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This publication is student-produced and the research was conducted during their undergraduate studies.

In *Trustee or Delegate* Russell writes on the political representation and decision making process that legislators face. Russell explains that understanding this complicated system can improve the knowledge of many related subfields in politics such as political activity and political institutions. While interning at the Massachusetts State House, Russell interacted with constituents on a daily basis. During that time, he noticed how the weight that constituent input carried was not identical across all issues. His unique perspective from within the Massachusetts State House and proximity to legislators offered the perfect opportunity to understand this important concept in political representation.

**About the author**

Matthew Russell, T ‘13, is a double major in computer science and political science. Studying two very distinct fields, he is always looking for new and interesting ways to utilize his passion for programming to tackle some of the most interesting challenges facing the world via code. Currently, he is interested in the growing importance of computer security and cyber warfare in an increasingly digitized world.

Matt first became interested in theories of representation while working at the Massachusetts State House as a legislative intern. He noticed a disconnect between traditional theories of political representation and the actions of elected officials in practice, prompting him to use his access to state legislators to create an alternative theory of representation in government.
Trustee or Delegate:
A Legitimate Question Facing Political Representation

By Matthew Russell (T ’13)

Abstract

The study of political representation is dominated by two theories proposing opposite views on how elected officials should behave in office. The trustee model, first theorized by Edmund Burke in the 18th century, encourages representatives to act solely in the best interest of the nation, independent of the wishes and beliefs of their constituencies. The delegate model, made famous by James Mill, instructs the same representatives to carry out only the mandates given from their electorates. Neither theory, however, presents a suitable framework for observing representation in practice. The politico theory is an attempt to reconcile these two theories into a practical model but still fails to account for various important tendencies present in American legislators. Through the use of qualitative interviews with Massachusetts State Senators and Representatives as well as the writings of John F Kennedy, this paper attempts to address the current deficiency in the study of political representation by offering a new model of representation. This model hinges on the research obtained in this study, demonstrating how elected representatives reach a decision when faced with a conflict between their own personal judgments and the beliefs of their constituents. On the majority of issues, legislators act as trustees by voting and acting in coordination with their personal convictions. However, for the issues to which legislators are neutral, constituent input is one of the most important considerations in the decision making process. By examining political representation through this more precise model, researchers and activists can better understand on which issues elected officials are more likely to be persuaded.
About this Paper

This was the final paper in Professor Gleason’s Fieldwork in Politics course, in which students intern at various institutions related to topics in political science. Students are required to work between 8 and 16 hours per week and submit at the end of their internship an academic paper that relates to their work. While interning, I was also enrolled in Professor Berry’s Media, Congress, and Bureaucracy class where we briefly discussed representational theory, sparking my interest in topic.

I chose to write on political representation and the decision making process that all legislators face because I believe that understanding this complicated process can improve the knowledge of many related subfields in politics such as political activity and political institutions. Because I interacted with and responded to constituents on a daily basis, I noticed how the weight that constituent input carried was not identical across all issues. The unique perspective from within Massachusetts State House and proximity that I had to legislators, offered the perfect opportunity understand this important concept in political representation.

Because I only had a general understanding of the Trustee and Delegate models of representation prior to writing this paper, much of my initial research was spent reading the original texts. This effort proved extremely useful as I drew heavily on them throughout this study to frame my arguments. Only after developing a research question did I begin to interview with the legislators at the State House; from these qualitative interviews, I developed my thesis and the new model of representation that I present in this paper.
Introduction

The trustee and delegate models of representation offer elected officials two highly divergent approaches for making decisions while in office: the trustee model emphasizes the sound judgment of representatives and encourages them to reach decisions in the best interest of the nation as whole, while the delegate model instructs representatives to follow the opinions and mandates of their constituents at all times in order to have a truly representative democracy. Politico theory provides an important alternative approach to representational philosophy by combining elements of both the trustee and delegate models but fails to address the strong trustee tendency of many elected officials – necessitating the creation of a new model of representation.

The first section of this paper contrasts the trustee and delegate models of representation and explains how the politico theory attempts to reconcile these two different notions. In the second section, this essay will determine which of the three theories elected officials identify with in principle and practice, utilizing interviews with State Senators and Representatives from Massachusetts and a personal account from John F. Kennedy. The third section will address the shortcomings and strengths of the politico theory as a model for representative democracy, revealing the need for the development of a similar yet distinct new theory of representation. The fourth section will use the theory developed in the previous section and examine the implications that can be drawn from viewing United States democracy through this new framework. The final section of the paper will summarize the findings of the previous sections and conclude by suggesting the next step in the study of political representation.

The Theoretical Debate

The political debate about whether elected officials should behave as delegates or trustees has been waged for over two centuries by both political theorists and statesmen. This section will
explore the differences between the trustee and delegate models of representation and examine the emergence of a new theory, the politico model, and its attempt to merge together key components of both the trustee and delegate theories.

*The Trustee Model*

Edmund Burke, one of the most well-known political philosophers of 18th century England, is credited by many political science scholars as the first major champion of the trustee model of representation. Burke’s political philosophy was never explicitly formulated but can be inferred through his literary work and speeches.¹ He became a prominent member of the Whig party and was elected to represent the city of Bristol. Immediately following his victory, Burke delivered one of his most famous speeches on November 3, 1774, titled “Speech to the Electors of Bristol.”² As Susan Stokes notes, “When Burke was elected Member of Parliament from Bristol in 1774, it was not uncommon for constituents to write instructions for their MPs, directing them in matters of policy.”³ In this speech, Burke states that he would not continue this practice which he saw as detrimental to the nation:

> To deliver an opinion, is the right of all men; that of constituents is a weighty and respectable opinion, which a representative ought always to rejoice to hear; and which he ought always most seriously to consider. But *authoritative* instructions; *Mandates* issued, which the member is bound blindly and implicitly to obey, to vote, and to argue for, though contrary to the clearest conviction of his judgment and conscience,--these are things utterly unknown to the laws of this land, and which arise from a fundamental mistake of the whole order and tenor of our constitution.⁴

Burke’s fundamental disagreement with mandates stems from his belief that elected officials must at all times put the interests of the nation before both their personal interests, and more

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⁴ "Representation: Edmund Burke, Speech to the Electors of Bristol."
importantly, the interests of their constituents. He viewed Parliament as a single body, united in the goal of protecting and serving the nation, not the interests of the masses. Burke felt that it was likely that a constituent might form his or her opinions rapidly and without regard to the rest of the nation or community, and it was the duty of the Member of Parliament to make decisions carefully and with sound judgment. Burke goes on to draw a distinction between how a Member of Parliament should view his responsibilities. Burke told his constituents, “You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament.”

Edmond Burke was not only an ardent supporter of the trustee model in rhetoric, but also in practice. While in Parliament, Burke faced a tough decision regarding relaxing the trade restrictions imposed on Ireland. Burke knew that Bristol, a city that relied heavily on trade, would suffer from the passage of this motion, and his constituents were vehemently opposed to its passage. Burke, however, felt it necessary in the interest of the nation to vote in favor. He responded to the outrage that followed by reiterating his political philosophy: “If from this conduct, I shall forfeit their suffrages at an ensuing election, it will stand on record as an example to future representatives of the Commons of England, that one man at least had dared to resist the desires of his constituents when his judgment assured him they were wrong.” It was not that Burke was unresponsive to his constituency, but rather that he carefully examined the benefits and consequences of the future policy with Ireland and judged the benefits to be greater. Burke did in fact face the political consequences of this decision and was defeated in the

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5 “Representation: Edmund Burke, Speech to the Electors of Bristol.”
7 Kreis
8 Prior pp. 175.
following election. Fortunately for Burke, his political career did not end with Bristol; he was elected the next year to serve the people of Malton.

**The Delegate Model**

Political theory is by no means a homogenous field, and many political thinkers believe strongly that the best form of representation is one in which the elected officials serve as an instrument of the people who elected them. This model is often referred to as the delegate theory of representation and is closely tied to the writings of James Mill, who viewed the representative as a placeholder for the constituent body. John Tyler, the 10th President of the United States, offered an extremely compelling case for a system of delegate representation while a member of the House of Representatives. He delivered a speech on the floor in favor of repealing an extremely unpopular increase in the salaries of Congressman, stating, “If a member of this House is not a representative of the people, what is he? And if he is, how can he be regarded as representing the people when he speaks, not their language, but his own? He ceases to be their representative when he does so, and represents himself alone.”

Tyler, like many delegate model supporters, believed that it is impossible to expect a single person to be incapable of making an error, and therefore the judgment of the district is more reliable because of its size.

One of the most formative arguments in favor of the delegate model was published in an account of a debate that took place within the General Assembly of Virginia. During this debate, the proponents of the delegate model clearly state that a government in which elected representatives do not follow the instructions of their citizens is not representative democracy.

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9 Kreis
10 ibid
13 ibid
They argue that a representative “must be the organ of others – of who? Not of the nation, for the nation deputes him not; but of his constituents, who alone know, alone have trusted, and can alone displace him.”\(^{14}\) The supporters also attempt to refute common objections to the delegate model of representation to prove to the other members the model’s superiority.

The first objection states that it is extremely difficult to determine the majority opinion of one’s constituents. To this argument, the General Assembly of Virginia agrees there will not always exist an “instruction” to the representative, but that does not mean that when there does exist a majority opinion it should be discredited.\(^{15}\) Secondly, proponents of the trustee model argue that constituents are unable to hear the debates that take place in government and therefore cannot be good judges of outcomes. The General Assembly of Virginia notes that “although the representative ought to be, and generally will be, selected for superior virtue and intelligence, yet a greater mass of wisdom and virtue still reside in the constituent body than the utmost portion allotted to any individual.”\(^{16}\) Therefore, constituents cannot and should not rely on the intelligence of their representatives to make decisions for them but should advocate vigorously for their beliefs. Lastly, trustee advocates in the United States have also highlighted the fact that there is no constitutional framework that invalidates a legislator’s vote, so there can be no binding contract or obligation between the legislator and his constituents. To this argument the Assembly notes that there exist a multitude of duties that are of the highest importance which have no legal bindings: duties to parents, to God, and to country. The Assembly concludes its


\(^{15}\) ibid.

\(^{16}\) DiClerico pp. 183.
argument by declaring, “The duty of the representative to obey the instructions of the constituent body cannot be placed on higher ground.”

*The Politico Approach*

Political theorists recognize that in practice, it is rare to find a system in which representatives act solely as delegates with a mandate from their constituents or as trustees who decide issues based upon their personal judgment and in the best interest of the nation. In reality, they argue, it is a combination of these two approaches that elected officials put into practice. Politico theory emerged as a hybrid of delegate and trustee models of representation in an effort to formulate a theory that mirrors how representatives actually act in government. Proponents argue that in fact, representatives weigh input from a variety of competing interests, including special interest groups, party leaders, and political relationships, in addition to constituent opinions and personal judgment. Not all inputs are weighted equally; a central tenant of the politico theory rests on the role that public opinion plays in the decision making process. Politico theory suggests that on issues that have a low degree of public opinion, elected officials are able to weigh more on their personal judgment and less on constituent opinion and act more in line with the trustee model. Galloway also describes how representatives quickly learn which issues are at the core of their constituency and are careful not to go against them without regard to the consequences of such a decision. According to this model, George Galloway describes the job of a representative as twofold:

> It is in the nature of the congressman’s job that he should determine, as far as he can, public opinion in his own constituency and in the whole nation, analyze it, measure it in

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17 DiClerico pp. 183.
19 DiClerico pp. 188.
20 ibid
21 DiClerico pp. 189.
terms of the practicability of turning it into public policy, and consider it in the light of his own knowledge, conscience, and convictions.\textsuperscript{22} Galloway also highlights the important fact that all representatives are human and have a desire to be reelected in the next election.\textsuperscript{23} They cannot carry out their policy agendas without the support of their voting base. Therefore, all representatives will be more sensitive to the wills of their constituency as the next election approaches, and if they do deviate from those opinions, they will likely seek to explain clearly their decision and why they felt it was in their constituents’ best interest.\textsuperscript{24} Galloway describes the ideal representative as one who will be able to take his or her constituents’ concerns and opinions, explain to them the best course of action for those goals, and at times demonstrate how those beliefs may be actually opposed to the best interests of the nation. The politico theory represents an important development in the history of representative theory; it allows representatives to act within a larger framework while explaining how they come to a decision on most issues. In the following sections, this paper will show that this theory provides a better attempt at explaining the role of a legislator in the United States but places too much emphasis on public opinion.

As this section has demonstrated, the three theories of representation have widely different models for how an elected official should operate on a daily basis and make decisions on a variety of issues. The trustee model allows representatives to make decisions in the best interests of the nation and their constituents, without being subject to the individual interests and opinions of their constituency. The delegate model imbues representatives with the responsibility of putting the interests of their constituents above all else, in order to create a truly representational government. The politico model represents an effort to formulate a theory that

\textsuperscript{22} DiClerico pp. 190.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid
\textsuperscript{24} ibid
explains the actions of representatives in reality, placing heavy emphasis on the degree of public opinion that exists on the issues being decided. The extent to which the delegate, trustee, or politico model of representation manifest themselves in practice is examined in the following section through interviews with officials at the Massachusetts State House and in the writings of one of the most prominent figures in American politics.

**Putting the Theories into Practice**

In the debate between the delegate and trustee models, each side has attempted to secure itself as the ideal form of representation while attempting to demonstrate flaws in the opposing view. The politico model, a blend of these two theories, attempts to take elements of both models in order to explain how elected representatives actually operate. While many political theories are an attempt to describe how representatives should act in the ideal form, it is equally important to determine if a theory models the actions in reality, allowing political scientists to draw implications for the consequences of such a practice. This section will utilize firsthand interviews with State Senators and Representatives in addition to an account from President John F. Kennedy in order to determine which theory most closely represents the actions and mindsets of United States legislators.

*From the Perspectives of Massachusetts Legislators*

State Representative Louis Kafka, elected official from the Eighth Norfolk district of Massachusetts, has served in the House since 1991 and is currently the Chair of the House Committee on Steering, Policy, and Scheduling. In an interview on March 10, 2011, Representative Kafka expressed his personal opinions of the delegate and trustee model and the process by which he reaches a decision before voting. From the beginning of the interview it was apparent that he is more closely aligned with the trustee model in belief and practice, and
expressed many of the common concerns with the delegate model of representation. “The hardest part about voting in a delegate manner,” he explained, “was that you never know your entire constituency, even on hot button issues which typically have larger constituent turnout.”\textsuperscript{25} An example of this difficulty was the response he received during the question of the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts. His office received hundreds of emails, letters, and phone calls, but that is still a tiny fraction of the constituents he represents. He believes that it is better to be up front with voters on hot button issues during the election, and it is during this time that the majority of a legislator’s constituents can determine if those positions are in line with their views.\textsuperscript{26} Representative Kafka noted that he is most influenced by constituent opinion when approached with an issue to which he is initially neutral. For these types of issues, he will listen closely to the testimony from experts and constituents in order to make a final decision.\textsuperscript{27} These occurrences, however, are rare, since most issues in the legislature are recurring bills or budget items that come up every session. On the rest of the issues, he will reexamine his opinion on a given issue if he receives a strong response from constituents, but constituent mandates and instructions will be only one of the many factors that he considers when reevaluating his position.

State Senator Cynthia Stone Creem, representing the first Middlesex district and Norfolk Massachusetts, in an interview on March 31, 2011, expressed similar views of representation to those of Representative Kafka, although her reasons for doing so were somewhat different. Senator Creem also saw herself primarily as a trustee, elected to office to exercise her own judgment about what is best not only for her constituents but the state of Massachusetts. She believed that it was easier for her to act as a trustee on most issues because her district is very

\textsuperscript{25} Kafka, State Representative Louis. Personal interview. 10 Mar. 2011.
\textsuperscript{26} ibid
\textsuperscript{27} ibid
representative of her own views. In her interview she expressed, “My decisions are made with how I believe the majority of my constituents would also make their own decisions; otherwise I would not be elected to represent them.”\textsuperscript{28} She described herself as being very similar to the typical constituent in her district; she shops at the same stores, talks to the same people, and attends many town events.\textsuperscript{29} This semblance between her and the “average constituent” played a central role in her tendency to support the trustee model of representation.

Like Representative Kafka, Senator Creem also felt it necessary to be as up front as possible with voters during the campaign with regard to the critical issues. She saw her reelection as a mandate from the majority of voters to continue as she has been voting with her own judgment. If that judgment had become so vastly different from the rest of her constituency, she reasoned that they could just as easily vote her out of office the next election.\textsuperscript{30} Like Representative Kafka, she highlighted the importance of recognizing the silent majority. She noted that it is usually the vocal and typically small opposition from which she will hear. For example, she has been an advocate for many years for a bill that would make discrimination against people who are transgender a hate crime. She has received numerous nasty letters as a result of her support, but she felt that if polled, the majority of her constituents would support the bill.\textsuperscript{31} There are times when Senator Creem has stood against what she perceived to be at least close to a majority view, but they have not been major issues. A few years ago, she voted against public funding for a new stadium for the Red Sox, which many of her constituents supported, because she believed that it was not right to use the public money for this private entity.\textsuperscript{32} In response to the feedback from her constituents, she sent a written response to each person who

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[28]{Creem, State Senator Cynthia S. Personal interview. 31 Mar. 2011.}
\footnotetext[29]{ibid}
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\footnotetext[32]{ibid}
\end{footnotes}
had contacted her, detailing her reasons for voting against the bill. Lastly, Senator Creem also utilizes input from her constituents when confronted with issues which she does not already have an opinion on such as budget items and smaller pieces of legislation. “Not all issues are issues of the heart,” she said, and it is those issues that she heavily considers constituent opinion.

State Senator James Timilty, representing Bristol and Norfolk, approached the trustee versus delegate debate somewhat differently than Representative Kafka and Senator Creem. In an interview on April 14, 2011, Senator Timilty began by saying that while he is not a delegate in the strict and narrow view, the people from Bristol and Norfolk are “his guys” and first and foremost he was looking out for their interests, to the best of his ability.33 He was quick to note, however, that he was not afraid to tell his constituents if he felt they were misguided on an issue, even a majority of his constituents, and would be happy to explain his position to anyone. Senator Timilty described how he entered office initially opposed to gay marriage, especially as a decision through the courts and not by the people, and the majority of his constituents supported this belief. He abruptly changed his mind on the issue of gay marriage, however, when he met a young boy with two moms while visiting families in his district. He saw how happy and stable this family was and how the young boy just wanted to spend time with his parents. Senator Timilty realized that with so many other problems facing the state, he should not be trying to break up such a stable family.34 He knew that he might face harsh criticism from his constituents but was convinced that he had reached the right decision. Senator Timilty also noted the dangers of a strict delegate approach in cases such as these by reiterating the often heard expression, “even the smallest voice deserves to be heard.”35

An important point that Senator Timilty highlighted during his interview was that legislators’ opinions on how they reach decisions may

34 ibid
35 ibid
change over time. A freshman legislator has a million things to learn on day one, and when a legislator gains more experience, as Representative Kafka noted, he or she will have likely already formed an opinion on most issues. However, Senator Timilty was adamant that it does not mean a legislator should ignore constituent input, especially when they are personal emails, phone calls, or letters, as opposed to the generic forms generated by interest groups. As a newer member of the Senate body, Senator Timilty also described how he routinely consults other colleagues before making a decision, in an attempt to see how they view the issue with their own eyes. Lastly, similarly to his colleagues in the Senate and House of Representatives, Senator Timilty also expressed the importance of elections serving as a mandate for approval. He viewed running for office just as apply for a job, saying that “every two years you get to interview for the job again, there is no simple rehire process.”

John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States and former United States Senator from Massachusetts, also confronted the question of political representation in his book Profiles in Courage. He believed that it was critical that every legislator be an advocate for his or her own constituency, because otherwise the people would no longer have a voice in government. However, Kennedy strongly argued that the vital role of a legislator was not to “serve merely as a seismograph to record shifts in popular opinion.” Kennedy wrote that this narrow view of representation placed too little faith in people, writing that proponents of the trustee model had more faith in people to honor courage, respect judgment, and have confidence

36 Timilty
37 ibid
38 ibid
39 Profiles in Courage 34
that their representatives would act for the benefit of the nation. Kennedy believed it was this faith that is the foundation of United States Democracy and representative government.

The former President argued, like the State Senators and Representatives expressed during their interviews, that the voters select a representative based on how confident they are in a candidate’s judgment and his or her ability to make the best decision for the nation as a whole. Kennedy writes, “[elected officials] must on occasion lead, inform, correct, and sometimes even ignore constituent opinion, if we are able to exercise fully that judgment for which we were elected.” This view is extremely similar to the view of Senator Timilty who always put the interests of his constituents first but was not afraid to tell them when their opinions were misguided. Lastly, additional parallels between President Kennedy and the State Senators and Representatives are evident in Kennedy’s questioning of the clear expression of majority opinion. Rarely was he sure that the lobbying by interest groups, letters and phone calls from constituents, and articles in the local papers represented the actual concerns of the majority.

**Commonalities and Differences**

The three interviews with Representative Kafka, Senator Creem, and Senator Timilty, as well as the written testimony of President Kennedy offer a glimpse into the minds of legislators in the Massachusetts State House and Congress. While not all of the interviewed legislators share the same views, common threads are evident in their responses. These commonalities and differences can then judge the validity of the three theories of representation. First and foremost, it is clear that all four legislators believe they have been elected to office to use their personal judgment. Even Senator Timilty, who would place the interests of his constituents above the interests of the commonwealth on most issues, still felt that he was not elected to office as a

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40 ibid
41 Profiles in Courage 39
42 Profiles in Courage 37
mouth piece for the district. This belief falls in line with the trustee model as well as the politico model by allowing legislators to weigh a variety of inputs before making a decision. Again siding against the delegate theory, all four individuals expressed in various ways the difficulty to judge majority opinion on most issues. Instead, they viewed elections as the primary vehicle to provide approval for their personal judgment, and if that judgment had become out line with majority opinion, then the voters would elect the other candidate to represent their interests.

Another common element was emphasis placed on being upfront with the constituent body by explaining and clearly laying out positions on controversial issues. This mindset of a legislator is a key component in the politico model, placing emphasis on leading public opinion and educating the voters on issues which the representative and constituent body may disagree, as well as the sensitivity a representative feels when voting opposed to a perceived majority.

One important element that was present in all three interviews but is incorrectly stated in the politico model describes the issues on which legislators rely more heavily on constituent opinion. As discussed previously, the politico model places a heavy emphasis on public opinion and describes how officials will likely be more responsive to the constituent body with regard to matters of a high degree of public awareness and cohesion. As the three interviews at the State level have shown, legislators are in fact somewhat less responsive on these issues. This is because many of these issues are either moral issues or are central tenants of a legislator’s beliefs. On many of these issues, legislators have already formulated strong opinions and as Senator Creem describes, these issues “are closer to the heart,” and therefore more important. On these issues, it is rare for constituent opinion to sway a legislator, and the only action for opponents is to attempt to elect a new legislator into office during the next election. The politico model is correct in that the legislators do recognize the need to explain their positions; however,
they will rarely place the judgments of the constituent body above their own. The issues that do receive the most constituent input are typically smaller items such as budget items and bills upon which the elected official has not reached a final decision. It is these issues that constituents can hope to have the most influence through letters, emails, phone calls, and rallies.

Despite the commonalities, there are a few differences between the interviews and testimonies of the legislators that must be examined before passing judgment upon the three theories of representation. While all legislators expressed strong trustee tendencies in their interviews, Senator Timilty placed a greater emphasis on the need to fight for his constituent body. Senator Timilty, however, cannot be considered a delegate style legislator because he believed, like the other legislators, that he was elected to use his own judgment. Another difference that materialized in the study of the four legislators was the way in which each legislator rationalized their trustee tendencies. Representative Kafka emphasized his personal experience; Senator Creem relied on her similarities to the constituent body; Senator Timilty believed he was elected to exercise his judgment; and President Kennedy placed faith in the ability of voters to select the best representative for their interests. The differences present in the testimonies from the four legislators do not detract from the commonalities present in both the interviews and written testimony, allowing for the three theories to be reevaluated in light of this new information in the follow section.

Reexamining the Three Theories

A New Model Emerges

As the previous legislators’ testimonies have shown, it is clear that many elected officials view themselves somewhere in between a politico and trustee when they make a decision on the issues presented to them. The politico model is an attempt to devise a theory that explains the
actions of legislators in reality. In order to do so, it allows representatives to make decisions based upon a combination of the opinions of their constituency, the interests of the nation, and their own personal judgment. While this theory clearly provides a better framework for actual practice than the rigid trustee and delegate models, interviews with the three State legislators and the writings of John F. Kennedy reveal misplaced emphasis in the politico model on the ability of constituents to influence a legislator’s opinion on major issues. In the interviews, the only case in which a legislator was significantly swayed by his constituency on a major item occurred when Senator Timilty reversed his position on gay marriage. His position was not, however, a core part of his personal beliefs, and he reconsidered his position when confronted with the real life implications. All legislators clearly value the opinions of their constituency, and every interviewee expressed a willingness to listen to all sides; however, this paper has shown that is extremely unlikely for an elected official to give into constituent mandates on critical issues. Therefore, the politico framework must be adapted to account for this deficiency.

This new approach, referred to as the Russell model throughout the rest of the paper, is an adaptation on the politico model discussed by George Galloway. Like the politico model, the Russell model highlights the numerous pressures that exist on a legislator and the tension within an elected official to follow his or her own conscience while representing the interests of the constituency. Similarly to the politico model, the Russell model recognizes that it is extremely difficult to determine the majority opinion of a legislator’s district or state, and on most issues the legislator can reach decisions without concern for the political consequences. Unlike the politico model, in the face of a conflicting personal conscience and the opinion of the majority of a legislator’s constituents, the Russell model states that in most instances, legislators will decide in line with their personal beliefs. In this case, they are convinced that the voters elected them to
office because of confidence in the candidate’s personal judgment and his or her ability to act in their best interests; they do not view themselves simply as delegates with instructions from their constituency. On smaller pieces of legislation and budget items, constituent input allows elected representatives to learn about projects that affect lives. This input can provide valuable insight for policy makers who otherwise are forced to solely examine cost-benefit reports, crunch numbers, or rely only on material from special interest groups.

The Russell model also adopts from the politico approach the ability and responsibility for elected representatives to both follow and lead public opinion. When legislators make controversial decisions on important issues, they feel it necessary to inform their voters of their actions and explain their reasoning. As Senator Timilty described in his interview, most legislators are not afraid “to have that frank discussion.” Elected representatives feel that in many cases they possess more information than the average constituent on most legislative issues and have a duty to share it with their district or state. In this way, they inform the people of the actions of the government and how their elected representative is responding to those changes.

The Russell model, like the politico model, provides an approach that is a mixture of the delegate and trustee theories of representation, but differs from the politico model in that trustee tendencies are more likely when deciding on major issues.

Limitations and Previous Studies

Before examining the implications the Russell model has for United States democracy, it is important to recognize the limitations of the tools used to create this theory. First and foremost, the sample size of the interviews is small. The interviews themselves were conducted during a legislative internship at the Massachusetts State House and were limited by the accessibility of the individual Senators and Representatives and the duration of the interviews.
After speaking with legislative staff members who have spent many years working in the State House, the trustee tendencies described above appear to be fairly common among the other State Representatives and Senators when viewing their actions in meetings and on the floor. Another limitation is the use of the Massachusetts State House as a case study. The Massachusetts’ legislature has a very high percentage of Democratic Representatives and Senators when compared to other State legislatures and Congress. As of the beginning of the 2011-2012 legislative session there were only 4 Republicans in the 40 member Senate and 31 Republicans in the 160 member House. Clearly, this changes the dynamics of the legislative body, and all the interviews were conducted with Democratic legislators. In more divided legislative bodies, the influence of party platforms and party leaders may play an even greater role in the decision making process. The testimony from John F. Kennedy shows that despite the differences in the roles that political parties play at the Massachusetts State House and in Congress, legislators still often face decisions in which they must weigh the inputs of their constituency against their own personal judgment and conscience.

The study presented in this paper may not be the most comprehensive approach to examining political representation, but it does provide insight into the minds of legislators at the State and, to a lesser degree, the Federal level. Few studies to date have a comprehensive approach to this topic. One such study was done by Warren Miller and Donald Stokes who surveyed 116 members of the House of Representatives and gauged their political tendencies through roll call votes and the opinions of their district via random sampling.43 The study, published in 1963, found that with regard to civil rights issues, a Representative’s attitude was closely associated with his perception of and the actual opinions of his constituents. However

with regard to social welfare, the correlation was much less significant.\textsuperscript{44} Clearly much has changed since the 1960s, and it remains unclear if the delegate tendencies that were present with regard to civil rights issues have manifested themselves in other hot button issues of the current century. It is possible that a study today would also show a correlation in favor of the delegate model because candidates make clear during their campaign their positions on the decisive issues of the present, resulting in elected candidates who are aligned with the majority’s opinion.

Unfortunately there has not been research conducted recently with the same precision and scope of the Miller and Stokes survey that took place fifty years ago. In light of the scarcity of research conducted on whether legislators operate as trustees, delegates, or somewhere in the middle, the Russell model provides new insight into the minds of current legislators. The next section of the paper will utilize this new framework to present new implications for United States Democracy.

**Implications for Democracy in the United States**

This paper has shown that elected representatives in the United States do not operate as delegates, trustees, or even politicos. In practice, they view themselves according to the Russell model: representatives who were elected to utilize their judgment in order to make decisions in the best interest of the country and their constituents. As a consequence, legislators devalue the opinions of their constituents with regard to their own on major policy items. This arises from various factors ranging from possessing greater amounts of information to believing that during the election, the voters legitimized the candidate’s own personal judgment. At the same time, elected representatives elevate the opinions of their constituents with regard to smaller items, arguing that the people who are affected by these programs are the most credible resources.

\textsuperscript{44} Miller and Stokes pp. 56.
While the implications of such a practice are difficult to fully describe in their entirety, several major consequences can be realized from examining democracy through this model.

The most important consequence from this new perspective of democracy in the United States is the heightened emphasis on elections. It is widely accepted that elections provide the mechanism by which democracy operates. Free and fair elections are the only way for voters to create a fully representative government. When viewing democracy from the Russell approach, elections also become the best way by which constituents can effectively shift their elected representatives’ opinions on major political issues. Because candidates attempt to clearly state their views on the major issues throughout the campaign, candidates view a victory as the affirmation of those beliefs. Only when a new legislator is elected into office will the direction of the legislature shift noticeably on these issues. It is important to recognize, however, that while legislators’ general opinions are difficult to shift on a major issue, it is possible for opponents to convince their elected representatives to restructure pieces of legislation they feel particularly egregious. Opponents who are willing to compromise will find themselves in a much better position to influence their Representatives and Senators than those who are unwilling give ground on an issue. The immense reelection rates that incumbents receive once they are finally in office can also help explain why Congress and State Legislatures have been criticized as slow in responding to shifts in public opinion. Since incumbents enjoy many benefits such as free mailings, heightened media attention, higher fundraising abilities, and the ability to influence the bureaucracy on behalf of their constituents, at times they may be able to win elections despite not being in line with all of their constituents’ opinions. Therefore, the Russell model demonstrates that United States democracy is not always responsive to the opinions of its constituents.
Conclusions

The trustee and delegate theories of representation offer two distinct approaches for elected representatives to act in a democracy. Neither model, however, offers a theory that describes the actions of legislators in practice at both the Federal and State level. The politico theory is an attempt to devise a model explaining the actions of legislators in practice, freeing them to weigh both their conscience and the opinions of their constituents when making a decision. The interviews with State Representative Kafka, State Senator Creem, and State Senator Timilty, as well as the written testimony of President John F. Kennedy demonstrate that the politico model does not correctly describe the trustee tendencies present in the mindset of many American legislators.

In order to account for this trustee mindset, the creation of a new theory, the Russell model, is necessary. The Russell model is similar to the politico model in that it blends the trustee and delegate theories, but it acknowledges that legislators feel that they have been elected into office because of their positions on the major issues and are therefore unlikely to concede to delegate pressure on high profile issues. The issues which are smaller in focus allow for constituents to wield greater influence with their legislators. The Russell model, unlike the trustee and delegate theories, does not have an ideal form of representation; it serves merely as a model for how legislators balance the opinions of their constituents with their personal convictions. The implications of this new approach allow for new insights into the importance of elections and the most effective roles that constituents can play in voicing their support or opposition. Most importantly, this paper has shown the need for a new comprehensive study on representation and the relationships between legislators and their constituents. Only then will the debate between the trustee and delegate theories of representation be finally settled.
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