**British Journal of
Political Science**

ARTICLE

Venturing Beyond the Vote: Routes to Feeling Represented through Unelected Representation

Andrea Vik[1,2,3] , Pieter de Wilde[1,4] , Oliver Treib[5] and Lene Aarøe[6]

[1]Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway, [2]Department of Psychology, Royal Holloway, University of London, London, UK, [3]Centre for the Politics of Feelings, School of Advanced Study, University of London, London, UK, [4]Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands, [5]Department of Political Science, University of Münster, Münster, Germany and [6]Department of Political Science, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark
Corresponding author: Andrea Vik; Email: andrea.vik@rhul.ac.uk

Abstract

This study examines how unelected representation, where political activists make representative claims on behalf of self-articulated constituencies, shapes citizens' feelings of representation. Through a cross-national conjoint experiment (Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Romania, N = 8279), we test three *routes to representation*: *descriptive representation* through demographic congruence, *substantive representation* through issue congruence, and *psychological representation* through personality-trait congruence and personality-ideology congruence. Results indicate that unelected representation makes people feel represented through these routes. Substantive representation has the strongest impact, followed by psychological representation and descriptive representation. We also find that contextual and individual factors influence how these routes operate. Ultimately, this paper presents a novel perspective on the effects of unelected representation, laying the groundwork for new empirical models of political representation that are firmly rooted in the conceptual innovations of constructivist theories. Unelected representation may have important implications for modern representative politics.

Keywords: political representation; conjoint experiment; constructivism; feeling represented; personality

Introduction

Many citizens express low levels of political trust, are discontent with elected representatives, and do not feel represented in current democratic systems (Holmberg 2020; Keane 2009; Dalton 2017). Some argue that this discontent with democracy illustrates the end of representative politics, which is being replaced by forms of 'swarm activism' (Tormey 2015). Frustrated with elected politicians and key institutions of electoral democracy, such as elections, parliaments, and political parties, political activists take matters into their own hands and present themselves as champions of various political causes. In doing so, they frequently describe themselves as representatives of self-articulated constituencies. Greta Thunberg argues that she speaks on behalf of future generations, demanding immediate action to tackle climate change (Thunberg 2019). Many speak on behalf of an undefined 'we' – that is, 'we demand justice' – leaving it open to all citizens to associate themselves with this collective (Guasti and Geissel 2019). Constructivist theorists of political representation refer to this practice as representative claim-making (Disch 2011; Saward 2010). Through representative claim-making, democracy is reinvigorated by '*...sparking new*

political subjects into action – both within and beyond the confines of parliamentary politics' (Disch 2019, 1).

This 'constructivist turn in political representation' thus alters our understanding of political representation and encourages us to think beyond the traditional party-based democratic institutions (Disch, Sande and Urbinati 2019). Unlike traditional views that focus on elected officials as the starting point, this theoretical shift redefines political representation as a dynamic, relational communication process between representatives and the represented (Disch 2011; Saward 2006). Constructivist scholarship thereby challenges long-standing perspectives on how political representation is interpreted and studied. If representation is constructed through representative claims, both elected and unelected individuals can be successful representatives if and when citizens authorize their claims (Saward 2010). In the traditional electoral system, such authorization comes in the form of votes. For unelected representatives who operate outside electoral channels, authorization and legitimization of their representative practices come in other forms. As summed up by De Mulder (2022), *'the ultimate judge of whether representation is legitimate or not, are the citizens themselves – whether they feel represented'* (p. 3).

Citizens' subjective feeling of being represented may indeed have central implications for democratic behaviour as 'personal feelings of representation might strongly affect citizens' intention to vote, their support for parties or the government, and their feelings of being well represented' (Dalton 2017, 189). Recent research shows that this feeling of being represented can be generated through exposure to various forms of political communication (Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Kaplan et al. 2023; Duell et al. 2023), particularly through representative claims (Vik and De Wilde 2024). Feeling represented is thus a critical element in the constructivist turn in political representation with profound democratic implications. What remains unknown is whether and how unelected representation influences citizens' feelings of representation. In this paper, we therefore study whether exposure to representative claims by unelected representatives makes citizens feel represented through them.

In answering this research question, this paper provides three key contributions. First, building on an understanding of unelected representation as a communicative act, we conduct the first large-scale cross-national investigation of the effects of representative claims made by unelected representatives. Second, drawing on research from political representation and political psychology, we theorize how citizens' feelings of being represented through unelected representation can be expected to be shaped by three *routes to representation*: *descriptive representation* through demographic congruence, *substantive representation* through issue congruence, and *psychological representation* through personality-trait congruence and personality-ideology congruence. Third, we test and compare these routes to representation through a comprehensive cross-national conjoint experimental design (Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Romania, N = 8279). This allows us to study and compare the causal effects of several dimensions of representative claims simultaneously (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014; Knudsen and Johannesson 2019). The research design also allows us to explore contextual differences in how the routes operate, as political representation works very differently in the four countries of analysis.

We find empirical support for all routes to representation in these different contexts, although to different extents. The findings indicate that unelected representatives can influence citizens' feelings of representation. Citizens feel somewhat more represented by unelected representatives who are similar to them in terms of gender, age, and traits of narcissism and agreeableness. Citizens also feel substantially more represented when an unelected representative makes a claim that resonates with the respondent's issue positions on climate action and immigration. By contrast, congruence on the issue of taxation does not affect feelings of being represented. In exploring the routes to representation, we uncover who travels which routes and find that context and individual factors, such as country of analysis, gender, age, and political interest, interfere with how these routes operate.

Ultimately, this paper presents a novel theoretical and empirical perspective on the effects of unelected representation, laying the groundwork for new empirical models of political representation that are firmly rooted in the conceptual innovations of constructivist theories. The key takeaway is that in a time in which the foundations of traditional political representation seem to crumble, unelected representation can increase citizens' feelings of being represented when there is congruence between the claim and the citizen. This opens up a range of questions about how we think about political legitimacy in representational terms, who contributes to it, in what way, and with what consequences.

Theoretical Background

Unelected Representation

Constructivist theorists of political representation argue that political representation is not necessarily the result of elections (Dryzek and List 2003; Saward 2006; Disch 2011). Where the standard account of political representation starts with elections and then asks whether the result is representative, constructivists start with acts of representation – representative claims – in which would-be representatives present themselves as champions of certain causes and groups, followed by acceptance or rejection by those witnessing these acts. Central to this constructivist turn in representation is the idea that representation should be viewed as a dynamic process of claim-making, an ongoing process of making and witnessing, accepting, and rejecting claims – in, between, and outside electoral cycles (Saward 2010). Political representation is here defined as a two-way process in which both representatives and the represented play active roles in defining and shaping the terms of political representation.

Saward (2010) defines a representative claim as 'a claim to represent or to know what represents the interests of someone or something' (p. 38). To study these claims empirically, De Wilde 2013 developed Representative Claims Analysis (RCA), which identifies three essential components of representative claims: the maker, the claim itself or policy demand, and the object or ascribed constituency. Representative claims can be found in various contexts, including social media, mass media, and parliamentary debates (Heinisch and Werner 2019; Joschko and Glaser 2019; Celis et al. 2014). These claims are made by both elected and unelected representatives and can encompass a wide range of policy demands on behalf of diverse groups (De Wilde 2020), including transnational constituencies (Kinski and Crum 2020). Typically, representative claims focus on broad interests or values rather than specific constituencies. Examples include statements such as 'We demand justice' or 'The reform is needed to improve children's education' (Guasti and Geissel 2019, 102). The public articulation of a political demand qualifies it as a claim (Koopmans and Statham 1999), while the linguistic connection to a group or collective transforms it into a representative claim.

From a constructivist perspective, representation can, in principle, be 'practiced, performed, claimed' by anyone within and without the familiar institutions of electoral democracy (Saward 2010). Specifically, this leads to an expansion of representation (Wolkenstein 2021; Wolkenstein and Wratil 2020), as not only elected representatives can make representative claims, but also unelected representatives (Wolkenstein 2021; Wolkenstein and Wratil 2020; Fossheim 2022; Bovenkamp and Vollaard 2018).[1] In conclusion, when representative claims are made by individual political activists who are not elected, they contribute to the universe of *unelected representation* (see Vik 2025).

In short, we take a political communication perspective on the universe of unelected representation, demarcated by the occurrence of a particular subclass of speech acts in the public sphere. Unelected representatives, for the purpose of our study, are thus defined as political activists who formulate representative claims, that is, policy demands, on behalf of self-articulated

---

[1]Also referred to as self-appointed, self-authorized, non-elected, and informal representatives in the literature; see Hayat 2022; Salkin 2021; Montanaro 2017; Saward 2016.
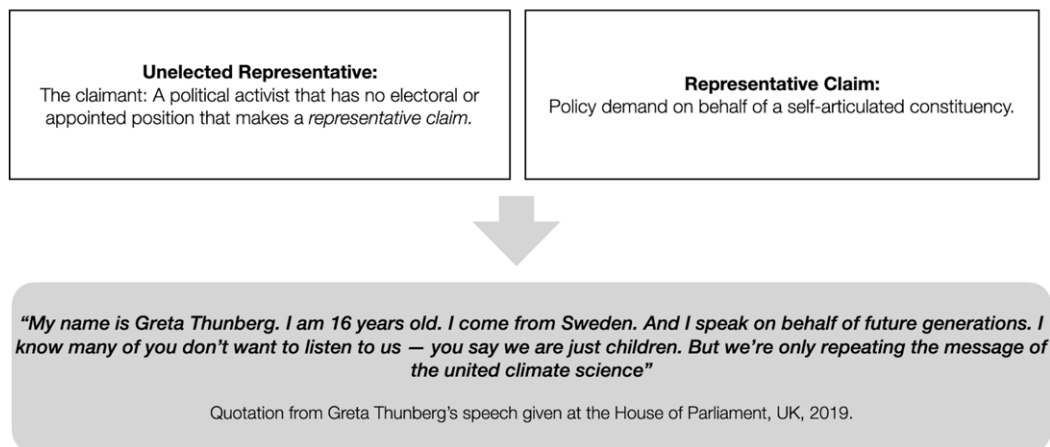
Unelected Representation

Unelected Representative: The claimant: A political activist that has no electoral or appointed position that makes a *representative claim*.	**Representative Claim:** Policy demand on behalf of a self-articulated constituency.

"My name is Greta Thunberg. I am 16 years old. I come from Sweden. And I speak on behalf of future generations. I know many of you don't want to listen to us — you say we are just children. But we're only repeating the message of the united climate science"

Quotation from Greta Thunberg's speech given at the House of Parliament, UK, 2019.

Figure 1. Illustrative Example of Unelected Representation: A Representative Claim by Greta Thunberg.

constituencies in front of a wide audience. Unelected representatives are thus a specific subgroup of political activists, and they stand out through their performance of representative claims. In Figure 1, we have illustrated our definition exemplified by a claim from Greta Thunberg, the climate activist who has hit a political nerve with her activism and representative claims, mobilizing millions of young climate activists and becoming the Times Person of the Year in 2019 (Felsentahl 2019).

Unelected representation challenges conventional notions of political representation by bypassing key features of liberal democracy, with significant implications for its functioning. This shift emphasizes the importance of new, unconventional sites and practices of representation, pluralizing the concept and making it harder to understand through traditional political theory (Sintomer 2013). Thus, current discussions on unelected representation focus largely on whether these representatives help or hinder democracy (Kuyper 2016; Montanaro 2012; Näsström 2015) and on what this expansionism means for democratic legitimacy (Schweber 2016; Disch, Sande and Urbinati 2019; Montanaro 2017; Disch 2015; Kuyper 2016; De Wilde 2020). Without denying the remaining scope for normative assessments of the legitimacy of unelected representation, for the purpose of our study, our focus aligns with Saward 2010 ideas on Weberian uses of legitimacy and constructivism; citizens ultimately determine the legitimacy of political representation – if they feel represented, the representative is legitimate.

Feeling Represented as the Missing Link in the Construction of Representation

'Feeling represented' has garnered significant attention in recent years (Rohrschneider 2005; Holmberg 2020; De Mulder 2022). A central argument in this literature is that citizens' subjective feeling of being well-represented by their representatives is a key element of representation, and importantly, also has implications for democratic behaviour (De Mulder 2022; Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Dalton 2017). There is a growing literature investigating how various forms of political communication elicit feelings of representation, finding that a variety of politicians' traits and their communication can cause changes in how citizens feel represented (Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Kaplan et al. 2023; Duell et al. 2023). But there is – to our knowledge – no systematic, rigorous analysis of whether citizens feel represented through unelected representation, and - if so - why and how this is the case.

The literature does, however, present differing conceptualizations of citizens' subjective feelings of representation. On the one hand, these feelings may have instrumental components reflecting feeling substantively represented (De Mulder 2022; Holmberg 2020). However, there are suggested expressive components related to feelings of connectedness, affective correspondence, and identity

(Coleman 2005; Jakimow 2022; Vik and De Wilde 2024). In sum, the subjective feeling of political representation may encompass both instrumental and expressive components. In experimental research, respondents have been asked directly how well they feel represented by different political communication, an approach which seems to be treading ground (Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Vik and De Wilde 2024; Kaplan et al. 2023; Duell et al. 2023). Taking these advancements into account, we conceptualize 'feeling represented' as a subjective feeling state that can be elicited through political communication, such as representative claims.

The relationship between representative claim-making from unelected representatives and citizens' feelings of being represented remains to be theorized and empirically investigated. In the following sections, drawing on literature from political representation and political psychology, we theorize and empirically examine three routes to feeling represented: descriptive representation through demographic congruence, substantive representation through issue congruence, and psychological representation through personality-trait congruence and personality-ideology congruence. Substantive and descriptive representation are considered in the literature as key dimensions of political representation (for example, Pitkin 1967, see also Lavi et al. 2024, 3 for a recent review), while personality congruence is studied in political psychology (for example, Caprara et al. 2007; Nai, Maier and Vranić 2021; Vecchione et al. 2011). Our study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first to test and compare these three routes to representation in the same design.

Descriptive Representation and Feeling Represented

Descriptive representation refers to the idea that representatives should be demographically similar to the groups or communities that they represent. Such demographic traits include gender, race, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation. Pursuing descriptive representation ensures that all members of the community are represented in the decision-making process. The importance of descriptive representation, especially for historically marginalized groups, has been repeatedly underpinned (Mansbridge 1999; Reher 2022; Arnesen and Peters 2018). Mansbridge (1999) argues that descriptive representation (1) improves communication between the representative and represented, (2) similarity increases the likelihood of developing similar positions, and (3) installs a sense of 'ability to rule' in people. Descriptive representation is also argued to matter for how citizens feel represented (Jakimow 2022). Unelected representatives have been closely related to marginalized groups that are typically excluded from decision-making processes (Gause 2022; Montanaro 2017), thus we would expect that demographic congruence can matter for successful representation. An example of this is Greta's young age and how she has mobilized or been the voice for young people who often feel excluded from the electoral political system.

Political psychology further bolsters the importance of descriptive congruence for political representation. We know that an enduring identity, an emotional attachment to a party or a political leader, is strengthened by social affiliation to gender, ethnicity, or religion (Huddy and Bankert 2017; Huddy, Mason and Aarøe 2015; Greene 2004). Thus, when elected parliaments and governments reflect a microcosm of society in terms of key demographics like gender and ethnicity (descriptive representation), stronger emotional attachments with the entity or individual may be facilitated. Therefore, we expect demographic congruence, in relation to gender and age, to matter for whether citizens feel represented in unelected representation.

H1 (Demographic congruence): Citizens feel more represented through claims made by a claimant who shares their demographics. Stronger demographic congruence in terms of (a) gender congruence and (b) age congruence predicts higher levels of feeling represented.

For descriptive representation, we focus on gender and age, as these are two demographic characteristics that can have a significant impact on an individual's experiences, perspectives, and interests (Ross and Rouse 123; Mansbridge 1999; Ruedin 2015).

Even if descriptive representation is important in many ways, not least for substantive representation, there are also plenty of reasons to believe that we should not cling to the importance of descriptive representation. A range of studies, for example, finds that descriptive representation does not necessarily translate into substantive representation, which to citizens matters at least as much (Celis et al. 2008; Staehr Harder 2020; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Bankert, Huddy and Rosema 2017). Therefore, it is also important to consider whether citizens exposed to representative claims by unelected representatives agree with the policy demands they make.

Substantive Representation and Feeling Represented

According to Dahl 1971, substantive representation is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy, as it allows representatives to use their positions of authority and influence to actively advocate for policies and decisions that will benefit their constituents (p. 1). This reflects the strong importance scholars of political representation and democracy, in general, have placed on substantive congruence – the principle that the policy preferences of elected officials should reflect the policy preferences of those they represent (Thomassen and Schmitt 1999).[2] Issue congruence is, therefore, by many considered to be an essential indicator of representation (Miller and Stokes 1963; Powell 2004). In the circumplex model in political science as a theory of core affect, issue congruence is found to be affectively laden (Bakker, Schumacher and Rooduijn 2021). Those with extreme attitudes experience more arousal in response to political rhetoric, while political rhetoric incongruent with prior attitudes evokes negative affect (Bakker, Schumacher and Rooduijn 2021). This aligns with substantive representation in the way that we can explain stronger positive evaluations when the respondent views a claim that is congruent with their previously held beliefs, and the opposite effect when their views are incongruent with the message. Such findings imply that substantive congruence is conducive to people feeling represented, and thus, we formulate the following hypothesis.

> H2 (Issue congruence): *Citizens are more likely to feel represented through claims that express an issue position that matches their own issue position. Stronger issue congruence for the issues of (a) immigration, (b) climate, and (c) taxation predicts higher levels of feeling represented.*

The effectiveness of issue congruence can vary depending on the context, the salience of the issues, and the evaluation of the importance of the issues (Burstein 2003; Costello et al. 2021; Page and Shapiro 1983). Saward (2006) argues that issue congruence may be less pronounced in situations where there is a high level of public trust in representatives, as constituents may be more willing to accept representatives who hold different views on certain issues. Thus, we will inspect how issue congruence matters in unelected representation on issues that vary in political polarization, namely climate action, immigration, and taxation (Pew Research Center 2019), and explore under which conditions issue congruence matters more or less.

Psychological Representation and Feeling Represented

The congruency model of political preference states that there are 'interacting congruences among voters' self-reported traits and values, voters' perceptions of leaders' personalities, politicians' self-reported traits, and programmes of favoured political coalitions' (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004, 581). Similarly, the susceptibility to differences model explains that differences in personality can explain why communicated messages, in our case, representative claims, are appreciated by some

---

[2]Here, we deviate from the strictest interpretation of the constructivist turn in representation, as we assume citizens have policy preferences prior to the exposure of our representative claim stimulus. While we consider policy preferences to be at least somewhat malleable through political discourse over time, we deem it unlikely that a single-shot experiment with a fictitious representative claim could change preferences on well-established issues significantly.

and not by others (Valkenburg and Peter 2013). While so far largely overlooked in the literature of political representation, psychological congruence between representative claim-makers and members of the audience might thus be a key missing piece of the puzzle in understanding representative linkages. Personality is defined as 'a multifaceted and enduring internal, or psychological, structure' that is typically manifested as traits (Mondak et al. 2010). These traits are reflected as internal dimensions that predispose one to relatively stable patterns of experience and behaviour across situations (McCrae and Costa 2008).

Three of the most popular trait frameworks used in political science are the Big Five, HEXACO, and the Dark Triad. The Big Five consists of five traits: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability (the inverse of neuroticism), and openness (Goldberg 2013; McCrae and Costa 2008). HEXACO has the same traits as the Big Five but also includes a measure of honesty-humility (Lee and Ashton 2014). Meanwhile, the Dark Triad consists of three 'socially malevolent' traits: narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism (Jonason and Webster 2010). HEXACO's honesty-humility measure is essentially the opposite equivalent to the common element shared by the Dark Triad variables (Lee and Ashton 2014). These traits have been found to be robust measurements, being relatively consistent across cultures, situations, and over time (McCrae and Costa 2008; Larsen and Buss 2010; Rogoza et al. 2021; Schmitt et al. 2007).

Citizens tend to vote for politicians whose personality traits are in accordance with the ideology of their preferred political party, as well as politicians who possess their own personality traits (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004). For example, citizens with dark traits prefer candidates with dark traits (Hart, Richardson and Tortoriello 2018; Nai, Maier and Vranić 2021). In research that asked respondents to design their ideal politician, individuals sought to find leaders with traits that were congruent with their own (the congruency principle) but also those who possessed some key leadership qualities (the leadership appeal framework) (Aichholzer and Willmann 2020). Furthermore, (Kalmoe, Gubler and Wood 2018) tested the polarizing effects of common violent metaphors on issue preferences and found these effects to depend on participants' aggressive personality traits. Similarly, Bakker, Schumaker and Rooduijn (2020) found that agreeableness had an independent effect on populist voting (irrespective of the ideological position of the populist parties), in which individuals who scored low on agreeableness were more likely to support populist parties. This effect has been found to be caused by the anti-establishment component of populist rhetoric, as an anti-establishment message is congruent with not being agreeable (Bakker, Schumaker and Rooduijn 2020). In (political) marketing, psychological microtargeting is a hot topic, and several studies have shown that personality-tailored ads are very persuasive (Matz et al. 2017; Zarouali et al. 2022). Together, these studies illustrate that congruence in personality matters for numerous processes related to political representation.

Aichholzer and Willmann (2020) argue that congruence in personality may foster ideological or value representation.[3] Certain personality traits can reflect values; for instance, agreeableness correlates positively with benevolence and traditional values, and these values are strong among populist supporters (Roccas et al. 2002; Baro 2022). Thus, it is possible that individuals who score low on agreeableness prefer politicians with the same trait, as this can be argued to be a form of value congruence. In addition to agreeableness, narcissism is a personality trait that is closely related to self-enhancement values (Kajonius, Persson and Jonason 2015). Agreeableness refers to the tendency to be likeable, agreeable, pleasant, and harmonious in relation to others (Gerber et al. 2012), and (grandiose) narcissism consists of grandiosity, a need for admiration, a lack of empathy, a sense of entitlement, and self-admiration (Rogoza et al. 2021). Both of these traits are what we consider to be value-associated traits, and we go into depth in our reasoning when selecting these traits in Appendix B1. We expect that the importance of personality-trait

---

[3]While this resonates somewhat with Mansbridge 2003's focus on principles, beliefs, and values in her concept of gyroscopic representation, we focus more on citizens' perspectives and how they attribute values to the portrayed personality of politicians.

congruence, especially for the traits of agreeableness and narcissism, extends to unelected representation and that citizens feel more represented by activists who mirror their own personalities:

> H3 (personality-trait congruence): *Citizens feel more represented through claims in which the claimant communicates traits similar to their own. Stronger trait congruence in terms of congruence for the traits of (a) narcissism and (b) agreeableness predicts higher levels of feeling represented.*

In addition to straightforward personality-trait congruence, there is also substantial evidence for personality-ideology congruence, as personality is strongly correlated with political preferences (Jost, Nosek and Gosling 2008; Fatke 2017; Ekstrom and Federico 2019; Jonason 2014; Aichholzer, Danner and Rammstedt 2018; Mondak and Halperin 2008). From the Big Five framework, two have emerged as robust predictors of political preferences: openness and conscientiousness. Openness is characterized by the willingness to try new experiences and the interest in abstract ideas and concepts, while conscientiousness is characterized by a sense of responsibility, organization, and self-discipline (Costa, McCrae and Dye 1991). Individuals who score high on openness tend to prefer left-wing parties and ideologies (for example, political liberal policies), whereas individuals scoring high on conscientiousness tend to prefer parties and ideologies from the right (for example, political conservative policies), and this effect is found in most Western countries and is stable over time (Jost, Nosek and Gosling 2008; Fatke 2017; Ekstrom and Federico 2019). This can be argued for by the fact that openness has clear implications for how people tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. This is more prevalent in left-leaning ideologies seeking social change (Ekstrom and Federico 2019). Conversely, right-leaning parties/politicians/ideologies promote stability, duty, and obedience, which likely resonates with individuals scoring high on conscientiousness; however, this relationship has more mixed and somewhat weaker evidence (Ekstrom and Federico 2019). Together, these studies provide evidence of the relationship between personality and ideology. Therefore, we expect that when the ideological position of the representative claim matches the respondent's personality traits, respondents feel more represented.

> H4 (personality-ideology Congruence): *Citizens feel more represented through claims that have an ideological position that matches their personality: (a) Citizens who score high on openness feel more represented through claims that have a liberal ideological position, and (b) Citizens who score high on conscientiousness feel more represented through claims that have a conservative ideological position.*

There is some overlap between psychological and descriptive routes to representation since both represent dimensions of similarity between representatives and constituents. Yet descriptive representation has typically been studied with a focus on demographic characteristics, which are typically externally identifiable and related to people's position in society. By contrast, personality traits are internal, relatively stable psychological characteristics that can be reflected in thoughts, communication, and behaviour. Psychological representation is, therefore, also different from substantive representation, which is traditionally oriented toward policy advocacy and, hence, an external act of responsiveness to the interests of the represented (for example, Pitkin 1967, 209; see also Lavi et al. 2024). In Pitkinian terms, our pathways resonate with the descriptive, substantive, and symbolic dimensions of dyadic representation (Lavi et al. 2024; Pitkin 1967), albeit that our understanding of psychological representation focuses on persons and their performative style and elaborates its psychological underpinnings much more elaborately than most understandings of the symbolic dimension. As part of psychological representation, it also relates to personality-ideology congruence, as hypothesized in H4, where people with certain personality traits are

drawn towards certain ideological orientations; this pathway could indirectly contribute to substantive representation. It goes beyond the scope of the present paper to investigate how these routes interact with and complement each other.

Methods

To test our hypotheses and answer our research question, we conducted a visual conjoint experiment (Vecchiato and Munger 2021) in Germany, Italy, Romania, and Sweden (N = 8279). A conjoint experiment allows us to study and compare the causal effects of several dimensions of an unelected representative's claim simultaneously (Knudsen and Johannesson 2019; Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2014). The simultaneous analysis of various causal effects allows us to assess the strength of each route to representation, which we elaborate on below. This method is a widely adopted approach for assessing the public's preferences regarding political candidates through so-called candidate choice experiments (Schwarz and Coppock 2022), and also for other multi-dimensional choices such as policy measures on climate change and immigration (Bansak et al. 2019), and, most importantly, preferred political representatives (Costa 2021; Arnesen and Peters 2018; Arnesen, Duell and Johannesson 2019). The increasing popularity of conjoint analysis in political science can be attributed to its enhancements of the overall external validity of the findings (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto 2015), which we believe has even more merit for visual conjoint designs, and its mitigation of the influence of social desirability bias (Bansak et al. 2019).

The study is pre-registered and available at this OSF link, and any clarifications and deviations are explained in the manuscript and Appendix D. All data were collected by the polling company Kantar Germany in July 2022, and respondents were incentivized for their participation according to Kantar's policies.[4] We selected the following countries to capture contextual diversity, particularly in terms of quality of government (within Europe): Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Romania. The quality of government has been shown to affect aggregate levels of feeling represented (Holmberg 2020; Rohrschneider 2005), including elements such as government corruption, the rule of law, and the quality of democracy. It is very high in Sweden, high in Germany, moderate in Italy, and low in Romania (see Appendix A1 for more information regarding case selection). These four countries differ in many other potentially relevant contextual conditions, such as the level of economic development, the degree of democratic consolidation, and media use. If there are contextual scope conditions for our observed effects, this diverse case selection should allow us to identify them (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Newton 2007).

Kantar collected 2073 responses from Germany, 2090 from Sweden, 2097 from Italy, and 2019 from Romania, giving us a total sample of 8,279 respondents. We performed an a priori power analysis with the cjpowR R package from Schuessler and Freitag 2020 to ensure that we had sufficient power for our statistical analyses. We assumed a very small effect size (0.02) for the main effect in the conjoint design, and a two-sided $\alpha = 0.05$, which, after applying the Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons across the sixteen levels, becomes $\alpha_{\text{corrected}} = 0.003$. For pooled analysis (N = 8279), we then have a power above 99%, and for country-level subgroup analysis, the power is 87%. To improve the representativeness of our samples, we applied quotas for gender, age, and education. See Appendix A2 for the full sampling method and sample descriptives, and Appendix A3 for an elaboration on research ethics.

Our conjoint design is fully randomized and consists of a paired-profile design in the form of Twitter profiles of fictitious political activists (that is, unelected representatives).[5] Note that we can have a fully randomized design as we ensured the realism of all possible profile combinations (see

---

[4]We received the data from Kantar in a fully anonymized format without any identification markers. As a company registered in Germany, Kantar complies with strict EU data protection regulations.

[5]Data collection was completed before Elon Musk acquired Twitter/X in October 2022.

Appendix B for elaboration and Appendix B4 for the successful randomization check). Each respondent was shown four pairs of profiles, meaning that each respondent saw a total of eight Twitter profiles.

To measure the effects of different profile characteristics on citizens' feeling of representation, respondents were asked to choose which of the presented profiles they felt represented them more (choice task, DV1), and they were asked to indicate how well represented they felt by each of the profiles on a 7-point scale (rating task, DV2). These item wordings are inspired by and similar to those in other recent research, notably Duell et al. (2023) and Kaplan et al. (2023). Importantly, this way of asking respondents about their feelings of representation has been shown to load on both instrumental and expressive components of 'feeling represented' (Vik and De Wilde 2024). This means it is not merely feeling substantively represented, as highlighted by De Mulder (2022) and Holmberg (2020), but also incorporates the connectedness and identity component of feeling represented as suggested by Coleman (2005) and Jakimow (2022). Highly similar phrasings have also been used in focus group interviews, in which respondents were able to articulate what it means for them to feel represented and illustrate with examples of experiences in which they felt represented (Jong and Mügge 2023).

We manipulated the stimuli on the following dimensions of a representative claim: (1) the maker of the claim, whose (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) cues about their personality traits were varied, and (2) the claim, which concerned pro or anti positions on one of the following three policy issues: climate change, immigration, or taxation. In order to limit the number of variables and levels, we kept the object of the claim constant, with each activist referring to an imaginary community denoted by the collective pronoun 'we', as this is common in interest/value claims (Guasti and Geissel 2019). The dimensions, attributes, levels, and manipulations of our conjoint design and an example of the conjoint task are illustrated in Figure 2. In addition, a detailed description of the experimental design is available in Appendix B.

Twitter (now called X) profiles were chosen because this platform has been found to influence voting and thus to be suitable for studying online representational politics (Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Kruikemeier 2014). In addition, the number of followers that activists such as Greta Thunberg or Leonardo DiCaprio have on Twitter, the frequency with which these activists use this platform to communicate their claims, and the amount of engagement such messages generate in terms of likes, retweets, and comments, clearly demonstrates that Twitter is a key platform for many activists.

For descriptive representation, we manipulated gender and age via the activist's name and profile picture. We chose generic Anglo-Saxon names (Mary and John Smith) and a picture from the Chicago Face Database (Ma, Correll and Wittenbrink 2015), which we manipulated to fit with all gender and age categories using the FaceApp. This allowed us to keep other variables, such as ethnicity and attractiveness, constant across conditions. For substantive representation, we manipulated one tweet to be the representative claim, that is, the policy demand on behalf of a generic 'we' on the issues of climate change, immigration, and taxation. We chose these issues as the degree of polarization of positions on these issues varies widely (Pew Research Center 2019), and they load on both the economic and cultural left-right dimension in European politics (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), thus ensuring that findings are not driven by the peculiarities of any individual issue. A small pretest (n = 28) showed that respondents understood all policy demands correctly (see Appendix B1).

For psychological representation, we manipulated one tweet to illustrate the psychological traits of each activist. In doing so, we follow prior research (Laustsen 2017; Nai, Maier and Vranić 2021) and use short text descriptions to highlight the relevant personality attribute. Specifically, we chose to manipulate narcissism and agreeableness, for the following four reasons: (1) ecological validity – these traits are prevalent among activists and politicians; (2) suitability for congruence – traits that resemble basic values have been argued to matter the most in congruence; (3) traits that are not a feature of ideology – narcissism and agreeableness are typically not associated with
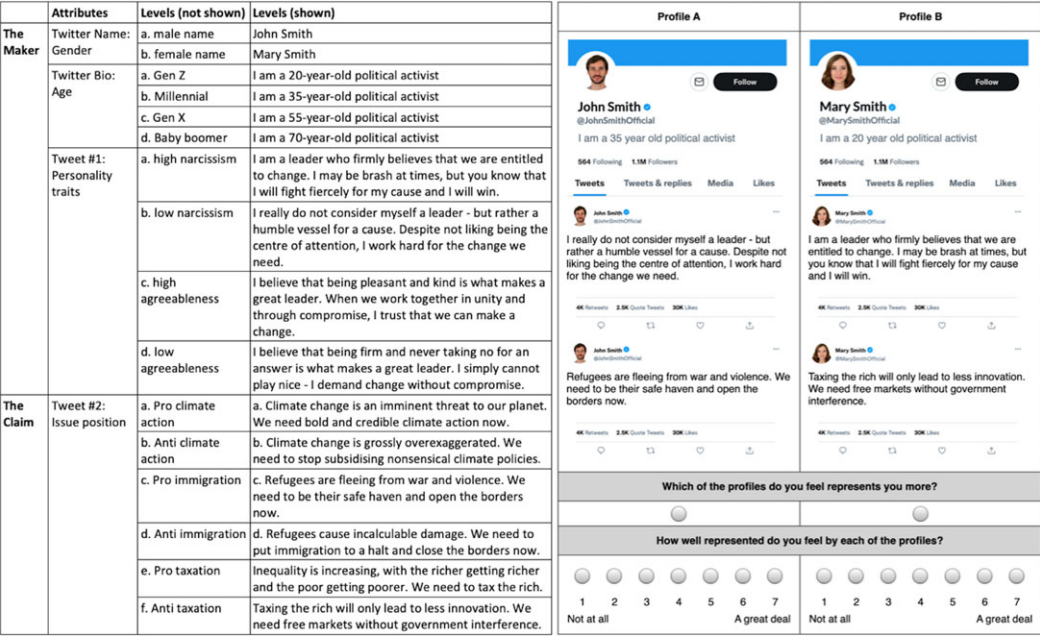
Figure 2. Left: Conjoint dimensions and levels. Right: Example of a conjoint task.

typical left/right ideological stances, and (4) people should be able to perceive these traits in others: narcissism and agreeableness are easiest to signal to other people. Specifically, to manipulate the personality traits of agreeableness and narcissism, we provided adjectives and values associated with the traits in the claim-maker's self-descriptions (Goldberg 2013; Jonason and Webster 2010; Lee and Ashton 2014).[6] We conducted a manipulation check for our manipulations in a small pre-test (n = 28), showing that the low agreeableness condition was indeed perceived as communicating lower agreeableness than the high agreeableness condition and that the low narcissism condition was perceived as conveying lower narcissism than the high narcissism condition. Yet, the results also indicate that both low agreeableness and high narcissism have similar scores on both narcissism and agreeableness (see Appendix B1 for all pretest details). Prior research has found that agreeableness and narcissism are correlated (Paulhus and Williams 2002), and while the manipulation checks support that people could identify variation in personality type based on the statements, we need to keep in mind that it may be difficult to disentangle low agreeableness and high narcissism.

Measures

The full survey design consisted of a pretreatment questionnaire, the conjoint module, a vignette experiment for another study, and a posttreatment questionnaire. A detailed account of the measures and their justifications can be found in Appendices B1 and B2.

In the pretreatment questionnaire, we asked respondents questions relating to our three types of representation. To establish (1) descriptive representation, we asked respondents about their (a) gender and (b) age. Ethnicity, for instance, becomes practically infeasible as our design is

---

[6]Valuing kindness, being pleasant, compromise and working together was highlighted to convey high agreeableness, while inability to be nice and a focus on being firm and demanding change without compromise was highlighted to convey low agreeableness. Low narcissism was conveyed by emphasizing humility and no grandiosity, while high narcissism was cued by describing the claimant's sense of entitlement, grandiosity, blatant tendencies, and aggression. See Appendix B1 for further description and discussion of the operationalization.

conducted in several European nations with different ethnic majorities/minorities, which would lead to difficulties in maintaining experimental control and statistical power. To measure (2) substantive representation, we asked respondents to indicate their pro or anti stance on our three issues on a ten-point scale where 1 meant that they 'fully agreed' with the statement on the left, and 10 meant that they 'fully agreed' with the statement on the right: (a) issue positions on climate protection were measured with a scale ranging from 'climate protection should take priority, even at the cost of economic growth' to 'economic growth should take priority, even at the cost of climate protection'; (b) for issue positions on immigration, the endpoints of the scale consisted of the statements 'immigration strengthens our society' and 'immigration is a threat to our society' and; (c) for issue positions on taxation, we pitted the statement 'taxes should be raised to increase public services' against the statement 'taxes should be cut, even at the expense of cutting public services'. For psychological representation (3), we measured (a) narcissism ($\alpha = 0.82$) using the four items from the 'Dirty Dozen' (Jonason and Webster 2010), (b) agreeableness ($\alpha = 0.69$), (c) openness ($\alpha = 0.61$), and (d) conscientiousness ($\alpha = 0.63$) were measured by the four-item scales from the Mini IPIP (Donnellan et al. 2006).

Congruencies

For all the routes to representation, we created measures of congruence by contrasting the pretreatment measurements with the attributes illustrated in the conjoint design. In other words, we consider congruence to be a match between respondents' self-reported attributes with the stimuli presented in the conjoint. This process was inspired by how previous work on issue congruence was coded (Bakker, Schumacher and Rooduijn 2021) and was specified in our pre-registration. We explain the coding briefly below, and in Appendix B3, we have illustrated the coding process.

For demographic congruence, we create congruence indexes for gender and age. Gender congruence is simply whether the gender of the respondents matches with the displayed gender of the claimant (0 = incongruent, 1 = congruent). If respondents reported other or nonbinary as their gender, this was coded as incongruent. For age congruence, we created a continuous scale of congruence by estimating the age difference between the respondent's age (18–90) and the activist's (GenZ: 20, Millenial: 35, GenX: 55, Boomer: 70), and reverse-coded the index so that a higher score represented high levels of congruence. To illustrate, when a 20-year-old respondent witnesses a 20-year-old claimant, they are given a score of 70 (maximum congruence), whereas when a 90-year-old respondent witnesses the same activist, their age congruence score is 0 (minimum congruence).

For *issue congruence*, we computed degrees of congruence with each issue by contrasting the issue position of the respondent with the policy demand of the claim displayed in the conjoint design (-4 = maximum degree of incongruence, 4 = maximum degree of congruence). A positive score ($0 < x \leq 4$) means that the policy demand in the representative claim was congruent with the respondent's issue position (for example, anti-immigration position and anti-immigration claim). Negative scores ($-4 \geq x > 0$) indicate incongruence between the respondent's issue position and the policy demand portrayed in the claim (for example, anti-immigration attitude and pro-immigration claim). Again, we assume that the claim is more congruent for participants with more extreme attitudes, as done in Bakker, Schumacher and Rooduijn 2021. A score of '0' indicates that the respondent has a neutral issue position, meaning that none of the policy demands in the claim are congruent or incongruent with the respondent's issue position.

For *personality congruence*, we created variables indicating (1) trait/trait congruence, the match between the traits indicated in each profile and respondents' self-reported trait; and (2) trait/ideology congruence: the match with the respondent's self-reported traits (openness and conscientiousness) and the ideological position of the claim (left-leaning claims and right-leaning claims). We calculate the congruence in a similar manner to issue congruence. We computed degrees of personality trait congruence by contrasting the personality trait displayed in the conjoint design with the respondent's score of the personality trait (-2 = maximum degree of

incongruence, $2 =$ maximum degree of congruence). A positive score ($0 < x \leq 2$) means that the trait manipulated in the conjoint was congruent with the respondent's score on that trait (for example, a respondent with low agreeableness witnessed a claimant with low agreeableness). For personality-ideology congruence, we created a congruence index by contrasting the ideological position of the claim (left-leaning; pro-climate, immigration, taxation or right-leaning; anti-climate, immigration, and taxation) with the respondents' scores of openness and conscientiousness ($-2 =$ maximum degree of incongruence, $2 =$ maximum degree of congruence). A positive score ($0 < x \leq 2$) means that the ideological position in the conjoint design was congruent with the respondent's score on either openness or conscientiousness (for example, a respondent with high openness witnessed a left-leaning claim).

To make the continuous congruence measures more comparable and interpretable while retaining the fine-grained information from the continuous measure, we rescale them to range from 0 (minimum congruence) to 1 (maximum congruence).[7] In our pre-registration we did not specify that for H2 (issue congruence) and H3 (personality congruence), we will have missing values for the subcongruencies we test in the hypotheses, that is congruence for the three issues (a) climate, (b) immigration, and (c) taxation and for the personality traits (a) narcissism and (b) agreeableness. When the respondent, for instance, witnessed a pro-climate claim, we cannot calculate immigration congruence. Due to our high statistical power, we code them as missing values (NAs) to test the pre-registered hypotheses. In our exploratory analysis, in which we aim to compare the routes to representation, we take into account higher-order congruence for H2 and H3. In other words, we look at issue congruence and personality congruence overall, as it was visible in the conjoint design. This is illustrated in Appendix B3.

Controls

Although a fully randomized design is expected to eliminate the impact of confounding variables, including controls for potentially influential factors that may vary across the countries and influence our dependent variable in our analysis, can help prevent any unidentified confounding effects that may arise. Therefore, we specified controls a priori as social media use, political interest, and social trust (see Appendix B2 for the exact wording of all measures).[8] In our sample descriptives, we see that these variables do differ substantially between the countries (see Appendix A2).

Results

To test our hypotheses, we follow the pre-registered analysis plan and use OLS regression models with clustered standard errors to account for repeated measures (each participant rates a total of eight profiles). Our dependent variable was a continuous measure of feeling represented (DV2: 'How represented do you feel by Profile X?', M = 3.80, SD = 1.87), and for predictors, we used continuous rescaled congruence measures (see the Method section). The main effects of the conjoint attributes on feeling represented are available in Appendix C1.

The results of our analyses are presented in Table 1. As pre-registered, we perform robustness checks with (1) binary congruencies and (2) probit regression with the choice variable as the dependent variable. We also (3) ran an additional non-pre-registered analysis of robustness, where we added country dummies to the analysis in Table 1. Finally, we also looked at (4) descriptive marginal means in subgroups as an additional non-pre-registered robustness check (see Appendix C3.5), which allows us to focus on the levels of the conjoint and respondent characteristics without relying on congruences. All robustness checks replicate the conclusions from our main analysis.

---

[7]This rescaling was not pre-registered but does not change the results and eases interpretation (see Appendix C 3.1).

[8]In our pre-registration, we specified political trust as a control, but this was an error since we decided to drop the respective item from the survey and focus on social trust.

Table 1. OLS Regressions H1–H4: Routes to Representation

	Descriptive Representation		Substantive Representation			Psychological Representation			
	H1a	H1b	H2a	H2b	H2c	H3a	H3b	H4a	H4b
Gender C	0.052*** (0.015)								
Age C		0.252*** (0.030)							
Climate C			1.919*** (0.046)						
Immigration C				2.126*** (0.049)					
Taxation C					−0.053 (0.055)				
Narcissism C						0.254*** (0.043)			
Agreeableness C							0.436*** (0.042)		
Openness C								1.239*** (0.046)	
Conscientiousness C									−1.015*** (0.038)
Political Interest	0.030*** (0.007)	0.030*** (0.007)	0.025* (0.010)	0.030** (0.009)	0.031** (0.009)	0.026** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.009)	0.030*** (0.007)	0.029*** (0.007)
Social Trust	0.001 (0.008)	0.002 (0.008)	−0.011 (0.010)	0.019 (0.009)	0.002 (0.010)	−0.003 (0.009)	0.006 (0.009)	0.001 (0.008)	0.001 (0.007)
Social Media Use	0.162*** (0.009)	0.161*** (0.009)	0.180*** (0.011)	0.162*** (0.011)	0.147*** (0.012)	0.168*** (0.010)	0.156*** (0.010)	0.160*** (0.009)	0.161*** (0.009)
Num. Obs.	66232	66232	22107	22105	22020	33116	33116	66232	66232
R2	0.012	0.013	0.114	0.128	0.010	0.013	0.015	0.035	0.034
R2 Adj.	0.012	0.013	0.114	0.128	0.010	0.013	0.015	0.035	0.034
AIC	270545.5	270485.1	88362.3	87735.0	89026.4	135302.9	135060.1	268930.0	269025.7
RMSE	1.87	1.86	1.78	1.76	1.83	1.87	1.86	1.84	1.84

OLS regression estimates, robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered at the level of the respondent.
Congruences are rescaled (0-1)
* $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.003$, *** $p < 0.001$

Descriptive Representation

As seen in Table 1, consistent with H1, both gender congruence ($\beta = 0.05$, SE = 0.02, $p < .003$) and age congruence ($\beta = 0.25$, SE = 0.03, $p < .001$) are positively associated with feeling represented. When respondents witnessed a profile that was gender-congruent, holding other variables constant, they had a 0.05 increase in the feeling represented scale, a slightly higher feeling of representation compared to respondents who witnessed a gender-incongruent profile. When the age congruence goes from a maximum degree of incongruency to a maximum degree of congruence, there is an average increase of 0.25 in the feeling represented measure. As the dependent variable is measured on a six-point scale, the substantive size of both effects is relatively low. Therefore, sharing demographics such as gender and age makes citizens feel slightly more represented, which supports both H1a and H1b.

Substantive Representation

We find large and positive effects on feeling represented when the demands in the representative claims are congruent with the issue positions of the participant on climate protection ($\beta = 1.92$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$) and immigration ($\beta = 2.15$, SE = 0.05, $p < .003$), but an insignificant and slightly negative effect for taxation ($\beta = 0.05$, SE = 0.06, $p = .33$). It is interesting to note

that the effect of issue congruence varies so much depending on the issue. Immigration has the largest effect, eliciting an average increase of 2.13 on the six-point feeling represented measure as we move from the maximum degree of incongruency to the maximum degree of congruence. Congruence on climate protection has a slightly smaller effect, but an average increase of 1.92 in the dependent variable still represents a large effect. In comparison, congruence on taxation leads to a statistically non-significant decrease of 0.05 in people's feeling represented level. Thus, H2a and H2b are supported: seeing a claim that is congruent with your position on climate protection and immigration increases your level of feeling represented both substantially and significantly. Surprisingly, witnessing a claim that is congruent with one's position on taxation has no effect on feeling represented. Therefore, no support is found for H2c. One possible explanation for this finding could be that prior research has found that the representation gap between voters and political candidates on economic issues is smaller than the representation gap between on cultural issues (Dalton 2017). From this perspective, the representation gap that can be filled in by claim-making from unelected representatives might be larger for cultural issues than for economic issues. Still, the finding could also be due to our operationalization of the pro- and anti-tax claims in the conjoint, which specified taxing the rich. While there was a substantial share of respondents who agreed with the statement against higher taxes prior to the treatment (see Appendix A2), we observed a strong preference among many respondents in favour of the pro-tax message (see Appendix C1 and Appendix C3.4). In our subgroup analysis of descriptive marginal means (available in Appendix C3.5), we discovered that responnull findingndents who were pro-taxation felt mostly represented by the pro-taxation claim and not by the anti-taxation claim. Interestingly, even the respondents who reported being anti-taxation preferred the pro-taxation statement and did not even feel represented by the anti-taxation statement, which might explain this unexpected null-finding. We return to this point in the concluding discussion.

Psychological Representation

The results of our analysis reveal that both narcissism congruence ($\beta = 0.25, \text{SE} = 0.04, p < .001$) and agreeableness congruence ($\beta = 0.44, \text{SE} = 0.04, p < .001$) are positively associated with higher levels of feeling represented, as expected. These effects are considered small to moderate. These results suggest that individuals who witness unelected representatives with similar traits tend to feel more represented, and we conclude that the evidence supports H3a and H3b.

Our analysis of the relationship between personality-ideology congruence and feeling represented yielded mixed results. Our regression analysis revealed that openness-ideology congruence, specifically a congruence between liberal representative claims and respondents' levels of openness, is positively associated with feelings of representation ($\beta = 1.239, \text{SE} = 0.05, p < .001$). This supports H4a. However, we found the opposite effect for personality-ideology congruence involving conscientiousness. The results indicate that when the ideological position of the representative claim is matched with respondents' levels of conscientiousness, it leads to a significant and substantial *decrease* in feelings of representation ($\beta = -1.015, \text{SE} = 0.04, p < .001$). Therefore, hypothesis H4b is rejected. These effects could be due to the fact that the pro-statements resulted in respondents feeling the most represented (see Appendix C1 and C3.5).

Exploring the Role of Contextual and Individual Factors

We conclude the analyses by estimating a model with the congruencies at the conjoint levels (gender, age, issue, personality-trait, and personality-ideology) to compare the routes to representation and explore how contextual and individual factors influence the way the routes to representation work. Again, we use OLS regression with clustered standard errors. Importantly, our results are confirmed when controlling for other congruencies; gender congruence ($\beta = 0.051, \text{SE} = 0.01, p < .001$), age congruence ($\beta = 0.24, \text{SE} = 0.03, p < .001$), issue
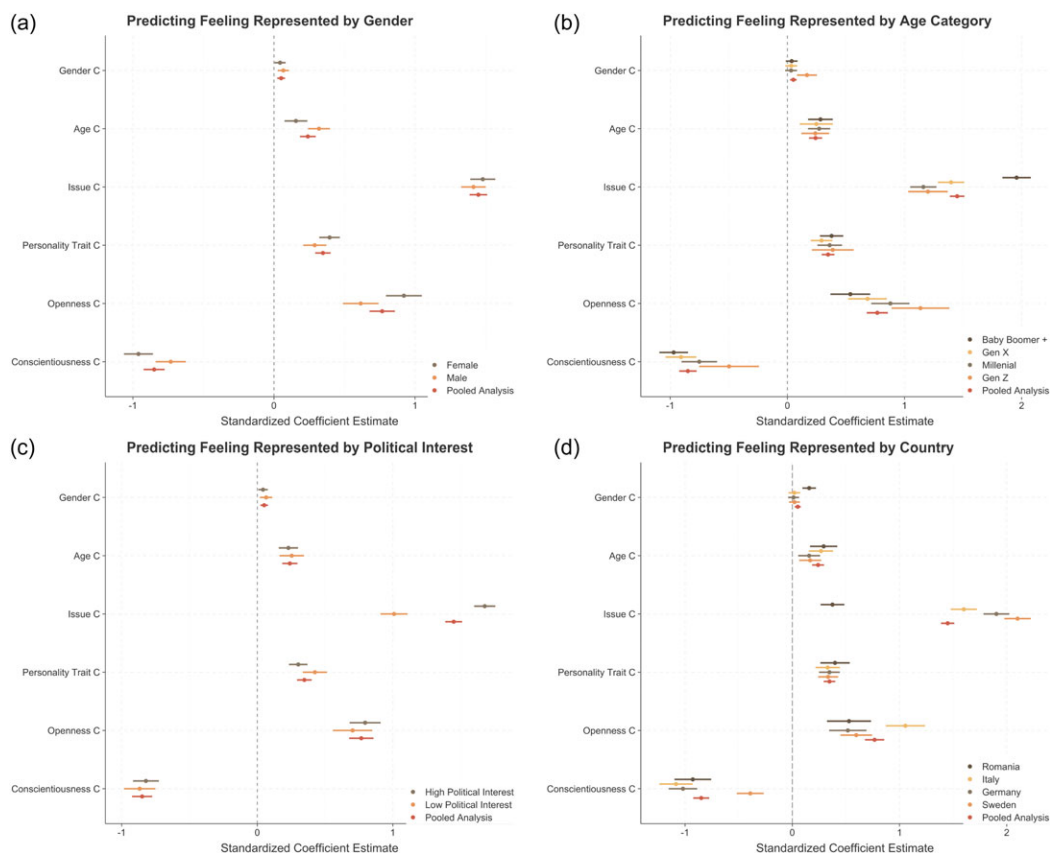
Figure 3. Coefficient plots based on OLS models: subgroup analysis by (a) gender, (b) age category, (c) political interest, and (d) country. Standard errors are clustered at the respondent level.

congruence ($\beta = 1.45$, SE $= 0.03$, $p < .001$), personality-trait congruence ($\beta = 0.35$, SE $= 0.03$, $p < .001$), and openness-ideology congruence ($\beta = 0.77$, SE $= 0.05$, $p < .001$) predict increased levels of feeling represented, and conscientiousness-ideology congruence ($\beta = -0.325$, SE $= 0.04$, $p < .001$) predicts decreased levels of feeling represented (see Appendix C2 for the model with all congruencies). As robustness checks, the manner in which binary coded congruencies influence feeling represented was investigated with two estimations: (1) Average Marginal Causal Effect (AMCE) and (2) descriptive marginal means. These are illustrated in Appendix C3.5 and largely replicate results from the OLS model in Appendix C2.

In the next step, we perform exploratory analyses to investigate potential contextual and individual factors that may influence how the routes to representation operate.[9] Specifically, we perform subgroup analyses by (a) gender, (b) age category, (c) political interest, and (d) country. The results are illustrated in Figure 3

From these plots, we see that overall issue congruence matters most for feeling represented ($\beta = 1.45$, SE $= 0.03$, $p < .001$). Gender congruence has a larger and significant effect for men ($\beta = 0.07$, SE $= 0.02$, $p < .003$) and a smaller significant effect for women ($\beta = 0.04$, SE $= 0.02$, $p < .05$). Age congruence also has a slightly larger effect for men ($\beta = 0.32$, SE $= 0.04$, $p < .001$), whereas the openness-ideology congruence has a larger effect for women

---

[9]These analyses are exploratory and were thus not pre-registered.

($\beta = 0.96$, SE $= 0.07$, $p < .001$). Baby boomers are more influenced by issue congruence ($\beta = 1.96$, SE $= 0.06$, $p < .001$), and gender congruence has a stronger effect for members of Generation Z ($\beta = 0.17$, SE $= 0.04$, $p < .001$). Having low political interest diminishes the effect of issue congruence ($\beta = 1.00$, SE $= 0.05$, $p < .001$). We also discover country differences, as in Romania ($\beta = 0.38$, SE $= 0.07$, $p < .001$), issue congruence has smaller effects on feeling represented compared to Sweden ($\beta = 2.10$, SE $= 0.06$, $p < .001$). Gender congruence, in contrast, has larger effects in Romania ($\beta = 0.16$, SE $= 0.03$, $p < .001$), with insignificant coefficients in all other countries of analysis. Overall, the effect of personality-trait congruence seems to be most stable across countries. The full regression table for all subgroup analyses is available in Appendix C4. In conclusion, we have strong evidence for the relevance of the different routes to representation, but we also discovered that the routes are not always straightforward.

Discussion

In the constructivist turn in political representation, attention is directed toward the dynamic process of representative claim-making (Saward 2010). This communication conceptualization of representation aims to reinvigorate democracy by sparking new political subjects into action, both within and beyond the confines of electoral politics (Disch, Sande and Urbinati 2019). While elected politicians make these claims, so can – and do – *unelected representatives*, that is, political activists (Saward 2016; DeWilde 2020; Gause 2022). Constructivist scholars argue for a citizens' perspective in representation (Saward 2010; Disch 2011), yet we do not know how citizens receive claims by unelected representatives. By building on an understanding of unelected representation as a communicative act and authorization by citizens as a function of feeling represented, we pave the way for empirical inquiry and perform one of the first large-scale, rigorous investigations to map the routes to feeling represented through unelected representation.[10]

We investigated the effects of exposure to representative claims made by unelected representatives on citizens' feelings of being represented through a cross-national conjoint experimental design. We do this by inspecting and exploring what we refer to as routes to representation, consisting of the following: *descriptive representation*, through demographic congruence, *substantive representation* through issue congruence, and *psychological representation* through personality-trait and personality-ideology congruence. We find empirical support for the functioning of all routes to representation, also when measured simultaneously, to various extents. Importantly, these models of representation extend to unelected representation; citizens can feel represented via representative claims by unelected representatives. The fact that routes to representation, which we derived from studies on the electoral channel of representation, political communication, and political psychology, also largely work in expected ways for unelected representation provides strong support to constructivists' arguments that we need to study political representation as a dynamic process of claim-making, rather than merely as a result of elections, and that unelected representatives contribute to it. Our test is demanding, since we exposed citizens in four European countries – Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Romania – to representative claims by fictitious Anglo-Saxon (thus foreign) makers of claims. When even single-shot stimuli with claims from fictitious foreign activists can increase citizens' feeling of being represented, it stands to reason that unelected representation forms an important part of modern representative politics. It also makes it likely that the feeling represented is an important and useful construct beyond the realm of unelected representation.

---

[10]We have not tested all of the advances from the constructivist turn, but we hope that empirical political scientists, who often ignore such theoretical advancements (see Wratil and Wolkenstein 2020), would see the advantage in incorporating some of the key features of the constructivist turn, such as representative claim-making.

Descriptive Representation

Our findings indicate that demographic congruence also matters in unelected representation. Gender and age congruence predicted higher levels of feeling represented, although the effect sizes are small, especially for gender congruence. We highlight that the effect holds up when controlling for other congruencies, that small effect sizes in such social science experiments are common (Funder and Ozer 2019), and that the gender cue was only given in terms of a picture and name. Making the gender cue more salient (for example, by including statements like 'as a man, I believe in climate change' or 'as a man, I am fighting for change'), could potentially have made the gender congruence effect stronger. Additionally, although gender congruence had almost no effect in Sweden, it had effect sizes comparable to issue congruence in Romania; the effects were also larger for younger respondents and larger for men. This poses important questions related to internalized gender scripts, discussions of quotas, and the representativeness of both formal and informal political spaces.

First, although women have been found to report that they want or need women representatives (Arnesen and Peters 2018), actual preference for gender in leadership could differ due to internalized gender expectations and gender stereotypes. For example, previous research has shown that both men and women perceive men as better political leaders (Bos et al. 2022). In addition, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that objective and subjective marginalization do not necessarily coincide, and middle-aged white men report feeling more marginalized despite being objectively well-represented in politics descriptively (Bollwerk, Schlipphak and Back 2022). Is it possible that descriptive representation, therefore, is more important for individuals who feel subjectively marginalized due to these demographic traits rather than being objectively politically marginalized? And how does such a relationship work, taking into account gendered political socialization? Such interactions are important to explore in the debate on the meaning of descriptive representation.

Second, our results point to the relevance of descriptive representation in the public sphere. If prominent voices in the informal public sphere constituted by mass media, social media, and 'the streets' do not reflect society at large, this may lead to unbalanced feelings of representation among the population. This has implications for media organizations, such as TV channels and newspapers, when they decide whom to feature as talk show hosts, pundits, and columnists. It has implications for society at large when discussing how to deal with the online harassment and trolling of women, minorities, and marginalized groups, which could lead influential unelected representatives to retreat from the public sphere.

Third, our findings raise the question of whether unelected representation could potentially offset a lack of descriptive representation in formal arenas. We know that women, young people, and minorities are classically underrepresented in legislatures and other formal political bodies (Ruedin 2015). Can the recent prominence of young female activists in the public sphere, from Greta Thunberg to Malala Yousafzai, compensate for this in terms of making citizens feel represented, nevertheless? These are questions that clearly go beyond the scope of this paper, but our findings invite such questions.

Substantive Representation

Substantive representation turns out to be the 'road most travelled' towards representation in our study – having overall the largest impact on our respondents' degree of feeling represented. Our design allows us to inspect issue congruence closely and explore meandering paths that may occur toward substantive representation. Congruence in preferences on taxation, for example, seems to have little effect on feeling represented. A majority reported preferring the pro-tax message, but they reported being more conservative in their actual tax positions. This could be due to the nature of the stimuli, as the stimuli in the conjoint design specifically mentioned taxing the rich and arguing that taxation can combat inequality, whereas the issue positions were more on raising or lowering taxes for public services. This also highlights something important with our design: the

potential priming effects are likely to be stronger for issue congruence, given the similarity between the issue positions in the pretreatment questionnaire and those presented in the stimuli, especially for climate and immigration. An alternative or additional explanation is that in highly polarized issues and in issues with high salience (Pew Research Center 2019), such as climate change and immigration, substantive representation may be more important. Economic dimensions are known to have larger representation gaps in the elected arena (Dalton 2021), so this could be a substantive finding. Taxation may also be a less important topic in activism than the other two issues, at least in the European context. Either way, our dual findings that issue congruence on climate change and immigration have major effects on citizens' feelings of being represented, while issue congruence on taxation does not raise follow-up questions on why this is the case.

Furthermore, the impact of substantive representation varies between countries; it seems to matter less in Romania, which has a lower quality of government, more among Baby Boomers, and more among politically interested individuals. This resonates with general biases in survey research: (i) self-selection bias: the average citizen is not very politically interested, but panel respondents in political science often are, and (ii) Western bias: much work is done in Western, rich, and affluent countries and effects may be culturally sensitive and might not extend to other contexts (Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan 2010). Among groups that are often neglected in empirical political science, representation – and other political processes – could work very differently, and future research should aim to dissect how feeling represented through representative claims by both unelected and elected representatives works in these contexts. Overall, our paper shows that substantive representation – although the biggest driver for feeling represented – has important contextual and individual limitations.

Psychological Representation

We find support for the functioning of personality-trait congruence as a route to representation, albeit with small effect sizes. The level of representation felt by respondents increased when the personality traits signalled by unelected representatives in our stimuli, such as narcissism and agreeableness, matched those of the respondents. It is essential to consider the conjoint design when interpreting these results. The innovative approach of manipulating personality traits within brief formats, while common in marketing and psychological tailoring research (Matz et al. 2017), differs from the longer text descriptions typically used in political science studies (Laustsen 2017; Nai, Maier and Vranić 2021). The brevity required by our conjoint design may have constrained our findings on personality-trait congruence, as manipulations of gender, age, and issue positions can be inferred more directly from short text descriptions. Consequently, the modest effect of personality-trait congruence on feelings of representation might be more pronounced in real-life scenarios, where leaders consistently express their personality traits in more substantial ways. It could be that there are other manipulations that would be more effective in increasing feelings of representation, and we see it as a fruitful avenue for personality research to develop more evidence-based personality stimuli and assess the effectiveness of shorter text stimuli.

Relatedly, it will also be relevant for future research to investigate how personality congruences beyond agreeableness and narcissism influence experiences of political representation. Moreover, the reasoning behind the meaningfulness of trait congruence needs to be further investigated. As highlighted by Aichholzer and Willmann (2020), this congruence finding is likely due to some value-related representation, in which we may deem those similar to us, in terms of traits, to possess similar values, which could influence leadership appeal. In a time when psychological microtargeting is becoming increasingly common and has persuasive appeals (Zarouali et al. 2022), we need to dissect the meaningfulness of personality trait congruence.

We find mixed support for the congruence between the ideological position of the claim and respondents' personality traits (personality-ideology congruence). Openness worked as hypothesized: when the claim was progressive (pro-immigration, climate, and taxation) and

the respondents scored high on openness, the levels of feeling represented were substantially higher. In contrast to our expectations, when the claim was conservative (anti-immigration, climate, and taxation) and the respondent scored high on conscientiousness, the levels of feeling represented decreased substantially. The evidence for conscientiousness and preferences for conservative ideology is slightly more mixed or weaker (Ekstrom and Federico 2019), but it is still surprising to find a significant effect in the opposite direction. This is likely due to the strong preference in favour of the progressive positions (pro-climate action, immigration, and taxation) among our respondents, despite our sample being relatively equal in terms of their political ideology. This could be due to undiscovered confounding factors that influence the persuasiveness of the policy demand in the claim. In any case, our findings raise important questions regarding the relationship between personality and ideological positions.

Our inclusion of psychological factors is relatively novel in the study of political representation, certainly in comparison to descriptive and substantive factors in representation, which are well-established in the literature. Our findings provide evidence that psychological mechanisms, in terms of both personality-trait congruence and personality-ideology congruence, matter for feeling represented. We hope that further studies, both theoretical and empirical, will investigate the role psychology plays in political representation. Our results also open up avenues for future work on the psychological foundations of substantive representation. For example, the relationship between personality and ideology is complex, and in recent research, there is evidence that the relationship between them is bidirectional (Bakker, Lelkes and Malka 2021). Thus, investigating how personality may drive issue positions and how these dynamics contribute to substantive representation could be an important new avenue in the study of political representation.

Continuing on the Route Towards (Unelected) Representation

This paper presented and mapped out several routes to (unelected) representation. The psychological emphasis on the importance of homophily seems to travel to political representation; citizens feel more represented through claims made by unelected representatives that match them in terms of gender, age, issue positions, and personality traits, as well as through issue positions that match their personality traits. The possible intersections of these routes remain to be studied. This was beyond the scope of the present paper, but future research should aim to understand how the routes interact with each other, and it should explore the psychological foundations that may drive substantive and descriptive representation.

Further research could also investigate what people think of or consider when asked whether they feel represented by claims made by unelected representatives. The operationalization of our main dependent variable corresponds to that of other studies on political representation (Kaplan et al. 2023; Dvir-Gvirsman et al. 2022; Duell et al. 2023) and the fact that routes to representation we know to function in the electoral arena are also found to empower feelings of representation by unelected representatives in our study supports the validity of our measurement. But since ours is the first study to apply this measurement outside the electoral arena, it is nevertheless worthwhile to investigate more in-depth what it means when people say they feel represented by an unelected representative making a representative claim.

In our study, we also manipulated a specific form of representative claims: interest/value claims (Guasti and Geissel 2019). These claims do not include an explicit linkage with the self-articulated constituency but rather invoke a generic 'we' or 'us' on whose behalf the claimant claims to speak, allowing anyone to associate themselves with this constructed collective. We encourage future research to claim, with an explicit linkage to various specific constituencies, such as Greta Thunberg's 'future generations' or Bono's 'Africa'. Experimental designs could, for instance, differentiate between the different types of claims as postulated in Guasti and Geissel 2019 and compare effects on feelings of representation.

Further research also needs to address the democratic and normative implications of feeling represented via unelected representation. Unelected representation might be a supporting factor to the legitimacy of electoral representative democracy, or it may be detrimental (Kuyper 2016; DeWilde 2020). We have focused here on whether citizens feel represented through unelected representation and how (through which pathways). We have not asked whether citizens feel strongly or sufficiently represented by unelected representatives, implying that there would no longer be a need for elected representatives, nor have we compared feelings of representation as a result of activists elevated to the status of unelected representatives through successful claim-making to elected representatives, or to more formal unelected representatives, like appointed civil servants (for example, central bankers or key figures in international organizations), trade union leaders, or religious leaders. We therefore strongly encourage future research to investigate the implications of feelings of representation by unelected representatives for the legitimacy of electoral representative democracy. How do citizens feel about key institutions of representative democracy and their elected representatives when they feel represented by unelected representatives? Which factors might play a role in determining whether unelected representation supports or undermines the legitimacy of electoral democracy? The findings of this study present an invitation to pursue this line of inquiry, not a final answer.

References

Aarts K and Thomassen J (2008) Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter? *Electoral Studies* **27**(1), 5–18. ISSN: 02613794. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2007.11.005.

Aichholzer J, Danner D and Rammstedt B (2018) Facets of personality and 'ideological asymmetries'. *Journal of Research in Personality* **77**, 90–100. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2018.09.010.

Aichholzer J and Willmann J (2020) Desired personality traits in politicians: Similar to me but more of a leader. *Journal of Research in Personality* **88**, 103990. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2020.103990.

Arnesen S, Duell D and Johannesson MP (2019) Do citizens make inferences from political candidate characteristics when aiming for substantive representation? *Electoral Studies* **57**, 46–60. ISSN: 02613794. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.10.005.

Arnesen S and Peters Y (2018) The Legitimacy of Representation: How Descriptive, Formal, and Responsiveness Representation Affect the Acceptability of Political Decisions. *Comparative Political Studies* **51**(7), 868–899. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414017720702.

Bakker B, Lelkes Y and Malka A (2021) Reconsidering the Link Between Self-Reported Personality Traits and Political Preferences. *American Political Science Review* **115**(4), 1482–1498. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000605.

Bakker B, Schumacher G and Rooduijn M (2021) Hot Politics? Affective Responses to Political Rhetoric. *American Political Science Review* **115**(1), 150–164. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000519.

Bakker B, Schumaker G and Rooduijn M (2020) The Populist Appeal: Personality and Anti-establishment Communication. *Journal of Politics* **83**(2), 589–601.

Bankert A, Huddy L and Rosema M (2017) Measuring Partisanship as a Social Identity in Multi-Party Systems. *Political Behavior* **39**(1), 103–132. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9349-5.

Bansak K, Hainmueller J, Hopkins DJ and Yamamoto Y (2019) Conjoint Survey Experiments. In James N. Druckman JN and Donald P. Green DP, *Cambridge Handbook of Advances in Experimental Political Science*, Cambridge University Press, 19–41.

Baro E (2022) Personal Values Priorities and Support for Populism in Europe – An Analysis of Personal Motivations Underpinning Support for Populist Parties in Europe. *Political Psychology* **43**(6), 1191–1215. https://doi.org/10.1111/POPS.12812.

Beck U and Beck-Gernsheim E (2001) *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: Sage.

Bollwerk M, Schlipphak B and Back MD (2022) Development and Validation of the Perceived Societal Marginalization Scale. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* **38**(2), 137–149. https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759/a000651.

Bos AL, Greenlee JS, Holman MR, Oxley ZM, and Lay JC (2022) This One's for the Boys: How Gendered Political Socialization Limits Girls' Political Ambition and Interest. *American Political Science Review* **116**(2), 484–501. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001027.

Bovenkamp H van de and Hans Vollaard H (2018) Representative claims in practice: The democratic quality of decentralized social and healthcare policies in the Netherlands. *Acta Politica* **53**(1), 98–120. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-017-0040-6.

Burstein P (2003) The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda. *Political Research Quarterly* **56**(1), 29–40.

Caprara GV, Barbaranelli C, Fraley RC and Vecchione M (2007) The simplicity of politicians' personalities across political context: An anomalous replication. *International Journal of Psychology* **42**(6), 393–405. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207590600991104.

Caprara GV and Zimbardo PG (2004) Personalizing politics: A congruency model of political preference. *American Psychologist* **59**(7), 581–594. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.59.7.581.

Celis K, Childs S, Kantola J, and Krook ML (2008) Rethinking women's substantive representation. *Representation* **44**(2), 99–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890802079573.

Celis K, Childs S, Kantola J, and Krook ML (2014) Constituting Women's Interests through Representative Claims. *Politics & Gender* **10**(2), 149–174. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X14000026.

Coleman S (2005) The lonely citizen: Indirect representation in an age of networks. *Political Communication* **22**(2), 197–214. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600590933197.

Costa M (2021) Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want from Political Representation. *American Journal of Political Science* **65**(2), 342–358. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12571.

Costa PT, McCrae RR and Dye DA (1991) Facet scales for agreeableness and conscientiousness: A revision of the NEO personality inventory. *Personality and Individual Differences* **12**(9), 887–898. https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(91)90177-D.

Costello R, Toshkov D, Bos B and Krouwel A (2021) Congruence between voters and parties: The role of party-level issue salience. *European Journal of Political Research* **60**(1), 92–113. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12388. .

Dahl RS (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and opposition*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dalton RJ (2017) Citizens' representation in the 2009 European Parliament elections. *European Union Politics* **18**(2), 188–211. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116516689729.

Dalton RJ (2021) The Representation Gap and Political Sophistication: A Contrarian Perspective. *Comparative Political Studies* **54**(5), 889–917. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020957673.

De Mulder A (2022) Making Sense of Citizens' Sense of Being Represented. A Novel Conceptualisation and Measure of Feeling Represented. *Representation* **59**(4), 633–657. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2022.2095662.

De Wilde P (2013) Representative claims analysis: Theory meets method. *Journal of European Public Policy* **20**(2), 278–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2013.746128.

De Wilde P (2020) The Quality of Representative Claims: Uncovering a Weakness in the Defense of the Liberal World Order. *Political Studies* **68**(2), 271–292. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719845199.

Disch L (2011) Toward a mobilization conception of democratic representation. *American Political Science Review* **105**(1), 100–114. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055410000602.

Disch L (2015) The 'Constructivist Turn' in Democratic Representation: A Normative Dead-End? *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory*, **22**(4), https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12201.

Disch L (2019) Introduction; the end of representative politics? In The Constructivist Turn in Political Representation, edited by Lisa Disch, Mathijs van de Sande, and Nadia Urbinati, 1–18. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Disch L, van de Sande M and Urbinati N eds. (2019) *The Constructivist Turn in Political Representation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN: 9781474442626. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474442626.

Donnellan B, Oswald F, Baird B and Lucas R (2006) The Mini-IPIP Scales: Tiny-yet-Effective Measures of the Big Five Factors of Personality. *Psychological Assessment* **18**(2), 192–203. https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.18.2.192. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7014171.

Dryzek JS and List C (2003) Social choice theory and deliberative democracy: A reconciliation. *British Journal of Political Science* **33**(1) 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123403000012.

Duell D, Kaftan L, Proksch S-O, Slapin J and Wratil C (2023) The rhyme and reason of rebel support: Exploring European voters' attitudes toward dissident MPs. *Political Science Research and Methods* **12**(2), 301–317. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2023.26.

Dvir-Gvirsman S, Tsuriel K, Sheafer T, Shenhav S, Zoizner A, Lavi L, Shamir M and Waismel-Manor I (2022) Mediated Representation in the Age of Social Media: How Connection with Politicians Contributes to Citizens' Feelings of Representation. Evidence from a Longitudinal Study. *Political Communication* **39**(6), 779–800. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2124335.

Ekstrom PD and Federico CM (2019) Personality and political preferences over time: Evidence from a multiwave longitudinal study. *Journal of Personality* **87**(2), 398–412. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12398.

Fatke M (2017) Personality Traits and Political Ideology: A First Global Assessment. *Political Psychology* **38**(5), 881–899. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12347.

Felsentahl E (2019) TIME's Editor-in-chief on why Greta Thunberg is the Person of the Year. https://time.com/person-of-the-year-2019-greta-thunberg/.

Fossheim K (2022) How can non-elected representatives secure democratic representation? *Policy & Politics* **50**(2), 243–260. https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16371011677734.

Funder DC and Ozer DJ (2019) Evaluating Effect Size in Psychological Research: Sense and Nonsense. *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* **2**(2), 156–168. https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245919847202.

Gause L (2022) *The Advantage of Disadvantage Costly Protest and Political Representation for Marginalized Groups.* Cambridge University Press.

Gerber AS, Huber GA, Doherty D and Dowling CM (2012) Disagreement and the Avoidance of Political Discussion: Aggregate Relationships and Differences across Personality Traits. *American Journal of Political Science* **56**(4), 849–874. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00571.x.

Goldberg LR (2013) An alternative 'Description of personality': The big-five factor structure. In Personality and personality disorders (pp. 34–47). Routledge. ISBN: 9781136767562. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.59.6.1216.

Greene S (2004) Social Identity Theory and Party Identification. *Social Science Quarterly* **85**(1), 136–153.

Guasti P and Geissel B (2019) Rethinking representation: Representative claims in global perspective. *Politics and Governance* **7**(3), 93–97. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2464.

Hainmueller J, Hangartner D and Yamamoto T (2015) Validating vignette and conjoint survey experiments against real-world behavior. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **112**(8), 2395–2400. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1416587112.

Hainmueller J, Hopkins DJ and Yamamoto T (2014) Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments. *Political Analysis* **22**(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1093/pan/mpt024.

Hart W, Richardson K and Tortoriello GK (2018) Dark personality voters find dark politicians more relatable and fit for office. *Journal of Research in Personality* **75**, 59–68. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2018.05.007.

Hayat S (2022) Unrepresentative Claims: Speaking for Oneself in a Social Movement. *American Political Science Review* **116**(3), 1038–1050. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421001210.

Heinisch R and Werner A (2019) Who Do Populist Radical Right Parties Stand for? Representative Claims, Claim Acceptance and Descriptive Representation in the Austrian FPÖ and German AfD. *Representation* **55**(4), 475–492. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1635196.

Henrich J, Heine SJ and Norenzayan A (2010) Most people are not WEIRD. *Nature* **466**(7302), 29–29. ISSN: 1476-4687. https://doi.org/10.1038/466029a. https://www.nature.com/articles/466029a.

Holmberg S (2020) Feeling Represented. *In Robert Rohrschneider, and Jacques Thomassen (eds), The Oxford Handbook of Political Representation in Liberal Democracies, Oxford Handbooks* https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198825081.013.21.

Hooghe L, Marks G and Wilson CJ (2002) Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration? *Comparative Political Studies* **35**(8), 965–989. https://doi.org/10.1177/001041402236310.

Huddy L and Bankert A (2017) Political Partisanship as a Social Identity. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.250.

Huddy L, Mason L and Aarøe L (2015) Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity. *American Political Science Review* **109**(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000604.

Jakimow T (2022) Representation through affective correspondence: The force of feelings and their consequences for representative democracy. *Emotion, Space and Society* **44**, 100897. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2022.100897.

Jonason PK (2014) Personality and politics. *Personality and Individual Differences* **71**, 181–184. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.08.002.

Jonason PKJ and Webster GD (2010) The dirty dozen: A concise measure of the dark triad. *Psychological Assessment* **22**(2), 420. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019265.

Jong JC de and **Liza Mügge L** (2023) Super Politicians? Perspectives of Minoritized Citizens on Representation. *Political Studies Review* **21**(3), 506–514. https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299221138730.

Joschko V and Glaser L (2019) A New Approach to Map and Quantify Representative Claims and Measure Their Validation: A Case Study Analysis. *Politics and Governance* 7(3), 137–151. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2150.

Jost JT, Nosek BA and Gosling SD (2008) Ideology: Its Resurgence in Social, Personality, and Political Psychology. *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3(2), 126–136. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6916.2008.00070.x.

Kajonius PJ, Persson BN and Jonason PK (2015) Hedonism, Achievement, and Power: Universal values that characterize the Dark Triad. *Personality and Individual Differences* 77, 173–178. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PAID.2014.12.055.

Kalmoe NP, Gubler JR and Wood DA (2018) Toward Conflict or Compromise? How Violent Metaphors Polarize Partisan Issue Attitudes. *Political Communication* 35(3), 333–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1341965.

Kaplan YR, Sheafer T, Waismel-Manor I and Shenhav SR (2023) People's sense of political representation and national stories: The case of Israel. *International Political Science Review* 45(4), 552–567. https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121231185576.

Keane J (2009) *The life and death of democracy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kinski L and Ben Crum B (2020) Transnational Representation in EU National Parliaments: Concept, Case Study, Research Agenda. *Political Studies* 68(2), 370–388. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217198485.

Knudsen E and Mikael Poul Johannesson MP (2019) Beyond the Limits of Survey Experiments: How Conjoint Designs Advance Causal Inference in Political Communication Research. *Political Communication* 36(2), 259–271. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1493009.

Koopmans R and Statham P (1999) Political Claims Analysis: Integrating Protest Event and Political Discourse Approaches. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 4(2), 203–221. https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.4.2.d759337060716756.

Kruikemeier S (2014) How political candidates use Twitter and the impact on votes. *Computers in Human Behavior* 34, 131–139. https://doi.org/10.1016/J.CHB.2014.01.025.

Kuyper JW (2016) Systemic Representation: Democracy, Deliberation, and Nonelectoral Representatives. *American Political Science Review* 110(2), 308–324. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000095.

Larsen RJ and Buss DM (2010) *Personality Psychology: Domains of Knowledge About Human Nature*. Fourth. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Laustsen L (2017) Choosing the Right Candidate: Observational and Experimental Evidence that Conservatives and Liberals Prefer Powerful and Warm Candidate Personalities, Respectively. *Political Behavior* 39, 883–908. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-016-9384-2.

Lavi L, Treger C, Rivlin-Angert N, Sheafer T, Waismel-Manor I, Shenhav S, Harsgor L and Shamir M (2024) The Pitkinian public: representation in the eyes of citizens. *European Political Science* 23:506–526. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-024-00489-2.

Lee K and Ashton MC (2014) The Dark Triad, the Big Five, and the HEXACO model. *Personality and Individual Differences* 67, 2–5. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2014.01.048.

Ma D, Correll J and Wittenbrink B (2015) The Chicago face database: A free stimulus set of faces and norming data. *Behavior Research Methods* 47(4), 1122–1135. https://doi.org/10.3758/S13428-014-0532-5.

Mansbridge J (1999) Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent 'yes'. *Journal of Politics* 61(3), 628–657. https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821.

Mansbridge J (2003) Rethinking Representation. *American Political Science Review* 97(4), 515–528. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000856.

Matz SC, Kosinski M, Nave G and Stillwell DJ (2017) Psychological targeting as an effective approach to digital mass persuasion. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(48), 12714–12719. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1710966114.

McCrae RR and Costa PT (2008) The Five Factor Theory of personality. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins, & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (3rd ed., pp. 159–181). The Guilford Press.

Miller W and Stokes D (1963) Constituency Influence in Congress. *American Political Science Review* 57(1), 45–56. https://doi.org/10.2307/1952717.

Mondak JJ and Halperin KD (2008) A framework for the study of personality and political behaviour. *British Journal of Political Science* 38(2), 335–362. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123408000173.

Mondak JJ, Hibbing MV, Canache D, Seligson MA and Anderson MR (2010) Personality and civic engagement: An integrative framework for the study of trait effects on political behavior. *American Political Science Review* 104(1), 85–110. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409990359.

Montanaro L (2012) The democratic legitimacy of self-appointed representatives. *Journal of Politics* 74(4), 1094–1107. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381612000515.

Montanaro L (2017) *Who elected Oxfam?: A democratic defense of self-appointed representatives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 9781108297721. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108297721.

Nai A, Maier J and Vranić J (2021) Personality Goes a Long Way (for Some). An Experimental Investigation Into Candidate Personality Traits, Voters' Profile, and Perceived Likeability. *Frontiers in Political Science* 3, 636745. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.636745.

Näsström S (2015) Democratic Representation Beyond Election. *Constellations* 22(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12123.

Newton K (2007) Social and Political Trust. In Russel Dalton and Hans Klingeman (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 342–361.

Page BI and Shapiro RY (1983) Effects of Public Opinion on Policy. *American Political Science Review* **77**(1), 175–190. https://doi.org/10.2307/1956018.

Paulhus DL and Williams KM (2002) The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality* **36**(6), 556–563. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00505-6.

Pew Research Center (2019) In a Politically Polarized Era, Sharp Divides in Both Partisan Coalitions. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/12/17/in-a-politically-polarized-era-sharp-divides-in-both-partisan-coalitions/.

Pitkin H (1967) *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Powell GB (2004) POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS. *Annual Review of Political Science* **7**(1), 273–296. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.7.012003.104815.

Reher S (2022) Do Disabled Candidates Represent Disabled Citizens? *British Journal of Political Science* **52**(2), 520–534. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000733.

Roccas S, Sagiv L, Schwartz SH and Knafo A (2002) The Big Five Personality Factors and Personal Values. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* **28**(6), 789–801. ISSN: 0146-1672. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167202289008.

Rogoza, R., Żemojtel-Piotrowska, M., Jonason, P. K., Piotrowski, J., Campbell, K. W., Gebauer, J. E., Maltby, J., Sedikides, C., Adamovic M., Adams, B. G., Ang, R. P., Ardi, R., Atitsogbe, K. A., Baltatescu, S., Bilić, S., Bodroža, B., Gruneau Brulin J., Bundhoo Poonoosamy H. Y., Chaleeraktrakoon T., . . . **Włodarczyk A.** (2020) Structure of Dark Triad Dirty Dozen Across Eight World Regions. *Assessment* **28**(4), 1125–1135. https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191120922611 (Original work published 2021).

Rohrschneider R (2005) Institutional Quality and Perceptions of Representation in Advanced Industrial Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies* **38**(7), 850–874. ISSN: 0010-4140. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005276305.

Ross AD and Rouse SM (2020) (Young) Generations as Social Identities: The Role of Latino*Millennial/Generation Z in Shaping Attitudes About Climate Change. *Political Behavior* **44**(3), 1105–1124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09649-8.

Ruedin D (2014) *Why Aren't They There? The Political Representation of Women, Ethnic Groups and Issue Positions in Legislatures*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Salkin W (2021) The Conscription of Informal Political Representatives*. *Journal of Political Philosophy* **29**(4), 429–455. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12246.

Saward M (2006) The Representative Claim. *Contemporary Political Theory* **5**(3), 297–318, ISSN: 1470-8914. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300234.

Saward M (2010) *The Representative Claim*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Saward M (2016) Fragments of equality in representative politics. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* **19**(3), 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2016.1144853.

Schmitt DP, Allik J, McCrae RR and Benet-Martínez V (2007) The Geographic Distribution of Big Five Personality Traits. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* **38**(2), 173–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022106297299.

Schuessler J and Freitag M (2020) Power analysis for conjoint experiments. https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/9yuhp.

Schwarz S and Coppock A (2022) What Have We Learned about Gender from Candidate Choice Experiments? A Meta-Analysis of Sixty-Seven Factorial Survey Experiments. *The Journal of Politics* **84**(2), 655–668. https://doi.org/10.1086/716290.

Schweber H (2016) The Limits of Political Representation. *American Political Science Review* **110**(2), 382–396. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000137.

Sintomer Y (2013) Les sens de la représentation politique: Usages et mésusages d'une notion. *Raisons politiques* **50**(2), 13–34. https://doi.org/10.3917/rai.050.0013.

Staehr Harder MM (2020) Pitkin's Second Way: Freeing Representation Theory from Identity. *Representation* **56**(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1636853.

Thomassen J and Schmitt H (1999) Issue Congruence. In *Political representation and legitimacy in the European Union*, edited by Hermann Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 186–208.

Thunberg G (2019) 'You did not act in time': Greta Thunberg's full speech to MPs. The Guardian, April 23, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/23/greta-thunberg-full-speech-to-mps-you-did-not-act-in-time.

Tormey S (2015) *The End of Representative Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Valkenburg PM and Peter J (2013) The differential susceptibility to media effects model. *Journal of Communication* **63**(2), 221–243. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12024.

Vecchiato A and Kevin Munger K (2021) Introducing the Visual Conjoint, with an Application to Candidate Evaluation on Social Media. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ar7up.

Vecchione M, Schoen H, Castro JLG, Cieciuch J, Pavlopoulos V and Caprara GV (2011) Personality correlates of party preference: The Big Five in five big European countries. *Personality and Individual Differences* **51**(6), 737–742. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.06.015.

Vik A (2025) Unelected Representation. In Nai A, Grömping M and Wirz D (eds), *Elgar Encyclopedia of Political Communication,* Elgar Publishing. Accepted version. https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/2d5tw.

Vik A and De Wilde P (2024) Reconceptualizing 'feeling represented': A new approach to measure how feelings of political representation are constructed. *Acta Politica.* https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-024-00358-2.

Vik A, De Wilde P, Treib O and Aarøe L (2005) Replication Data for: Venturing Beyond the Vote: Routes to Feeling Represented through Unelected Representation. https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/IHJVAM Harvard Dataverse, V1.

Wolkenstein F (2021) Revisiting the constructivist turn in political representation. *European Journal of Political Theory* **23**(2), 277–287. https://doi.org/10.1177/14748851211055951.

Wolkenstein F and Wratil C (2020) Multidimensional Representation. *American Journal of Political Science* **65**(4), 862–876. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12563.

Zarouali B, Dobber T, De Pauw G and de Vreese C (2022) Using a Personality-Profiling Algorithm to Investigate Political Microtargeting: Assessing the Persuasion Effects of Personality-Tailored Ads on Social Media. *Communication Research* **49**(8), 1066–1091. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220961965/.