% among the Socialist MPs and is even higher in other groups.

Graph 3.

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8 The results of all general elections held since the transition to democracy are enclosed in the appendix at the end of the paper.
9 That is, those who answer “All voters in my constituency” to the question “Whose interests do you represent primarily as an MP?”.
10 These percentages are the result of summing the response categories “The voters of my party” and “My party” of the question “Who do you represent in your parliamentary activity?” (CIS, Study 2250).
Spain is a good case to check whether parliamentarians from non-state wide parties conceive of their roles as representatives in the same manner as their fellow MPs from state-wide parties. The data available to explore this question refer only to the Catalan nationalists, given that the residual group “parliamentarians from other groups” includes MPs both from state and non-state wide parties. We expect MPs from regionalist and nationalist parties to reject a “national” model of representation and to be more prone to see themselves as representatives of the voters in their constituency, or in a more even only those of their voters. The data analysed confirm that Catalan nationalist MPs hold a clearly different conception of representation: among the MPs of this group there is a higher percentage of MPs that declare to represent their party or their party voters (60%), followed by a localist view of representation (“All voters in my district”) shared by 20% of the MPs of this group.

Graph 1 also shows the views of citizens and MPs regarding the main focus of representation. Among citizens the most widespread opinion is that deputies represent all Spaniards (42% voters). The only difference worth mentioning between citizens and deputies is that the “localist” conception of representation is much less common among citizens than among deputies.

Citizens portray an image of MPs representing the interests of their party, as opposed to the interests of voters. Among citizens the opinion that MPs defend the interests of the political party they represent in Parliament is more common than it is among deputies (24% of voters for 9% of MPs who hold this view). It seems that those 24% who think that

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11 The data of the MPs of small parliamentary groups with less than five of their MPs having completed the questionnaire have been added up in a group called “Other groups”. It comprises the MPs of United Left, Basque Nationalist Parties, Coalición Canaria and from other small regional/nationalist parties.
MPs represent their party mean the party as an organisation with its own interests that might not necessarily include those of their voters, since the other possible response category that refers explicitly to “the voters of his/her party” was chosen by a smaller number of citizens.

Further evidence along these lines may be found in the responses to other questions in the survey. For example, citizens attribute more influence over the decisions made by parliamentarians to party leaders, than they do to voters of the MP’s party, to party members, to interest groups, to voters in the MP’s electoral districts, to government and even to mass media. The comparison of these with the ones given by MPs reveals a clear gap between voters and their representatives; while only 90 percent of MPs think that they pay a great or moderate deal of attention to voters in their constituencies, this percentage goes down to 25% in the case of voters.

Table 1. Degree of attention paid by MPs to different groups/actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MPs</th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voters in their constituencies</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>-65.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders of their party</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>-12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>-44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party members</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>47.2</td>
<td>-16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass media</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>+12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other MPs of their party</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest groups</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voters of their party</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>-36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>+3.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages reflect the sum of the response categories “to a great extent” and “to some extent”. Our own elaboration. CIS Study numbers 2240 and 2250.

3.1.2. The style of representation

The style of representation refers to the criterion of judgement representatives use when deciding on legislative issues, i.e., whether representatives act as agents who follow instructions from their constituents or whether they should have the freedom to act according to their own judgement. The increasing presence of political parties in the functioning of democratic systems has brought in another consideration, namely the double nature of the link between individual deputies and voters. As Porras Nadales (1994) points out, the link between voters and representatives unfolds in two linkages: one that ties voters to parties and another that ties individual MPs to parties.

a. Voting discipline and the independence of individual MPs

The transformation of the theory of representation has altered the position of individual parliamentarians and their independence, particularly when voting on policy proposals. According to the medieval concept of representation parliamentarians were tied to the
instructions of their constituencies and acted as their delegates. With the development of representative government the parliamentarian turned into a trustee, who could decide according to his/her free judgement.

This is the conception of political representation that has remained embodied in the legislation of many Western democracies, among which the Spanish one, even if the formal recognition of the role of political parties in the process of representation has put into question the independence of individual representatives.\footnote{Garrorena (1991) has studied the evolution of the concept of political representation, focusing especially on how political parties affected the traditional concept of representation and the way this issue has been tackled in the Spanish institutional system.} Leaving aside legislative arrangements, in practice political parties have turned into the dominant actors of the representative process. However, even if many constitutions, among which the 1978 Spanish Constitution proscribe the existence of a delegate type relationship between MPs and voters, and few of them deal with the issue of the relationship between MPs and their political parties.

The independence of MPs is very related to party discipline. The existence of cohesive parties that exhibit tight discipline when voting on policy proposals has been considered as a necessary condition for the responsible party model to exist. In order to implement the proposals of their electoral manifestos, parties must behave in a cohesive manner (Thomassen 1994: 251). As a result, the independence of each representative characteristic of previous phases the development of parliamentarianism has been replaced by a co-ordinated behaviour of all parliamentarians of the same party. This has entailed a loss of relevance of the individual representative in parliamentary life.

The data provided by Spanish MPs contains information on the attitudes of parliamentarians regarding the issue of party discipline. Spanish MPs are in favour of co-ordinating their actions with the rest of members of their group, but only to a limited extent. About two thirds think discipline within parliamentary groups should be enforced when voting on some issues, but that MPs should be left the freedom to vote according to their judgement on other issues (see graph 4). About 30% is in favour of a stricter definition of party discipline that applies to all issues, and a very reduced number of MPs (4%) think deputies should always vote according to their own judgement. Among those who think that MPs should be left the freedom to vote according to their judgement sometimes, a large majority (80%) think the decision over which issues should be taken by each parliamentary group, whereas the rest prefers that the decision is taken jointly by all parliamentary groups.

Graph 4.
On the contrary, among voters the opinion that MPs should follow their own judgement when deciding on policies and laws is more popular than the idea of a strict party discipline (48% and 34% respectively). The voters - MPs comparison is not easy in this case, since the range of possible responses to this question given to citizens did not include the option “some issues should be subject to party discipline and some left to the free judgment of MPs”, which was offered to MPs.

Graph 5 shows the trends of public opinion on this matter. Citizens have been divided over this matter in two groups of roughly the same size, those in favour of party discipline and those in favour of a greater freedom for individual MPs. These groups have alternated as the preferred option all along the last half of the 1980s and during the 1990s, although the last available data show that, for the first time in the decade, there is a considerable difference in favour of the opinion that deputies should vote according to their own judgement. We should wait in order to determine whether this last result is the beginning of a new trend or just a continuation of the previous trendless fluctuation.
Another question of the survey asks voters to choose among different options regarding the meaning of party discipline. Voters are also divided in their interpretation of the meaning of the lack of party discipline. Roughly one third of voters (36%) think that the fact that some MPs vote in a different way from the rest of the members of his/her parliamentary group portrays an image of party division and lack of internal cohesion. Another third of the voters prefers to think that the lack of party discipline strengthens the position of individual MPs, while the other third think that none of the former interpretations is correct.\footnote{These were the only two options provided to interviewees. The answer “neither of the two” was only recorded if it was spontaneously given by the person interviewed.}

If we cross-tabulate the responses to these variables (attitude towards party discipline and interpretations of its meaning) we can see that the majority of voters who think MPs should vote according to their party line also think that discipline is a reflection of the internal cohesion of a party (75%). Similarly, for most of the voters who were in favour of MPs following their own judgement, that option contributes to strengthen the position of individual MPs (66%), and only a small number of them think that the lack of discipline necessarily portrays an image of division inside parliamentary groups (17%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MPs should:</th>
<th>Lack of party discipline shows:</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party division of MP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow party line........................</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow their own judgement............</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>1202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthening</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DK/NA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Cross tabulation of citizens’ views on party discipline and its meaning

Since the transition to democracy in the mid 1970s Spanish parties have been characterised by their hierarchical internal functioning (López Pintor 1994). They have been
dominated by elites who control a large amount of resources in the exchanges between the party and its environment. One of the most important resources is the influence party executives have traditionally exerted over the process of candidate-selection. The existence of closed and fixed electoral lists (for the election of the Congreso de los Diputados) constitutes a very valuable resource at the hands of party elites to enforce internal allegiance and discipline. In addition to that, there is a widespread feeling among politicians and citizens that internal divisions are electorally costly, as was shown by the electoral disasters experienced by parties and coalitions when they were suffering from severe internal disruptions.\textsuperscript{14}

The survey data analysed yield particularly interesting and novel results on this point since they reveal a considerable degree of confusion among the Spanish electorate about the issue of party cohesion. There is a clear division about the desirable cohesion political parties should exhibit: while 40% of voters think political parties ought to be more cohesive, 37% hold the opposite view and consider that parties already show too much unity and lack internal debate.

The views on party discipline are related to the attitudes regarding the degree of party cohesion. Most voters who consider that there should be more party unity, also think that deputies should vote along party lines (52%). On the contrary, a large percentage (72%) of those voters who think there is already too much unanimity within parties, also prefer deputies to follow their own judgement when voting in Parliament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views on party cohesion:</th>
<th>MPs should:</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parties should be more cohesive....</td>
<td>Follow party line</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is already too much cohesion</td>
<td>Own judgement</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our own elaboration. CIS Study number 2240.

Among the voters of the major parties (PP and PSOE) and among the voters of nationalist parties the percentage of those who would like more party cohesion is around ten points greater than the percentage of voters who think there is already too much unity. On the contrary, the voters of the left-wing coalition, United Left, present a very different pattern: around half of them think there is too much unity within parties, whereas 35% of them would also like to see more party cohesion. Young voters, those who were not old enough to vote in the 1996 general elections, also think parties are too homogeneous and lack internal debate.

\textsuperscript{14} This was the case of UCD, the centre-right governing coalition from 1977 until 1982. It experienced an electoral decline at the 1982 elections when it lost around 30 points. These bad results were mainly
Table 4. Public opinion regarding party cohesion by vote in 1996 general elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More unity</th>
<th>Already too much</th>
<th>DK/NA</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CiU</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>49.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under voting age</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not vote</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our own elaboration. Source of data: CIS Study number 2240

There is a notable difference between voters and representatives in their views regarding party unity: the feeling that there exists too much cohesion inside parties is more widespread among MPs than it is among voters (72% and 37% respectively. This gives an idea of how hierarchical and monolithic Spanish party organisations are.

Yet, although the diagnosis is clear for MPs, the division of voters in their evaluation of the situation makes it risky for parties to change the status quo. Changing the internal processes of decision-making within parties to make them more participatory, increasing internal debates over policy would satisfy those voters who think there is too much unity, but could also have a negative effect among those voters who think there should be more cohesion. On the other hand, it could be that those voters that are in favour of more cohesive parties refer to struggles over power and would not react against an increase of internal debate and even internal conflict if it was related to debates over policy, rather than over power. It is therefore difficult to interpret these results without having additional information. Further data and research, that should combine quantitative and qualitative techniques, is needed to shed some light on the meaning of these results.

b. Does the parliamentary seat “belong” to the individual MP or to the party?

As has already been mentioned, the transformation of the concept of political representation, and the passage from medieval to modern political representation brought about a strengthening of the position of individual parliamentarians who were not any longer tied to their constituencies by instructions, and could not be removed from his/her position, only punished by voters at the following elections. The increasing presence of political parties introduced important variations in this picture which again diminished the power of individual MPs.

In this context the question becomes, do parliamentary seats “belong” to the party or to the particular MP who holds them? The theoretical question regarding the ultimate

attributed to internal struggles and disruptions (see Hunneus 1985 and Hopkin 1995).
“owner” of the Parliamentary seat becomes a practical dilemma in situations when an MP is expelled or voluntarily abandons his/her political party. Should the MP resign and leave the seat to the next person in the party list, or should he/she keep the seat?

The dilemma is more intense in countries with proportional electoral systems with closed and fixed lists of candidates. The primacy of parties over individual candidates in these electoral systems is such that voters simply have to choose a party list but are not able to express a view on specific candidates. Those who advocate that seats “belong” to political parties argue that with this type of lists voters choose among different lists of parties and therefore one cannot assume a relationship of representativeness to exist if the MP abandons that list (De Esteban 1990: 15). From their perspective MPs that “switch” to a different party or parliamentary group deceive their voters (see De Esteban 1990, Garrorena 1991).

However, according to the traditional model of political representation that has been reflected in the 1978 Spanish Constitution MPs are entitled to keep their seat even if abandon the party they represented in the elections. The Spanish Constitutional Court has recognised this fact and has established a clear line of case law by which individual representatives may keep their seats even if they abandon the political party with whom they were elected (López Guerra 1994).

The relevance of the “switching” phenomenon goes beyond its legal or formal consideration. The “switching” of MPs from one parliamentary group to another became a worrying phenomenon in the years of transition to democracy, when the party system was still forming, and remains a political problem, particularly at the local level. Switching (transfuguesismo) weakens the image of politicians given that switchers were usually portrayed to change parties moved by opportunistic reasons rather than by ideological ones (López Guerra 1994). However, at the same time parties did not do much to stop that situation by setting limits to switchers or by reaching an agreement to stop these kind of practices at the different governmental levels, and took advantage in those situations in which the “switcher” joined their group. Eventually, some action was taken by reforming the internal rules of the Congreso de los Diputados and the Senate so that switchers could not go directly from one parliamentary group to another group. The main political parties have recently reached an agreement to stop this phenomenon at the local level.16

The surveys used to develop the present analysis included some questions to explore the opinion of MPs and voters regarding the behaviour they would expect from MPs

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15 It must be borne in mind that among MPs the percentage of “Don’t Know/No answer” is only 5%, whereas among voters it is 23%.

16 This is a recent agreement signed by most political parties in July 1998 by which parties compromise not to accept “switchers” in their groups (La Vanguardia, 8/7/98).
that left the parties they were elected with. Most MPs and voters think MPs should give up their seats if they switch from one party to the other (71% of voters and 92% of MPs).

Graph 6.

There are not many differences among the MPs of different parliamentary groups regarding this issue. While practically all Socialist and Catalan Nationalist MPs think MPs should resign when they switch parties, this percentage is smaller in the case of MPs that belong to the Popular Party and even smaller to other minor groups. This lower percentage of support for the “resign” option among MPs of “other groups” is that among these MPs there are some that have been expelled or have voluntarily left their political parties and thus might be more sympathetic towards these situations.

As next graph shows, the trend of public opinion in favour of the “resign” option has been very stable from the beginning of the 1980s.

Graph 7.
c. Professionalization of MPs. The views of MPs and voters over the compatibility between being MP and other professional activities

The transformation of political representation described in the previous rubrics has been accompanied by a process of professionalization of politics (Von Beyme 1996). This process is similar to what has happened in other professions and is the result of a general process of specialisation associated with modernisation, but in politics there are additional normative arguments that have favoured such professionalisation. These arguments refer to the greater independence of MPs with respect to particular interests if politics becomes a full-time professional activity. On the contrary, those that criticise professionalisation argue that it enhances the distance that separates voters from their representatives, who are increasingly isolated from the daily problems and worries of people and more dependent on the decisions of party elites, since professionalization makes it increasingly difficult for MPs to go back to the profession they had before going into politics (when they had one).

The survey data show that MPs are divided in their opinion with respect to how exclusive their professional commitment with their job as representatives should be. Approximately a half of MPs (54%) think that MPs should abandon any type of professional activity besides that of being representative, so as to avoid facing conflicts of interests and other external pressures when making decisions. A slightly lower percentage (42%) of MPs hold the opposite view: MPs should not abandon all professional activities to devote their time exclusively to politics, in order to be in a better position to understand and be aware of the problems of citizens.
There are important differences among the MPs of different parliamentary groups on this matter. In the Socialist Group there is a large majority who think MPs should abandon any type of professional activity (74%), while the Popular Party group most MPs hold the opposite view (59%). These differences may be a result of ideological differences between the two groups, or also of different occupational profile of the members of each of these groups.

It would be interesting to check whether there is some relationship between the actual profession of MPs and their opinion about the possibility to make them compatible with their job in politics. One can think MPs with liberal professions such as lawyers or entrepreneurs would be more inclined to think they can keep both activities. However, the requirement to respect the privacy of MPs makes it impossible to work with the variables needed to check such hypotheses. The only variable that can help us advance some hypotheses to be tested in future research is the one that provides information on the difference between the income MPs had before becoming representative with the one they have as MPs. The data show that those MPs whose income as representatives are lower or much lower than their previous income are considerably less likely to think politics should be the only professional activity of MPs than those whose income as MPs is the same or higher than their previous income.

Table 5. Views on whether being representative is compatible with having other professional activity by income of MPs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income as MP</th>
<th>Incompatible</th>
<th>Compatible</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>higher or much higher than before</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more or less equal than before</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower or much lower than before</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Row percentages do not sum 100 because the table does not show the "Don’t Know/No Answer".

19
Among citizens there is a clear support for the idea that MPs should devote their time exclusively to their political tasks and leave any other professional activity (shared by 58%), while 27% think MPs should be allowed to combine their political job with other professional activities. Unfortunately no trends to analyse the evolution in time of this indicator are available, but it would be interesting to check if the corruption scandals that have hit Spanish politics in the 1990s have had some effect in changing the views of Spanish voters over this issue. In that case we would expect that the current observed support for the “compatibility” option was the result of a decline of support for this position in the 1990s.

3.2. Other issues regarding the process of political representation

This rubric examines other aspects of the process of representation that help to complete the picture sketched in the previous sections of the paper about the nature of political representation in Spain.

The first issue concerns the frequency and the nature of contacts between MPs and voters. Nearly all MPs declared to have had contact with some voters in the month before the survey was conducted (98%). However, a closer examination of the data is enough to place this figure in the right perspective, given that only 5% of voters declare to have established some contact with an MP in the same period of time. Moreover, only 13% of those who did not have contact with an MP have ever thought to do it. It seems, therefore, that the direct contact between MPs and citizens is scarce and covers only a very reduced number of voters. According to MPs these encounters take place at the party local sections (51%), by telephone (19%) and through the mail (11%).

Even if they are very infrequent, MPs declare that they meet individual voters in their district more often than they have contact with organised groups of different types (44% meets often or very often with unions, 21% with professional organisations and only 6% with religious organisations).
One of the hypotheses tested in previous sections of the paper refers to the possibility that MPs from different parties, particularly if their ideologies are very different, have also a different concept and style of representation. One of the indicators of such differences would be to check if there exists a different pattern of contacts with a particular types of organisations. The data confirm such differences. The MPs of the Socialist Group have a closer relationship with unions (72% meets them often or very often whereas only 24% of the Popular MPs declare to do so). The MPs of the Popular Party are more closely related to the entrepreneurs (47% meet them often or very often for 14% of Socialist MPs).

A high percentage of deputies (85%) declare to have frequent contact with leaders and members of their own party. As far as the frequency of contact with minister and other public officials there are also clear differences among Parliamentary groups: while 73% of Popular Party MPs meet often with high public office and 42% with ministers, the percentage goes down to 22% and 14% in the case of Socialist MPs. This differences are the result of a logical closeness between the Parliamentary group of the governing party and the Administration.

The data also provide information on the limited extent to which MPs carry out the task of aggregating and voicing the interests of Autonomous Communities. Around a half of MPs (53%) contact often or very often regional parliamentarians, and this percentage is smaller (38%) when it comes to meetings with members of the regional governments. There are also notable differences among Parliamentary groups on this point: since the Popular Party is the governing party in many Autonomous Communities at the moment, there is a higher percentage of MPs that meet often or very often with members of regional government (44% for 28% of Socialist MPs). The frequency of contact with regional parliamentarians is similar for both groups.
As we have mentioned, there is little direct contact between MPs and citizens. In this context mass media become one of the most important channels of communication between representatives and voters. MPs are aware of this fact; most of them think citizens get information about the activities of the Chamber of Deputies through television (86%), followed by radio and magazines and newspapers. This perception is only partially confirmed by the data provided by citizens: television is in fact used by most citizens to have access to political information, but it is followed by newspapers and magazines and by the radio.

MPs also use mass media to find out the demands of the voters in their district or get feed-back from them. Around 46% of those MPs interviewed use regularly regional or local TV stations as their main source of information about the problems in their constituencies, whereas around 14% use state-wide media. Other less used means of finding out the problems in the constituencies include attending meetings with party members (13% MPs consider them their main source of information), meeting citizen groups and other interest groups (8%), and direct contact with voters (6.5%).

3.3. Levels of satisfaction with the work of Spanish MPs.

Most MPs are satisfied or very satisfied (77%) with their work as a member of the Congreso de Diputados. On the contrary, among voters the level of satisfaction is very low: only 28% are satisfied or very satisfied with the work MPs carry out and most voters express a clear discontent with the work of MPs.

The MPs of the Popular Party are those that show the lowest level of satisfaction with their job. On the contrary, PP voters show higher levels of satisfaction with the work of MPs than voters of other parties: 43% of PP voters is very satisfied or just satisfied with the work carried out by MPs (see table 6 below). The most negative group is that formed by the voters of United Left: only around 16% IU voters are satisfied with MPs´ work and 72% are unsatisfied. The youngest voters show low levels of satisfaction, not only as a result of a negative evaluation but also due to the high degree of “don’t know/no answer” in this group.

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17 This can be a problem, given the scarcity of programs devoted to provide information about what goes on in Parliament. Ollero (1994: 25) mentions the initiative to create a specific channel devoted to broadcasting parliamentary sessions to solve this problem.
18 Those voters who were not old enough to vote in 1996, therefore around 18-19 at the time the survey was conducted.
19 Of which 22% are “Don’t know”.
This low degree of satisfaction with MPs confirms the results of other authors who have measured the attitude of Spaniards towards Parliament. For example, in the most recent work on this topic Delgado, Martínez and Oñate (1998) carry out an analysis of public opinion towards Parliament over the last fifteen years. Their data reveal that voters are not satisfied with the extent to which MPs represent voters’ interests: over the 1990s more than 50% consider that MPs do not represent voters’ interests or do so to a very limited extent.\(^\text{20}\)

Table 6. Degree of satisfaction with MPs by vote at the 1996 elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Very satisfied+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quite sat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSOE</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CiU</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IU</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>24.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under voting age</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not vote</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our own elaboration. CIS Study 2240.

Among citizens there is also a negative evaluation of the reasons that move MPs to stand as candidates to become representatives. Most voters (57%) think the most important reason is the power and influence MPs have, followed at a great distance by more altruistic

\(^{20}\) In 1992 52% of voters thought that MPs did not represent voters’ interests (sum of those who answered “little” and “nothing” to the question “Do you think MPs represent the interests of voters?”).
reasons such as "in order to have the possibility to fight for their ideals and those of their party" (chosen by 19%), "in order to contribute to solve the country’s problems" (7%), "in order to have the possibility to defend the interests of its province/region" (7%).

Graph 11.

The discontent with the way in which political representation takes place does not mean that there is clear rejection of political parties. Most voters consider that parties are essential for democracy, necessary for the defence of the ideas and interests of different social groups, necessary to channel participation in politics. However their attitude is less positive when it comes to making concrete commitments with political parties, even loose ones: 68% think it is unlikely or very unlikely that they contribute to finance the activities of a political party, only 36% with a political party and only 3% are party members. Moreover, among those voters who are not members in any party only 2.5% have ever thought of joining a party while 90% thinks it is unlikely or very unlikely that they will do so in the future.

To sum up, the Spanish electorate shows a high level of discontent with the way MPs represent them and this discontent is extended to political parties: although there is a reasonable level of diffuse support for parties as institutions, this support disappears when voters are asked about making concrete contributions to political parties.

4. Concluding remarks

As in other established Western democracies political representation takes place via political parties. The empirical analysis presented in this paper has provided enough evidence that

In 1993 this figure went up to 56%, in 1994 to 69%, 59% in 1995 and 65% in 1996 (Delgado, Martínez
shows that Spanish MPs and voters give parties a central role in the process of political representation and the specific way in which they do so.

There are some aspects of the party model that are criticised both by MPs and by voters. MPs are critical towards party discipline and think there should be issues in which MPs should be left the possibility to vote according to their free judgement, instead of the current practice of voting nearly on every issue according to party instructions. Among voters there is also a large percentage that favours a greater independence for individual MPs. One of the most interesting finding concerns the issue of party cohesion, an issue over which there is not a clear agreement among voters who split in halves, some in favour of greater cohesion and some who think there is already too much unity within Spanish political party. Future research should focus on the analysis of this central question, which lies at the basis of any reform of the hierarchical nature of Spanish political parties.

The data also show a widespread feeling among voters that Spanish MPs are failing to represent voters. Citizens think their representatives defend the interest of their party, as opposed to their interests and think MPs hardly take the views and concerns of voters into account when making legislative decisions. There are very few direct contacts between MPs and voters, and voters do not seem to think that meeting an MP is of any help to solve a problem. Finally, a large percentage of voters are unsatisfied with the work of MPs. Thus, Spanish electorate shows worrying signs of distance, distrust and discontent with individual MPs and with political parties. Party membership is low, and only a small percentage of voters show any intention to contribute to the tasks carried out by political parties.

Spain developed its democratic regime at a time when political parties of Western democracies were increasing their presence in the State, and were becoming increasingly distant from society. Spain conforms to the idea presented by Andeweg (1996) that the crisis of representation in fact should be depicted as a crisis of party. The signs of this crisis (discontent, lack of social roots of political parties, distrust in politics) are perhaps more clear than they are in other Western established democracies. The lack of a historical legacy of democratic practice and the weak social roots of parties probably enhanced these tendencies, since parties or individual politicians did not have a reservoir of support, as they did in other countries with a longer democratic background. This points at a reason why studying recent democracies is relevant for scholars who are mainly interested in long established democracies. With the due caution, younger democracies might be used to study a possible route that the development of trends in established democracies might take, given that they are less affected by the weight of inertia, at least in the behaviour of some political actors.

Bibliography


### Appendix

**Vote and seats by parties and by elections 1977-1986**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UCD</th>
<th>PSOE</th>
<th>PCE/IU</th>
<th>AP/PP</th>
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<th>CiU</th>
<th>PNV</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>EA</th>
<th>ERC</th>
<th>HB</th>
<th>PAR</th>
<th>UV</th>
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<th>CC</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>29.3</td>
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<td>8.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.1</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>0.3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>2.9</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>70.6</td>
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</table>

Source: Ministerio de Justicia e Interior

Note: Percentages of the vote are calculated over valid votes without blank ballots.

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### Vote and seats by parties and by elections 1989-1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>UCD</th>
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<th>PCE/IU</th>
<th>AP/PP</th>
<th>CDS</th>
<th>CiU</th>
<th>PNV</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>EA</th>
<th>ERC</th>
<th>HB</th>
<th>PAR</th>
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<th>BNG</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
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<td>39.9</td>
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<td>26.0</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
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<td>0.6</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>0.7</td>
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<td>7.5</td>
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<td>-</td>
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Source: Ministerio de Justicia e Interior

Note: Percentages of the vote are calculated over valid votes without blank ballots.