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A “Selection Model” of Political Representation

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I. Introduction: Sanctions v. selection

As trust in government plummets in most developed democracies, citizens routinely call for more accountability and transparency. These demands are implicitly grounded in a model of political representation based primarily on sanctions, in which the interests of the representative (in economic terms, the agent) are presumed to conflict with those of the constituent (in economic terms, the principal). In such models the principal must invest in systems that monitor the agent closely, reward good behavior, and punish the bad.

Another possible – and sometimes conflicting -- approach is based primarily on selection. This approach works only when the principal and agent would have similar

¹ I thank the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study for the fellowship year that allowed me to begin work on a selection model of principal-agent relations; the Vienna Austrian Political Science meeting and the Oxford Political Thought Conference for an opportunity to present early versions; and the Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions at the University of British Columbia, the Passmore Lecture at the Australian National University, the E.U. Recon Workshop on Representation and Institutional Make-up in Brussels, and the Faculty Research Seminar at the Kennedy School of Government for the opportunity to present something close to the final product. I also thank participants in all of these events for their comments, especially Rainer Brauböck, Iris Bohnet, Archon Fung, Christian Grose, Mark Warren, and Richard Zeckhauser.

objectives even in the absence of specific incentives and sanctions. That is, the agent is already internally motivated to pursue certain goals -- goals that in politics include both a general political direction and specific policies. If the representative's desired direction and policies are the ones the constituent desires, and if the representative also has a verifiable reputation of being both competent and honest, then it makes sense for a constituent to put that representative in office and subsequently spend relatively little effort on monitoring and sanctioning. As a general rule, the higher the probability that the objectives of principal and agent may be aligned, the more efficient it is for the principal to invest resources *ex ante*, in selecting the required type, rather than *ex post*, in monitoring and sanctioning. If these objectives are well aligned, citizens will be better served by a constituent-representative relationship based primarily on selection than by one based primarily on monitoring and sanctions. From a normative perspective, the selection model also tends to focus the attention of both citizens and representatives on the common interest.

II. The two models compared.

The cover of a major text on the principal-agent model in economics, shown in Illustration 1, depicts the principal as a large dummy, controlling the actions of a smaller dummy, the agent, with marionette strings. The lesson could not be clearer: this is about control.

Control requires monitoring and sanctions – with the principal keeping a close eye on the actions of the agent and affecting the agent's behavior through punishments and rewards.²

² As the sociologist Harrison White put it, “control [is] the purpose of agency” (1985, 187). In a political scientist's words, agency theory is the study of “service [on the part of the agent] and control [on the part of

A recent and influential book on accountability by three political scientists borrows this economic model wholesale for the political process. “Governments are ‘accountable,’ the authors write, “if voters can *discern* whether governments are acting in their interest and *sanction* them appropriately. ... In a pure accountability model, voters use the vote only for one purpose, which is to *sanction* the incumbent...” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes, 1999, 40, 44, my emphasis).

This understanding of accountability, based on monitoring and sanctions, has several implications. First, it assumes that the agent’s incentives to act are extrinsic. The agent moves as he or she does only because the principal is pulling on the strings -- using positive incentives like money or negative ones like the fear of being fired. In politics, this analysis assumes that the representative acts because of the re-election incentive.

Second, this understanding assumes conflict between the principal and agent. The broader economic model assumes that the principal wants, for example, hard work and the agent wants to shirk. In politics, this analysis also assumes that voters and representatives must have different goals if (in the pure model) the voters need to use their vote “only for one purpose, which is to sanction the incumbent.”

Third, this model works through control over the agent after selection. The principal’s energy is concentrated on watching the agent and pulling the strings. In politics, this analysis also assumes that the voter needs to monitor the representative’s current actions, a task that requires as much transparency as possible.

the principal” (Mitnick 1992, 76). In management, writers frequently equate principal-agent thinking with incentives and sanctions (e.g. Laffont and Martimort 2002). Throughout this analysis I will use the words “sanctions” and “incentives” interchangeably, although “sanction” has the connotation primarily of negative sanction and “incentive” the connotation of positive incentive. I do not mean to imply that positive incentives and negative sanctions affect motivation the same way or have the same normative implications.

By contrast, a selection model offers a form of principal-agent relations based on the principal's selection of an agent with aligned objectives. Illustration 2, a variation on Illustration 1, depicts a large dummy, the principal, choosing a smaller dummy, the agent, who is walking in the same direction as the principal, instead of choosing other agents who are walking in different directions.³

The selection model can apply not only to politics but also to many other instances of principal-agent relations, including giving professors academic tenure, appointing judges for life terms, hiring a nanny, choosing a nursing home, or choosing a college. Three features that contrast with those of the sanctions model characterize these cases.

First, the agent is at least in part self-motivated. Even in the absence of extrinsic rewards for this behavior, some academics would themselves want to do good scholarship, judges to make fair decisions, nannies to treat the children in their care lovingly, and faculty to teach good courses. Sometimes these agents' intrinsic motivations have a moral overtone, calling upon the values of duty, love, and public spirit. In other cases the intrinsic motivations can be morally neutral or even evil. The individuals so motivated are, in economic terms, one or more versions of a "type."

Second, an alignment of objectives between principal and agent is possible, based on the agent's intrinsic self-motivation. A scholar who intrinsically wants to do good scholarship for reasons not related to sanctions and an academic department that also wants good scholarship have, at least to some degree, common interests. Similarly, court systems and judges, parents and nannies, patients and nursing home staff, students and faculty can have a significant core of common interests. When alignment is good, any difference between the objectives of the principal and the agent will tend to involve the pay and other

³ I thank designer Mike Fender for this illustration.

conditions of work, not the character of the work itself. In regard to the work itself, the objectives of the principal and the agent can be intrinsically very largely aligned.

Third, this model requires reliable mechanisms of selection and sorting. The principal's energy is concentrated on the selection process. With scholars, judges, nannies, nursing homes, and colleges, a principal's capacity to rely on the agent depends on the quality of the information acquired in the selection process. When the incentives are well structured, the principal can also rely on self-motivated agents to sort themselves accurately into relationships aligned with the appropriate principals.

In politics, the single institutional mechanism of elections can serve the purposes of both sanction and selection. Yet, as we shall see, tradeoffs sometimes arise. Then the balance that a political system, or any other institution, should strike between sanction and selection depends on the costs and benefits of the two models in a given context. Selection is attractive when its benefits are high – that is, when agents will face unpredictable future situations (as do scholars, judges, nannies, nursing homes, and colleges), when agents must act speedily, creatively, flexibly, and adaptively, dedicating all of their powers to an evolving problem as the need demands, when the goals are long-run rather than short-run, and when for other reasons the principal prefers a relationship based on mutual trust and common goals rather than an instrumental relation. Selection also is attractive when its costs are low – that is, in contexts where sufficient numbers of potential agents are self-motivated, where the probabilities are high of aligned objectives between principals and agents, where principals can fairly easily gather sufficient information about agents to make a reasonably accurate choice at the time of selection, and where agents can effectively self-select into the appropriate roles. Finally, selection is attractive when the costs of the

alternative -- sanctions and monitoring -- are high. With scholars and judges, we may fear that monitoring and sanctioning will produce political interference with the task. With nannies, nursing homes, and colleges, we cannot be there to see and judge the often highly subtle, interactions that are most important for the task. In such cases monitoring and sanctioning may even be counter-productive. When an agent intrinsically wants to do what the principal wants, monitoring every move to reward good actions and punish the bad can undermine that motivation.

In relatively uncorrupt democracies, the circumstances of political life frequently produce intrinsically motivated agents, the possibility of largely aligned objectives between voters and representatives, the capacity among voters to engage relatively easily in a reasonable selection process, and mechanisms by which relatively well aligned representatives self-select into their roles. When this is the case, the voter's efforts are efficiently concentrated at the front end of the process, in the selection. Moreover, when aligned objectives are possible, the representative system itself can both reflect and reinforce a concern for the common good in both representative and constituent.

The selection model of political representation in practice never totally supercedes the sanction model. Selections and sanctions map directly onto the two commonly cited motivations of representatives, the desire to make good public policy and the desire or need to be reelected. These motivations are almost always mixed. No matter how internally-motivated, or "gyroscopic" (Mansbridge 2003), democratic representatives might be, in actual politics they will also almost all be motivated to some extent by a desire for reelection, if only to continue pursuing the public goals that most deeply motivate them. Nor will the alignment of objectives ever be perfect. Thus constituents will always have

some reason to monitor their representatives and either try to induce new behavior through the threat of sanction or simply replace those representatives in the next election. By the same token, the sanctions model is also never pure. It is hard to imagine a representative with no intrinsic motivation to work for the policies he or she thinks good for the polity and hard to imagine any constituent voting for a representative whose preferences the constituent thought were always induced. As any real instance will be mixed, political scientists should ask descriptively what the balance is in any particular context. Political theorists should ask normatively what the balance ought to be. My goal in this paper is to restore the selection model to the status it had in 1963, of a descriptive and normative equal partner to the sanction model. I will note, however, that in some accounts (see Kingdon 1973, Lott 1987, Bernstein 1989, and Lee, Moretti and Butler 2004 below) it descriptively dominates the sanctions model. Some normative claims, based primarily on the quality of the interaction between constituent and representative, can also be made for its superiority to a sanctions model.

III. The checkerboard history of an idea

As I have reconstructed the past of the selection model, it, begins with Warren Miller and Donald Stokes, who in the early 1960s, when trust in government was at its peak in the United States, first enunciate that model analytically. In their classic article on constituency influence in Congress, Miller and Stokes specify two ways in which constituencies control their representatives. The first is “for the district to choose a Representative who so shares its views that in following his own convictions he does his

constituents' will." This is the selection model. Their second is "for the Congressman to follow his (at least tolerably accurate) perceptions of district attitude in order to win re-election" (1963, 50). This is a sanctions model. The authors depict these two "paths of constituency control" in both figures in their article, consistently describing the first (selection) path as based on the representative's "own convictions" and the second (sanctions) path as based on the representative's "perceptions of district opinion" (51). Miller and Stokes investigate these two paths with the best causal data they can obtain and conclude that the first (selection) path predominates in social welfare issues (because parties recruit candidates on the basis of the candidates' views on these issues and voters use party identification as a major signal in the selection process) and that the second (sanction) path predominates in civil rights issues. In short, this classic 1963 article non-controversially assumed that selection played a co-equal role with sanctions.⁴

Ten years after Miller and Stokes, John Kingdon produced his own classic, *Congressmen's Voting Decisions* (1973). His section on the mechanisms of constituency influence begins: "The simplest mechanism through which constituents can influence a congressman is to select a person initially for office who agrees with their attitudes" (44). He demonstrates that members of Congress "fully recognize the importance" of this "simple, elemental point." (45) Indeed, "It often happens that a congressman never feels pressured by his constituency and in fact never even takes them into account, simply because he is 'their kind of people' anyway" (45). His data show that "[a]pproximately three-quarters of the time...there was no conflict between the constituency position and the

⁴ By 2006 this article had become the fifth most cited article in the *American Political Science Review* (Sigelman 2006, 667-669). Yet in the top three journals in the profession for the field of American politics, almost a quarter of the citations did not refer to either of the two paths. When an article did mention one or both of the paths, the sanctions half of the analysis clearly predominated. I thank Phil Jones for this analysis.

legislator's own attitude, at least in the congressman's mind."⁵ He sums up: "That the recruitment process [the selection model] affects congressmen's voting is an elemental, easy-to-understand proposition, but its profound importance cannot be emphasized too strongly" (46).⁶

Within ten years, this "simple," "elemental," and "easy-to-understand" point with "profound implications" seemed to have lost much of its original force, as a series of works on Congress, beginning with David Mayhew's *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (1974) and Morris Fiorina's *Representatives, Roll Calls, and Constituencies* (1974), depicted a representative's prime motivation as the desire for reelection, with constituency control working through the sanctions made possible by this desire.

In 1989, Robert Bernstein reported in *Elections, Representation, and Congressional Voting Behavior: The Myth of Constituency Control* that he found only "quite limited," evidence that "representatives may be influenced by reelection pressures" (1989, 101). In his analysis, "Constituency influence over policy flows from more than the somewhat doubtful threat of electoral retaliation; it flows from the constituencies' initial selections of who their representatives will be" (idem). His data supported Kingdon's point that "Different districts simply recruit people of different attitudes to run for Congress" (1973, 46, quoted idem). In his summary:

⁵ Kingdon 1981, 46 (revised from first edition for clarity). He continues, "There was even less conflict among Northern Democrats, congressmen from urban areas, and congressmen with safe seats."

⁶ Although Kingdon did not specifically cite Miller and Stokes on this point, in a telephone interview with me in 2005 he said that their two paths of constituency influence were received wisdom at the time and played a central role in his thinking. A later section of the same chapter ("The Constituency") deals with "Electoral Consequences," pointing out both that many legislative votes are induced (through the sanction model) and that (through the selection model) there is a "process of natural selection at work," by which representatives are voted out of office when their opinions come to be "out of step" with their constituencies, presumably either by the representatives changing their direction or their constituencies' changing.

Constituencies do not control the policies adopted by their representatives; they have some influence over what those policies are, but members are by and large free to adopt what they think best. Constituency influence does not flow primarily from electoral threats against those in office, but rather from the initial selection of representatives. ...The desire for reelection has only marginal impact in shifting members from ideological preferences should those preferences differ from the preferences of their constituencies (104-5).

These data, however, did not shake the reigning model.

Six years later, in 1994, William Bianco began his study of representative-constituent relations by criticizing the sanctions model, which had become the dominant theory, for making “unrealistic assumptions about the motives held by representatives and the beliefs that voters have about these motives.” The standard principal-agent theory of representation, he pointed out, generally assumed that “all incumbents prefer to shirk,” that is, “act against constituent interests.” Congruently in the theory voters believe that the representative’s goals are “antithetical to their own” (1994, 26-27). John Ferejohn, for example, had designed his principal-agent game so that “the voter’s problem is to police moral hazard [shirking] rather than to find and elect the more capable or benevolent officeholders” (1986, 12, cited in Bianco 1994, 28).⁷ Working with the contrary assumptions of largely intrinsically-motivated representatives and constituents oriented

⁷ Although neither Ferejohn nor Bianco puts the point this way, Ferejohn’s two choices of policing moral hazard and finding and electing the more capable or benevolent officeholders are simply Miller and Stokes’s two paths, that is, the sanction and selection models. Anthony Downs had earlier described the contrast by arguing that contestants for office “formulate policies in order to win elections [sanctions model], rather than winning elections in order to formulate policies [selection model]” (1957, 28). In Terry Moe’s words (1990, 27-28, cited in Bianco 1994, 31), “In the positive [rational choice] theory of institutions, the public officials are almost always legislators who are assumed to be motivated by reelection. Their preferences over issues of policy and structure are induced by the preferences of other social actors, particularly in their constituencies, who are most relevant to their electoral popularity and success.”

toward selection, Bianco used rational choice methodology to explore problems in that selection, including the major role of stereotypes in this process, the leeway that constituents afford representatives they can trust and with whom they have common interests, and the concept of “conditional trust” (87).⁸ He concluded that in contemporary America by and large, constituents “make good decisions about trust,” taking account of a representative’s possible motives and expertise, and calculating roughly “the likelihood of a common interest” (160).

At the same time that Bianco was promoting a selection model as a response to the then standard sanctions model in rational choice theorizing, other political scientists trained in the old school continued to use Miller and Stokes’s two paths relatively uncontroversially as received wisdom not even worth citing. In an important article on the way the representative system responded to public opinion change, for example, James Stimson, Michael MacKuen, and Robert Erikson (1995) assumed the two paths throughout and explicitly linked the paths to two different forms of representative motivation: “policy preferences” in the “electoral replacement” path [selection model] and “expediency” in the “rational anticipation” path [sanctions model]. They concluded that electoral replacement plays the larger role in the Senate and presidency, while rational anticipation plays the larger role in the House of Representatives (1995, 560).⁹

⁸ In the chapter, “Assumptions about Decisions and Beliefs,” Bianco separates the procedural assumption, which he will adopt, that rational actors “evaluate the consequences of different actions in light of [their] goals” (39) from the motivational assumption, which he will contest, that “rational actors are invariably motivated by economic self-interest” (40).

⁹ Robert Stimson drew my attention to Miller and Stokes’s two paths in comments on my concept of “gyroscopic” representation (Mansbridge 2003). Robert Erikson, reviewing Miller and Stokes for recognition as fifth most cited article in the *American Political Science Review*, noted (without suggesting the greater disciplinary success of one path than the other): “At the heart of ‘Constituency Influence’ is the well-known ‘diamond model’ of political representation,” that depicts two pathways of influence, one “via electoral selection” and the other “via the representative’s anticipation of electoral sanctions” (2006, 674).

Thus while one group of political scientists continued uncontroversially to deploy Miller and Stokes's two paths, others saw themselves as making a contribution – perhaps even an embattled one -- by stressing both the existence and the analytic power of the selection path. In 1999, in a chapter for an influential volume on accountability whose editors hewed to a straight sanctions model, James Fearon (1999) followed in the direction of Bernstein and Bianco with an account entitled, “Electoral Accountability and the Control of Politicians: Selecting Good Types versus Sanctioning Poor Performance.” Defining accountability, along with the volume's editors, as requiring “powers to sanction or reward the agent” (1979, 55), Fearon questioned “whether elections are best thought of in terms of accountability at all” (56):

Certainly, an important tradition in democratic theory understands elections as mechanism of political accountability. In this view, elections are seen as a sanctioning device that induces elected officials to do what the voters want.

The anticipation of not being reelected in the future leads elected officials not to shirk their obligations to voters in the present (Barro 1973, Ferejohn 1986 [other citations omitted])” (56).

By contrast, Fearon argued that voters “might understand elections as opportunities to choose a ‘good type’ of political leader, one who would act on their behalf independent of reelection incentives.” In this case, it “follows that electoral accountability is not necessary for elections to produce public policy that the principals (the voting public) want.” Fearon defined a “good type” as a politician with the characteristics of 1) having policy preferences similar to those of the voter, 2) being honest and principled, and 3) being sufficiently skilled (59, 68). He pointed out that public attitudes seem to confirm that “in fact voters

think about elections more as opportunities to select good types than as mechanism establishing accountability,” and that this way of thinking makes “a good deal of sense” (56). A selection model would explain why voters dislike “office seekers,” favor term limits, and put a high premium on principles and consistency even when their representative takes stands that they oppose, while a sanction model, which uses the threat and promise of reelection to induce a representative’s behavior, would predict the opposite attitudes. A selection model would also explain why representatives are relatively unlikely to change their vote patterns in the last period of a limited term.

Although Fearon pointed out that selection and sanctioning “are by no means incompatible or mutually exclusive” (57), he ultimately argued that in a game theoretic model, “Introduce *any* variation in politicians’ attributes or propensities relevant to their performance in office, and it makes sense for the electorate to focus *completely* on choosing the best type when it comes time to vote” (77). Thus the chapter challenged the sanctions model of elections both empirically and theoretically, although that challenge was not taken up by the editors of the volume.

Meanwhile, economists had been developing their own line of thought on these matters. Economists had not been unfamiliar with the selection concept. In 1985, in the first edited volume directly addressing the principal-agent problem, John Pratt and Richard Zeckhauser gave a full page of their 35–page introduction to a pithy summary of the possibility of “alignment of objectives.” Although divergence in objectives produces an “intriguing” element and “intellectual interest,” they write, often “productivity is the goal. When this is the case,

...principals and agents will seek situations in which purposes line up naturally.

If we can get work that we like, we needn't worry about our boss's standing over us. Moreover, if we do not shirk, and there is no need for monitoring, we can share in the resulting cost savings (1995, 15).

The authors give the examples of members of religious organizations and family businesses, student athletes working wholeheartedly at summer maintenance because they welcome the exercise, college presidents and corporate executives placing "like-minded managers in positions of responsibility," and, tellingly, politicians appointing people "who share their goals, who will make the choices regarding welfare or the environment that they would make" (idem). They conclude, "Those who share one's objectives tend to carry them out; monitoring and conflict are reduced, and such people may even make themselves available at a cheaper price." Thus, "Alignment of objectives is beneficial to the performance of an agency relationship," and "[B]oth agent and principal have an incentive to make a good match" (idem).

Only two years later, another economist applied the selection model more fully to politics. In 1987 John Lott distinguished between politicians as "experience goods," in which "quality is guaranteed by the threatened removal from office" (the sanction model) and "search goods," where "product quality is known prepurchase ["through the politician's past actions"] and thus no cheating can occur" (1987, 170, 183). Lott explained the selection dynamic as based on a motivation among politicians for "consuming" altruism:

One possibility is that voters classify politicians by their 'pure ideological' beliefs. ...Politicians are seen as directly consuming 'having done the right

thing'. ...If this altruistic consumption motive accurately describes political actions, cheating of constituency groups is effectively reduced or eliminated.

Lott tested for this possibility by seeing if politicians' votes change in the U.S. House of Representatives in their last term before retiring, concluding that to an overwhelming degree they do not, and thus claiming empirical support for the selection model.¹⁰

In 1996, in a chapter on "Selection and the Currency of Reward," the economist Geoffrey Brennan argued that the "economic theory of politics," in which electoral competition gives "incentives" to representatives to act in the interests of their constituents and in which "it is common practice...to assign uniformly self-interested motivations to all agents" (1996, 257),¹¹ problematically "encourages institutional economists to overlook potentially important aspects of institutional design – those which depend on the operation of selection devices or 'screens' rather than on incentive devices or 'sanctions'" (258). Concluding that "selection is a potentially significant dimension of any institution's operation and that the methods of economic analysis tend to suppress that dimension" (idem), he wrote that instead of assuming "motivational homogeneity," if "one can identify the less knavish from the more knavish, one can locate the less knavish in those employments in which knavishness is most destructive. Put another way, ...such virtue as exists in society will be a positive resource for that society, and should be located in its

¹⁰ Looking at changes in voting patterns across retiring and nonretiring members of Congress between the 94th (1975-76) and 95th (1977-78) Congresses, Lott reported that "92 percent of the 216 regressions indicate that politicians in their last period do not behave any differently than other politicians" (1987, 19).

¹¹ This assumption is "an analytic device designed to test out the incentive properties of alternative institutional arrangements" (Brennan 1996, 3). As for reality, Brennan reports that he is "fond of quoting in this connection a remark of Alexander Hamilton's to the effect that: 'the assumption of universal venality in human nature is little less an error in political reasoning than the assumption of universal rectitude' (Hamilton 1788, quoted in Brennan 1996, 7).

highest valued use just like any other resource” (258-9).¹² Again, if “virtue is a resource that commands a higher social value in these non-market institutions [e.g., politics, bureaucracy, and the judiciary],...the good functioning of society will depend on the extent to which the relatively virtuous are selected for non-market offices” (259-60, citing the *Federalist Papers*). The “incentive”-oriented (sanction) model and the “selection”-focused models not being mutually exclusive, he noted that “on at least some occasions, the same institutional device [e.g., elections] will perform both incentive and selection functions” (262). Using the example of the selection model in academia, he then suggests that some non-monetary forms of “currency,” such as the esteem of one’s peers, the capacity to do a good job, autonomy, and other non-material rewards may encourage agents whose objectives are already aligned with those of the principle to self-select into certain jobs and discourage agents with other motivations.

In a set of major works from 1997 to the present, Timothy Besley has posed the same contrast between a sanctions model and a selection model.¹³ In *Principled Agents?* (2006), describing the sanctions model as “at the core of Public Choice” as a method,¹⁴ he quotes James Buchanan as writing that in that method, “Individuals must be modeled as seeking to further their own narrow self-interest, narrowly defined,” with “no suggestion

¹² In this comment Brennan opposes certain other economists, e.g. Dixit, who concluded that “the social optimality of moving the best people from the private to the public sector is not evident” (Dixit 2002, 717)

¹³ Besley and Coate 1997 propose a model in which the individual “who wins the election implements his preferred policy – promising anything else is not credible” (88), in contrast to “standard models” that “assume that candidates can credibly commit to implement any policy promise.” Besley and Ghatak 2005 study incentives and sorting processes in mission-oriented organizations with motivated agents. See also Besley 2005.

¹⁴ By “Public Choice” Besley means “the work beginning in the Virginia School in the 1950s,” which had the “three distinctive features” of first, “the assumption of rational self-interest in the study of political interactions,” second, the use of constitutions to constrain self-interest, and third, an assumption of a state whose legitimacy is limited to the domain to which freely contracting agents would agree (2006, 29).

that improvement lies in the selection of some morally superior individuals who will use their powers in some ‘public interest’” (1989, 18 and 20, quoted in Besley 2006, 29).¹⁵ Besley counters, “But good government...also requires good leaders – persons of character and wisdom.” In his analysis, the “twin elements of incentives [sanctions] and selection in politics are central themes throughout” (2006, 2). While “first generation models” influenced by Public Choice adopt a sanctions perspective with “elections as an incentive mechanism” (Besley 2006, 37; also 106, 136, 165),¹⁶ “second generation models” such as Besley’s own look at “the implications of agents who differ in their type,” with elections serving “two key roles: creating incentives and selecting the best type” (37). In investigating selection, Besley argues that “one important model of motivation...has received less attention in modeling the behavior of politicians” (40), namely “fiduciary” motivation. Fiduciary motivation, which includes pursuing both honesty and “the interest of citizens at large,” is a form of intrinsic motivation. “On this view, being a trustworthy politician is a type rather than a consequence of incentives” (idem). Elections play the role of selecting such politicians rather than “incentivizing” them.”¹⁷ Besley calls politicians “congruent” if they “share voters’ objectives exactly.” He also calls such types simply “good” politicians (176). Politicians are “dissonant” (or “bad”) if they are less than fully competent and thus find it costly to do what voters want, if they are influenced by special interest groups to pursue directions contrary to those of the voters, if they have private agendas of their own contrary to those of the voters (including ideological dispositions as

¹⁵ Besley (2006, 38) comments further, “The idea of modeling political choices from the premise that actors are self-interested is also characteristic of the Chicago approach to political economy. Thus Peltzman (1980) assumes that ‘political preferences are motivated purely by self-interest (page 16).”

¹⁶ Besley cites Barro (1973) and Ferejohn (1986) as examples.

¹⁷ See further analyses in Besley 2006, 68-70, 82-8, 99-100, 103-114, 180ff, 228 ff..

well as rent-seeking desires), or even if they do constituency service that makes their own reelection more likely but distracts them from the public interest (109).

As Besley was developing his version of the selection model for political representation, other economists were coming around to this perspective. David Lee, Enrico Moretti and Matthew Butler (2004), for example, summarized their analysis of the U.S. House of Representatives as follows:

There are two fundamentally different views of the role of elections in policy formation. In one view [the sanctions model], voters can affect candidates' policy choices: competition for votes induces politicians to move.... In the alternative view [the selection model], voters merely elect policies: politicians cannot make credible promises to moderate their policies, and elections are merely a means to decide which one of two opposing policy views will be implemented.

They concluded that the selection model was empirically more predictive in the U.S. House of Representatives.

As economists, Brennan, Besley and Lee, Moretti and Butler were unaware of the similar empirical conclusions drawn in political science by Miller and Stokes, Kingdon, Bernstein, Bianco, and Stimpson, McKuen and Erikson, whose data had suggested that the selection model explained as much as, or more than, the sanction model.¹⁸ Yet it was not only economists who failed to cite the early sources. In political science itself this line of thought, despite its empirical support, tended time after time to fade from view. Thus although Bernstein cited Kingdon, he did not realize that Miller and Stokes also supported

¹⁸ Besley 2004 and 2006 cited Fearon 1999, who works in the rational choice field.

his view. By the time of Bianco and Fearon, even Kingdon's demonstration of the empirical power of the selection model was no longer common knowledge. Thus in economics, Brennan and Besley, and in political science Bernstein, Bianco and Fearon each presented his work as a challenge to a relatively hegemonical sanctions model, unaware of the work of their predecessors in political science.¹⁹

In short, perhaps because of its intrinsic lack of intellectual interest (as Pratt and Zeckhauser 1985 speculate) and perhaps because of the attractions of self-interest as a motivation, the model of constituent-representative relations based on selection, intrinsic motivation, and common interests consistently received less attention in contemporary political science and political economy than the competing sanctions model based on representatives with extrinsic motivation and interests that conflict with those of their constituents – in spite of empirical support for the equal or greater explanatory power of the selection model. Perhaps self-motivated agents, particularly those inspired by the common good, are harder to explain than externally-motivated agents and common interests harder to explain than conflicting interests. But the possible greater productivity in practice of the selection model when it is feasible (Pratt and Zeckhauser 1985, Brennan 1996) as well as its seemingly greater predictive power in empirical analysis either in general (Kingdon 1973, Lott 1987, Bernstein 1989, Lee, Moreno and Butler 2004) or in some contexts (Miller and Stokes 1963; Stimson, McKuen and Erikson 1995) make it reasonable to examine in detail

¹⁹ Fearon did cite Lott 1987, his references as a rational choice scholar being primarily the economic literature. In my own analysis of “gyroscopic” representation (Mansbridge 2003), I learned of the selection path in Miller and Stokes only because James Stimson, who later identified himself as one of the article’s referees, brought it to my attention. Unearthing the lost history of the selection model had particular interest for me, because as I began to develop the concept of gyroscopic representation in talks beginning in 1994, for a while I believed that I had discovered the selection model myself.

its three necessary components: self-motivated agents, aligned objectives, and the selecting and sorting mechanisms that make that alignment possible.

IV. Self-motivated agents

Since the work of Douglas McGregor in 1960, management theorists have often distinguished between what McGregor called “theory x,” appropriate to situations in which employees will avoid work if they can and do not care about organizational goals, and “theory y,” appropriate to situations in which employees intrinsically enjoy their work, just as they enjoy play or leisure, and can be internally committed to the aims of the organization. Self-motivated employees, McGregor theorized, would be the more likely to exercise imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in their work.

In theory y, the intrinsic motivation of an employee can be of any kind – a desire to solve puzzles, to exercise outdoors, or to keep things neat. In politics also, the intrinsic motivation of a representative can be of any kind. A representative might, in principle, promote lower taxes simply because he or she personally had a lot of property subject to tax. Certain occupations, however – including politics in relatively uncorrupt democracies – attract agents whose intrinsic motivations include what might be called public spirit. Besley and Ghatak give as examples of intrinsic motivation “doctors who are committed to saving lives, researchers to advancing knowledge, judges to promoting justice, and soldiers to defending their country in battle” (2005, 616). It is true that the mix of motivations in any given individual will almost always include some extrinsic motivation, perhaps along with forms of intrinsic motivation not based on public spirit, such as the desires to feel

useful, solve puzzles, not be overruled, or stand by one's comrades. But in non-corrupt democracies, where politics does not produce great pecuniary rewards, political office will tend to attract actors with public-spirited intrinsic motivation.

Public spirit, however, is vulnerable to being undermined by three common factors: extrinsic incentives, monitoring, and a culture that assumes self-interest as the primary motivation.

Psychological research has established that in many circumstances extrinsic motivation drives out intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner and Ryan 1999). In one of many well-replicated experiments, one group of subjects was paid to do intrinsically interesting puzzles while another group was given the same puzzles to do without payment. In their free time after the task, those who had been paid for doing the puzzles did fewer puzzles spontaneously for their own enjoyment than those who had not been paid. The extrinsic motivation of the pay seemed to have driven out the intrinsic satisfaction of doing the puzzle. Work extending these findings has shown that extrinsic rewards framed either as inherent to the task or as honoring the actor for intrinsic motivation do not have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation (Kruglanski et al. 1975, Deci and Ryan 1985). Extrinsic rewards can “crowd out” intrinsic rewards and motivation in real life as well as laboratory experiments (Frey 1997, Bohnet et al, 2001). That process may be most likely when the agent has originally been selected for intrinsic motivation.²⁰

Monitoring may also drive out intrinsic motivation, particularly when the subjects of the monitoring perceive it as expressing distrust. As Onora O'Neill puts it, “Plants don't flourish when we pull them up too often to check how their roots are growing” (2002, 19). “Trust often invites reciprocal trust” in a virtuous spiral (25), but in her view the demands

²⁰ I thank Iris Bohnet for this suggestion.

of what she terms the “audit explosion” often undermine the “real work” of professionals (49). Mark Philp also argues that an agent “who regards his conduct...as a matter of honour should not be held to account in a way that is itself dishonouring or shaming” (2004, 22), while Anechiaro and Jacobs (1996, 202) conclude that “if public employees are treated like second- or third-class citizens, they will act accordingly.” Elected representatives too may be more willing to work in conditions of trust than in conditions that emphasize monitoring and sanctions.²¹ Fenno quotes one member of Congress saying, “To me, representative government means you hire a guy to use his own judgment; and if you don’t like what he does, you fire him. But you don’t keep after him all the time. If it isn’t my function to use my judgment, than what the hell is my function? And if that’s not my function, I don’t want the job” (Fenno 1978, 170).

Even the act of describing most behavior in self-interested terms tends to undermine public-spirited motivation. The theory that self-interest is the major causal explanation for human behavior seems to play a role in its own confirmation. The psychologist Dale Miller cites several experiments supporting this phenomenon and suggests three reasons for the phenomenon. First, “The image of the human being as self-interested leads to the creation of the kinds of social institutions (e.g. workplaces, schools, governments) that transform the image into reality.” Second, the implicit norm that one should act self-interestedly affects behavior because norms tend to change in the direction of the perceived majority’s norms.

²¹ Behn similarly points out that “institutionalized suspicion undermines trust” (2001, 83). See also Goodin (1982) on moral incentives.

Third, thinking of oneself as one of the few non-self-interested people in a group implies that one's altruistic behavior will have only a miniscule potential effect (1999, 1053).²²

For these reasons, although institutional designers have argued in the past that institutional arrangements based on self-interest will be the most impervious to destruction,²³ such arrangements also have the potential for crowding out public spirit. In democratic political systems, for example, the close races with little incumbency that are necessary to make the sanctions model work may also drive away the most public-spirited agents.

V. Aligned objectives

The selection model requires not only an internally motivated agent but also that the principal and self-motivated agent have aligned objectives. The closer citizens come to having common interests with their representatives, the less they need protection against the greater power of those representatives. In the extreme, complete common interests could legitimate large inequalities of power, as long as the two other conditions of legitimately unequal power, the maintenance of equal respect and the opportunity for individual development, were fulfilled (Mansbridge 1980).

²² On the prevalence of the norm, Miller cites, among others, Alexis de Tocqueville in the mid-nineteenth century observing that "Americans . . . enjoy explaining almost every act of their lives on the principle of self-interest.... I think that in this they often do themselves less than justice, for sometimes in the United States, as elsewhere, one sees people carried away by the . . . spontaneous impulses natural to man. But the Americans are hardly prepared to admit that they do give way to emotions of this sort" (1835/1969, p. 546, in Miller 1999, 1057). See also Eliasoph 1998.

²³ See Hume and others documented in Mansbridge 1990.

Aligned objectives among representatives and constituents arise more often in homogeneous districts. As Fenno's "Congressman C" noted, "A congressman who comes from a homogeneous district like mine will vote the way his district wants most of the time because he's so much like them" (142).²⁴ Even in relatively heterogeneous districts, constituents come closer to having common interests when they face a common enemy, such as environmental pollution from another state or military threat from another nation.

The viability of a selection model based on aligned objectives also depends vitally on the likelihood that an agent, once in a position of trust, will not act corruptly, in the narrow sense of engaging in "behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence" (Nye 1967, 419). Contexts that sustain the culture and institutions of relative honesty, such as the larger political and social culture in Sweden, the civil service in England, Germany and France, and the clergy in many forms of religion, make a selection model more viable. Institutions and culture interact to create and maintain such contexts.²⁵

Finally, the selection model depends on competence in the representative, both because competence is required to further the aligned objectives and because competence fosters internal motivation.

²⁴ Indeed, in a completely homogeneous district, even a random draw for representative would produce aligned objectives if no distorting objectives, such as corruption, intervened. Miller and Stokes 1963 point out, however, that in a random draw the non-chosen citizens would not exercise power over the system. The complete absence of citizen control might produce a problem from a democratic perspective for institutions such as citizens' assemblies drawn by lot unless they were advisory only or had decisional powers explicitly delegated by a legislature. As a random draw or citizen assembly illustrates, a selection model does not require a heterogeneous pool of agents. In practice, however, the potential pool of agents is always heterogeneous on the relevant dimensions of aligned interests, honesty, and competence. Besley (2006) points out that most economic principal-agent theory, based on sanctions, assumes a homogeneous pool of agents and so cannot avail itself of the efficiencies of sorting.

²⁵ On institutions, see Rose-Ackerman 1999.

Context affects not only the supply of, but also the demand for, aligned motivation.²⁶ A “contingency theory” for when the selection model is most applicable suggests that we ask on the demand side, “Given that no principal and agent ever have perfectly aligned objectives, when does it make most sense to tolerate some divergence?” All other things equal, the selection model is preferable when a principal needs from an agent flexible, adaptive, and creative performance and/or discretion in negotiation, aimed at the long-run objective. It is also preferable when tools for adequate monitoring and sanctioning are absent or expensive. In organizational theory, “high commitment” management practices (e.g. Baron and Kreps 1999), based implicitly on a selection model, are most effective in such contexts. In politics, the same factors apply. Descriptive representation (by geography, occupation, religion, tribe, race, gender, or any other factor), which is one form of a selection model, is most in demand when interests are uncrystallized and the representative must act with discretion (Mansbridge 2003) or when the standard forms of monitoring and sanctioning are either counterproductive or weak. The constitutional conventions in eighteenth century United States and twenty-first century Afghanistan and Iraq have thus relied heavily for their legitimacy on selection models of representation with a strong dose of descriptive representation.

VI. Selection and sorting

²⁶ Rarely in constituent-representative relations but more frequently in negotiations, a principal might select an agent with motivations or goals more extreme than the principal’s own in order to send a signal of intransigence to the other side that would increase the principal’s bargaining power. For this dynamic in legislatures, see King and Zeckhauser 2002.

The third necessary feature of an effective selection model involves accurate selection and sorting. For accurate selection, at the time of selection the principal must have sufficiently good information about the agent's motivation (and thus the likelihood of aligned objectives) to make an efficient choice. In economic terms, the principal will look for signals about the agent's "type." Those signals can be combined with self-sorting mechanisms by which, in appropriate conditions, agents sort themselves into jobs and organizations whose aims match as closely as possible their own intrinsic motivation.

The logic of collective action provides an example. Given voluntary interaction in an enterprise subject to collective action problems, both cooperators and defectors will search for signals of a potential partner's type. If the evidence is relatively easy to collect, cooperators will choose cooperators and defectors will be left without a partner.²⁷ In a potential relationship with aligned objectives, principals selecting self-motivated agents face a similar problem. Both parties will benefit if the agent can send a signal that is hard to manipulate (Bianco 1994, 56, Mansbridge 1999b, 305). For selection purposes, among other reasons, human beings may even be hard-wired to be alert for signals of "character," that is, underlying motivation.

The less a voter knows about policies and the less a voter expects to be able realistically to sanction a representative in the future, the more it is rational to select on character.²⁸ Citizens may want to choose "a good man" or "a good woman" partially

²⁷ Robert Frank's (1988) innovation was to see that many collective action problems involved voluntary cooperation and to work through the logic in such situations of reliable signals of future choices. Laboratory evidence currently suggests that trustworthy types may be better at predicting others' types (Yamagishi et al. 1998, cited in Bohnet et al 2001), perhaps because they have more to lose.

²⁸ In the United States, women, who are on the average less informed about politics than men (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996) and also have had less political power, have traditionally been more likely than men to choose their representatives on the basis of character (Andersen and Shabad 1979).

because it is so difficult to monitor and sanction appropriately.²⁹ In a parallel situation, when firms plan to work in a “low-enforcement environment,” they “heavily invest in screening of potential employees, stressing that character is more important than the possession of specific skills” (Bohnet et al. 2001, 132).³⁰

Countries with relatively corrupt systems or inexperienced voters can benefit from the side-effects of a war of independence, which allows some future leaders to give a costly signal of their willingness to give their lives for their country. The willingness of Washington in the United States, Nkrumah in Ghana, Mandela in South Africa, Nehru in India, Tito in Yugoslavia, Mao in China and others elsewhere to risk their lives in wars of independence earned them the trust of the citizens in contexts where more subtle forms of public spirit were hard to measure. Wars of independence can thus produce genuinely public-spirited leaders for a time, before misguided (even when public-spirited) policies take their toll or the leaders, tempted by power, become corrupt. Once the generation from the wars of independence has died, the voters have access to less reliable signals. The quality of the leadership is then likely to decline.

Religious leaders often send costly signals of non-self-interested motivation. In many forms of Judaism and Islam such a signal derives from devotion to a life of learning, particularly when the cost of learning an ancient, non-vernacular language or memorizing large amounts of a foundational text will not have an obvious payoff in great wealth (although it may guarantee a living). In the absence of other reliable signals in the political

²⁹ For this classic designation by voters, see Miller and Stokes 1963 and Fenno 1978. For the economic equivalent, “a good type,” see Fearon (1999). Popkin (1991) also points out that voters look for signs of character among the heuristics they use in selecting representatives.

³⁰ “The more leeway agents have...the more careful are principals when deciding who will be offered a contract” (Bohnet et al., 2001, 132)

world, it may be functional for people to select such religious leaders over secular leaders who are more likely to be motivated primarily by self-interest.

Along the same lines, in the United States today citizens sometimes gauge public spirit from the willingness of the wealthy to invest their fortunes in their own political campaigns. When corruption insures a monetary payoff to taking office, such investments may be purely self-interested. In the absence of corruption, the public often takes these investments as evidence of public-spirited (if sometimes wrong-headed) commitment to a cause.

Repeated interaction is the most frequent basis for interpreting the signals of an actor's internal motivations. In Avinash Dixit's words, "repetition creates scope for building a reputation about one's type" (2002, 703). In the absence of personal experience with an agent's past behavior, principals can rely on an agent's reputation within a network of individuals better placed to have observed those actions over time (Shapiro 2005, 276; Bianco 1994, 152). Professional networks – including the professional civil service in such countries as France, England, Germany, and Sweden – help create such reputations. In countries with disciplined party systems, the political parties can play this role for legislative candidates.

When both costly signals and reliable reputations are hard to come by, principals – including citizens choosing their representatives – often fall back on stereotypes. Bianco quotes Walter Lippmann as writing, "...modern life is hurried and multifarious.... There is neither time nor opportunity for intimate acquaintance. Instead we notice a trait which marks a well-known type, and fill in the rest of the picture by means of the stereotypes we carry about in our heads" (Lippmann 1922, cited in Bianco 1994, 55). From the stereotype

voters infer both aligned objectives or shared interests (59) and beliefs about the competence and honesty of the potential representative (120). Although accuracy regarding any individual may be poor and the decision frequently unjust, if a stereotype is at all true of a group in general, that stereotype allows a principal to take the average characteristics of a group as a decisional cue to the density of, for example, cooperators compared to defectors. Samuel Popkin (1991) documents many of the reasonable shortcuts and heuristics, including descriptive similarity, that voters use to make a rough guess at whether or not candidates for office have objectives aligned with their own. For most citizens, however, the party identification of a candidate serves as the most important indicator of policy alignment and even of character.

Deselection (which Besley 2004 calls “ex post selection”) generates a similar information problem for the principals, with some salient differences. In both selection and deselection, the agent has information that the principal does not know. After a representative achieves office, the voter has access to the public record of that representative’s behavior in office, a source of better information than before the representative took office (or that particular office). On the other hand, the representative in office usually has an increased capacity to make that record look better than it is through easier access to the media and public events and even through simple name recognition. Thus the asymmetry in information remains or worsens after election. The selection model is not normatively tenable, however, unless the citizenry retain sufficient capacity to remove representatives who either because they or the district have changed have gotten out of touch with the prevailing objectives of the district's voters.

In some circumstances, self-selection among potential agents can serve as a critical sorting mechanism. Non-profit organizations often act differently from private firms because the motivations of the managers are more intrinsic and they “sort themselves, each gravitating to the types of organizations that he or she finds...most compatible” (Weisbrod 1988, 31-32,). In a process of “assortative matching,” mission-oriented individuals in general are “likely to end up as employees in mission-oriented nonprofits” and individuals who care about “a particular cause” will sort themselves into that particular sector (Besley and Ghatak 2005, 625). Besley and Ghatak advocate heterogeneity among missions, whether in the non-profit or other sectors (e.g. among different kinds of elementary schools), to make this sorting process most efficient. The kinds of incentives offered affect the kinds of individuals attracted to different sorting processes (Bohnet and Oberholzer 2002).

Potential political representatives engage heavily in this sorting process. Those who might be interested in running for office refrain from this investment if they think their own policy orientations do not sufficiently reflect the orientations of their constituents (Lawless 2005). When the orientations of their constituents change (through changed boundaries in the district, economically changing demographics, or the entry of new cohorts with new political views), many elected representatives retire. “‘If your conscience and your district disagree too often,’ congressmen like to say, ‘you’re in the wrong business.’” (Fenno 1978, 142).

Low compensation plays two contradictory roles in this sorting process. On the one hand, the pay for mission-oriented agents must be sufficiently high to facilitate a sorting that selects for competence. On the other hand, that pay should be sufficiently low to

facilitate a sorting that selects for mission-orientation.³¹ The clergy and monks of the religions that demand celibacy or relative poverty have traditionally sorted themselves on the dimension of mission-orientation in response. Low-paying “citizen legislatures” and public offices have generated the same self-sorting. Both politics and non-profits demonstrate the tension between the functions of sorting for competence and mission-orientation.

One major problem with self-sorting by low compensation involves the resources that members of different groups bring to the sort. Unsalaries positions or positions with uncompetitively low compensation tend to attract individuals who have additional resources to support themselves and their families. In addition, sorting on “citizen duty” will attract members of groups who have been socialized to value that form of duty relatively highly. In the United States, surveys indicate that these are mostly the middle and professional classes (Prewitt 1970). Although in some contexts, local, religious and ideological commitments can crosscut class, in any context the representative’s assumptions about what is good for the polity may not match what the constituents would conclude if they had the time and resources to investigate the policy questions themselves.

VII. Implications for accountability and transparency

A selection model of political representation – and indeed any selection model of principal-agent relations – relies heavily on *narrative accountability*, in which the agent

³¹ Besley (2004, 207) argues that “Paying higher wages will tend to increase the fraction of congruent politicians who put themselves forward for office.” However, “if public service motivation were high enough ...[then] raising wages would attract more dissonant than congruent politicians. Indeed, in such a world there could be a case for amateur politicians...” (224, 209).

gives the principal an account, or explanation, of the agent's actions. When the relationship between principal and agent rests largely on aligned objectives, the focus of accountability shifts from monitoring and sanctioning to the agent's giving reasons for his or her acts.

As we have seen, in standard principal-agent theory, the accountability of an agent depends on the principal's capacity to monitor and sanction. Accountability means that a principal "has powers to sanction or reward the agent" (Fearon 1999, 55). In ordinary speech sanctions are also often central to accountability: "When people seek to hold someone accountable, they are usually planning some kind of punishment" (Behn 2001, 4).

Yet an earlier understanding of accountability stresses "giving an account" (*rendre compte, Rechenschaft abgeben*). In the process of giving an account the agent shows, explains, and justifies past actions to the principal (Behn 2001, 4; Philp 2004, 12).³² Such a process should ideally encompass not only the one-way explanation of narrative accountability but also the two-way communication of *deliberative accountability*, as principal and agent both ask questions and give answers, exploring whether or not they remain mutually aligned and whether the grounds of their alignment might have changed. Narrative accountability works best when the principal can see that the intrinsic motivation underlying the aligned objectives remains unchanged, even if the principal was not happy with the result. The narrative explains the reasons for the unwanted result and in deliberative accountability the interaction between principal and agent clarifies the explanation. In politics, representatives can explain changes in policy by new facts and

³² "[T]hose who are called to account should give an *account* of what they have done, and of their successes and failures, to others who have sufficient time and experience to assess the evidence and report on it" (O'Neill 2002, 58). The *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "accountability" gives as a substantive definition only "liability to give an account of, and answer for, discharge of duties or conduct." This definition does not mention sanctions, except in the implications of the phrase "answer for," which itself has a narrative ring.

circumstances, but cannot easily explain changes in principles.³³ Principles are a significant ground for the constituent's determination of aligned objectives, and changes in principles throw doubt on the consistency of the representative's character. In the selection model, sanctions take a back seat to narrative and deliberative accountability. When time and opportunity for the representative to give a full explanation are scarce, as in many electoral systems, the selection model works less well.³⁴

Every system, no matter how selection-based, needs some monitoring of both elected officials and bureaucrats. But that monitoring need not be systematic and on-going. Matthew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz (1984) distinguish between "fire-alarm" and "police patrol" oversight, contending that it is more efficient for individual citizens and interest groups to send in the alarm when they come across wrongdoing ("fire alarm") rather than engage in continual monitoring ("police patrol").³⁵ Fire alarm systems are particularly appropriate in high-commitment systems when intrinsic motivation on the part of the agent produces a high probability of honest, competent, and aligned behavior.

What organizational theorists call "network" – or "horizontal," or "professional" -- accountability can also substitute effectively for the "vertical" accountability standard to the sanctions model.³⁶ If members of a network have a strong enough internal commitment to

³³ I thank Richard Zeckhauser for this suggestion.

³⁴ See Bianco 1994 on the difficulty members of the U.S. Congress had in explaining their votes for catastrophic health insurance. Kingdon 1981, 48 similarly reports a member of Congress telling him, "Very frankly, if I had a chance to sit down with all of my constituents for 15 minutes and talk to them, I'd have voted against the whole thing. But I didn't have that chance. They wanted [x]. If I voted against it, it would appear to them that I was against [x], and I wouldn't have had a chance to explain myself.

³⁵ See also Aberbach 1990 on "alarm-based" vs. "constant-surveillance" models.

³⁶ See Goodin 2003 for network accountability in non-profit institutions, on the grounds that a form of accountability based on "praising or shaming and shunning" (12) will work most effectively among actors motivated by the public good. See Keohane and Nye 2001, on network accountability in international organizations. As Goodin (2003, 41) points out, networks can also function as "cozy cabals covering one

the norms of their profession, or even if the members have only a self-interested concern for the reputation of their network, they will have an incentive to monitor and sanction the behavior of others in the network to keep potential defectors up to network standards. The ambitions of the members of one section of a political system may also check in some respects the ambitions of others. These networks of horizontal accountability, along with recruitment systems and larger social norms, help produce honesty and competence outside any system of electoral sanctions. When these processes are functioning effectively, the amount of monitoring and sanctioning needed outside the network (e.g. through the electoral system) is only the minimum that experience shows is necessary to prevent the unraveling of a system based primarily on internal incentives and horizontal accountability. That is often not very much.

A similar analysis holds for transparency, that familiar cure for the ills of democracy advocated by both the public and many political scientists. Although some transparency is good -- indeed necessary -- for democracy and many situations could benefit from more of it, more transparency is not always better. In contexts where the elected representatives are in general competent, honest, and well aligned with their constituents, after an important minimum, each increase in transparency can create costs in efficiency and in motivation.³⁷ The greatest cost of transparency is often that many negotiations, great and small, are best conducted behind relatively closed doors. Negotiators need to show those with whom they are negotiating that they understand their positions. Accordingly, they need to be able to say things that some of their constituents

another's incompetence"; for these reasons even networks often require some external monitoring and sanctions.

³⁷ See O'Neill 2002 against transparency.

might consider fraternizing with the enemy. They need to be able to explore avenues that after exploration they might repudiate. They need to be able to act creatively and empathetically, without scrutinizing every word for how it will play in public.

The much-maligned European comitology system, for example, has produced reasonably good results, given the many factors the decision-makers have had to take into account. It has forged bonds among the members of the civil service of the many nations of the European Union. Its compromises have been hammered out not by taking positions in public, which encourages grandstanding, but by forging friendships and trust among the negotiators and creating packages that are eventually acceptable to all participants in the negotiation.³⁸

When transparency in the process has costs like these, we should favor not extreme transparency in process (for example making all committee meetings public), but instead transparency in procedures, information, reasons, and the facts on which the reasons are based. In the Supreme Court of the United States the deliberations and the negotiations around the decisions are secret, but the facts on which the decisions are based and the reasons for the decisions are public. When EU bureaucrats have been asked to be more “transparent,” they have in most cases responded appropriately in this more communicative fashion – giving reasons, explanations and facts, and improving notification, rather than opening their processes to public monitoring (Lodge 1994; also Keohane and Nye 2001, 230, Magnette 2003, 151). Ideally, these features of one-way narrative accountability should be supplemented with two-way systems of deliberative accountability, in which

³⁸ As Naurin 2004 points out, the costs of transparency are particularly great in potentially “integrative” or win-win solutions (for integrative solutions see Follett [1925] 1942 and Fisher and Ury 1981). Looking at transcripts of legislatures, Steiner et al. 2004 also conclude that expressions of respect and understanding of others’ positions are more frequent in closed sessions of the legislature than in public ones. See also Chambers 2009 forthcoming.

lines of communication with those who use the system would be open, accessible, and initiated by both sides.

VIII. Implications for hierarchy, communication and citizen activism

The selection model of representation should not be confused with the “trustee” form derived from the writings of Edmund Burke or with the elitism of Joseph Schumpeter. Trustee representation is only one instance of the selection model, the least democratic kind. Both the word “trustee” itself and Burke’s own stance suggest that the trustee is wiser, more far-seeing, more educated and cultured than others, and for this reason more fit to rule. Linguistically, a trustee is “one to whom something is entrusted, one trusted to keep or administer something” or “one holding legal title to property which he must administer for the benefit of a beneficiary,”³⁹ with the strong implication that the trustee knows better what is good for those for whom he or she administers the trust than do those individuals themselves. A financial trust is often created on the paternalistic assumption that it is better if the beneficiary never gets his or her hands on the funds at all. Burke’s own stance is also strongly aristocratic. In his actual speech to his constituents at Bristol, he said only that he considered a representative’s judgment “a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable” and that a representative “betrays, instead of serving” his constituents if he “sacrifices” that judgment to their “opinion” ([1774] 1889). In other work, however, Burke made it clear that, like many men of his time, he harbored some contempt for the capacities of the “lower orders” (Herzog 1998). Bernard Manin

³⁹ *Webster’s Third International*, (edition), s.v. “trustee”

makes a convincing case that in Burke's era, at the time of the framing of the U.S. constitution, electoral representation implied for many what Manin calls "the principle of distinction," that is, the idea that representatives "should rank higher than their constituents in wealth, talent, and virtue" (Manin 1997, 94).

Schumpeter too did not hide his disdain for the "typical citizen," whose "primitive impulses, infantilisms and criminal propensities" erupt in a crowd ([1942] 1962, 257), whose "disillusioning" openness to messages to his subconscious makes him prey to false advertising (258), who pays scant attention to matters that do not engage his "immediate personal and pecuniary" interests (260), and who, in Schumpeter's most famous phrase, "drops down to a lower level of performance once he enters the political field" (262).

Yet the selection model of political representation need imply no more hierarchy than is inherent in any representative process, based sanctions or selection. The selection of a representative can rest purely on a division of labor, as the Abbé de Siéyès suggested years ago.⁴⁰ At the founding of the U.S. constitution, when the Federalists advanced their principle of distinction the Anti-Federalists opposed it, arguing that representation required "likeness" and "resemblance" to constituents so that representatives could "possess their sentiments and feelings."⁴¹ Both Federalists and Anti-Federalists adopted a model of representation based primarily on selection. Today, in an Anti-Federalist vein, Timothy Besely imagines the selection model as based on a "citizen-candidate," selected for office by other "citizens."

⁴⁰ See Manin, 1997, 3.

⁴¹ Brutus 15 November 1787, in Storing, ed. 1981, vol. 2, 380; see Manin 1997, 110.

We have no survey data on the degree of hierarchy that voters perceive in districts where representation is based primarily on selection compared to those where representation is based primarily on sanction. In the one instance that I know best, the plumbers, carpenters and farmers of Selby, Vermont do not consider the one of them they select for Selectman to be a “trustee.” He or she is just someone reasonably competent and honest whom they have reason to think wants more or less what they want for the town. Many voters also generalize that way of thinking to other political representatives. When Richard Fenno and others report voters saying that they want to select a “good man” or “good woman” to Congress, they do not mean that the voters want someone of such virtue that it puts ordinary folk to shame. At least in the legislator’s estimation, as Fenno reports it, those voters want someone like them, with the interest, competence, and honesty to be a legislator. Edmund Burke did not present himself to his constituents as being “like them.”

It is not clear how selection versus sanctions affects constituent-representative communication. Particularly when selection is on descriptive grounds, the constituents’ sense of a representative’s being “like them,” with much the same objectives, should facilitate their communication with that representative. Black constituents, for example, are more likely to contact Black representatives and White constituents to contact Whites (Gay 2002). For their part, representatives loosen up, feel relaxed and communicate easily with their core constituencies (Fenno 1978). A selection model based on mutual trust and the expectation of common interests thus seems on its face more likely to facilitate communication than a sanctions model based on the expectation of conflicting interests.

On the other hand, selection is associated with relatively homogeneous districts, and representatives in such districts can easily ignore the objectives of the minority whose

interests and objectives conflict with those of their majority. They have little incentive to communicate with the minority. Representatives from heterogeneous districts will have incentives to talk to voters across lines of opposition, to try to get some of those voters to support them. In a sanctions model, candidates will craft their policies not on the basis of principles that they hold but on the basis of what the voters will buy. As a consequence, they will be highly interested in what voters might want. They will tend to listen hard and respond creatively, even across standard political lines. Although that communication may be shallow and instrumental, it will be aimed at crafting an accommodation that might tempt individuals on both sides of the political spectrum to cast their votes for the same representative. In a selection model, candidates in heterogeneous districts will succeed only if they embody goals and principles that appeal across the lines of heterogeneity and can communicate across those lines.

Incumbency, which is also compatible with the selection model, should play both a positive and a negative role in communication. On the one hand, the longer the selected representative remains in office, the more the constituents whose objectives are aligned with those of the representative will feel that they know the representative and the representative's staff. They will have had more chances to see the representative in person or to written and received a reply. They will have built a relationship that, although weak, facilitates further communication. On the other hand, incumbency with a largely aligned constituency could make a representative lazy, legislature-centered, or simply tired of going out on the hustings. Fascination with lawmaking could overtake fascination with shaking hands and giving speeches at local guildhalls. Communication could wither. It goes without saying that for the minority constituents whose views are not represented by the

legislator, the longer that legislator remains in power, the more these constituents will feel hopelessly left out of the loop.

Without empirical data on the extent, quality, and inequality of representative-constituent communication in predominantly selection-model districts and in predominantly sanction-model districts, we cannot resolve the question of how either model impacts communication. As more citizens move to districts where others share their core political values (as is happening in the United States today), it seems likely that their political lives will become proximately more satisfactory, especially if they can select representatives who intrinsically share their views. But as both voters and representatives sort themselves into more homogeneous political districts, they will no longer have to pay the price of trying to communicate with others whom they do not immediately understand. Short-run political satisfaction may have been bought at the expense of long-run growth in understanding.

Finally, it is not clear how selection versus sanctions affects citizen activism. The selection model of political representation tends to undermine citizen activism for two reasons. First, having selected an honest and competent representative with approximately the same general political views, the constituent can turn to other matters, letting the representative get on with the business of politics. Second, because representatives so selected usually continue to be the same people as when first elected, with much the same competence, honesty, and views, they usually retain their constituents' loyalty and are not likely to face major challenges at election time. The voters will not have the stimulus of a close election to bring their attention back to politics. These features of the selection model are drawbacks. To the extent that they do decrease citizen participation, they should be offset by other activities that increase citizen activism, such as citizen initiatives that trigger

representative citizens' assemblies, ombuds offices that accept group petitions, or citizen vouchers that fund associations to represent different political interests (Mansbridge 2005, Schmitter 1995). Yet the drawbacks may not be as significant as they seem at first sight.

First, having selected a good representative, the constituent can turn to other forms of politics. Alice Wolf, currently my representative in the Massachusetts state legislature, embodies the political stances of many of her constituents so well that she ran unopposed from her first election as a state representative in 1996 through 2004, when she had only token opposition. With Alice Wolf in the state legislature, I can pay less attention to Massachusetts state politics. But I need not become politically uninvolved. Having Wolf represent me in the state legislature instead of a representative who needs monitoring frees me and her other constituents up for political activities on other issues.

Second, a theorist of common-interest politics like Rousseau would not value highly political participation based on either fascination with a close electoral race or fear of one's own side losing the election. A politics that produces turnout through enmity or conflicting material interests is not likely to cultivate attachment to the common interest. Rousseau wanted citizens to "fly to the assemblies" in order to do their part in bringing a good polity into being, not because they feared that the other side might win.⁴²

Thus although a selection model of political representation may undermine citizen activism, that result is far from necessary. And the close race that is the ideal of many a political scientist does not have undisputedly positive normative qualities. A sanctions model, based on inducing a representative's preferences through the incentive of reelection, replaces ties of communality between representative and constituent with ties of power in a

⁴² Rousseau famously opposed representative government, so his views may not be thought relevant. Yet he also painted a more compelling picture than any other theorist of the decline of a polity when its citizens failed to desire the common good.

context of conflicting interests. Constituents who do not want such a relationship may withdraw from participation.

IX. Further problems of a selection model

Neither the selection model nor the sanctions model is without flaws. The selection model can rarely work without any monitoring and sanctions, is not possible in certain contexts, and is subject to slippage in alignment. Selection may also strengthen incumbency and exclude or marginalize minorities in the district. I shall argue that slippage is a significant problem but incumbency less of a problem than the literature suggests. The exclusion of minorities is a significant problem that is not, however, always solved by the sanctions model.

The first and extremely important problem with the selection model is that it is not always applicable. In corrupt democracies, it is not applicable at all. It works only when honest, competent, and mission-oriented individuals whose policy orientations are aligned reasonably well with those of the citizenry are available and willing to take up the representative role.

Moreover, slippage can readily occur. Faced with temptation, elected representatives (like any agent) may slowly – or even quickly – become dishonest. Absent institutions that allow constituents to monitor and sanction their representatives, corrupt practices will tend to drive out honest ones as dishonest representatives acquire greater power than the honest – by, say, using their dishonestly acquired funds to bribe voters or wage more persuasive campaigns. Competence can also slip, absolutely or relatively, when

a representative ages, loses touch with the district, or without changing personally is faced with a challenge from a more competent newcomer. In one common problem, a deeper mission-orientation may remain steady but congruence with the voters slip, as a representative engages more with other legislators and begins to be shaped more by the long run, by the personal social rewards and sanctions of the small group that is the legislature, by the political considerations of logrolling, senatorial courtesy, and paybacks that are not apparent to an outsider, by exposure to information generated by lobbyists, or by growing expertise in office. As a result, a legislator may conclude that what he or she thinks is good for the country has become less and less like what the constituents think is good.⁴³ At that point, many simply retire (Prewitt 1970, Fenno 1978). Those who do not retire must be replaced, however, and this replacement is made harder by incumbency.

A selection model promotes incumbency, as the constituent's goal is precisely to pick an appropriate representative and leave him or her relatively alone. Incumbency, in turn, vastly increases the asymmetry in information and power between representative and voter, as well as between representative and potential challenger. Thus any system of representation based primarily on selection, as empirical work suggests that the national system of the United States may largely be, must include safeguards against violation of the trust on which the selection model is built. If one of the attractions of a selection model is its capacity to reduce monitoring and transparency, however, those safeguards cannot congruently depend on increasing monitoring and transparency. Instead, the system might depend more heavily on internal sanctions, or guilt, within each individual, as well as on

⁴³ In mission-driven organizations the forms of potential slippage are many. In one possible misalignment between principals (managers and donors) and agents (front-line workers) in non-profits, front-line agents become too client-driven and concerned with short-term successes, with a resulting lack of attention to the long-run goals of the mission. (I thank Chris Stone for this example.)

network accountability and perhaps public shame of those who betray their trust – both forms of monitoring and sanctioning, but ones more congruent with a selection model than the standard forms traditionally coupled with a sanctions model. It is also critical to assure accurate information at the time of selection, information that party networks can often provide.

In a selection model, incumbency per se is not a problem. Indeed, incumbency will usually be a sign that the selection and sorting process has worked well. Incumbency becomes a problem when it interferes with a representative's communication with and attention to constituents, and when slippage occurs but the constituents either do not know about the growing differences between them and their representative or, having discovered those differences, find the representative hard to replace. Normatively, these are the characteristics to investigate in praising or condemning a system of representation, not incumbency per se.

It is a mistake to see the selection model as depriving the voter of power, defined as the threat of sanction and the use of force. The voter (the principal) exercises significant power at the times of selection and removal. This power should not be conceived as getting the *representative* to do what the representative would otherwise not do, as in the sanction model, but as getting the *legislature* to do what the legislature would otherwise not do by putting in the legislature a particular representative, with a specific “gyroscopic” motivation and orientation (Mansbridge 2003). Moreover, because almost all systems are mixed in practice, the voter always retains the capacity to sanction, which will serve to keep a system driven largely by internally motivated agents and aligned objectives from unraveling under

the pressure of a few self-interested defectors or the temptations in almost every person to narrow self-interest in the form of sloth, venality, or another distraction.

X. Conclusion

As both the sanction and the selection model are in practice always mixed, we might think of the selection ideal as having selection at its core and sanctions at its periphery. In such a system, most of the congruence between the principals' desires and the agent's behavior is accomplished by the voters selecting a representative who is honest, competent, and already has policy goals much like those of the constituent. In this model, the agent is intrinsically motivated, the objectives of principal and agent are very largely aligned, and signals or other sorting mechanisms work sufficiently well to bring the alignment into being in practice. The constituent must of course retain the capacity to replace the selected representative with another whose goals may be even more aligned with those of the constituent or who is more honest or more competent. Normatively, the selection model depends on ease of maintenance and ease of replacement. In addition, the very institution – election -- that serves as the vehicle of selection and replacement also serves to a lesser degree as the vehicle of sanction. While the strongest and central mechanism for representing the constituent's views is selection, sanction works at the edges of the system, disciplining lightly the selected representative's tendencies to deviation in alignment.

In spite of its disadvantages, the selection model has several normatively satisfying features. It couples intrinsic motivation on the part of the representative with control (over the legislature, not the representative) on the part of the voter. Selection can often get

voters more of what they prefer than can sanctions, because in the selection model the motives of the representative are more aligned with those of the voter. Constituents will tend to get behavior that is more dedicated, adaptive to long-run goals and flexible in the means, from an honest, competent representative who wants intrinsically to pursue the same kinds of policies that they want than from a representative who, seeking only reelection, responds only to the promise of votes or the threat of withdrawing those votes.

Beyond efficiency, however, constituents can take some satisfaction from the quality of their relationship with an intrinsically motivated selected representative. Many constituents can feel correctly that the representative is like them, at least in policy objectives and often in much more, including an overall approach to life. The constituent-representative relationship can be one of trust, even warmth. Although distant, it can partake of some of the characteristics of friendship, with an expectation of common interests. Without knowing the other personally, each partner in the relationship can wish the other well. Particularly in a country as populous as the United States, with considerable distance between represented and representative in national politics, this kind of relationship is hard to foster. A selection model both builds on and creates such a relationship. A representative who seeks selection may fake his or her authenticity, honesty, or competence, but in time the representative's actions should reveal information about all three characteristics. While monitoring should therefore never be absent and the representatives must always be removable, a selection model works well when, by and large, representatives sort themselves into districts where they can be what they present themselves to be and constituents have sufficient information at the time of selection to make a reasonable choice.

The sanctions and selection models rest on two separate normative bases, sometimes congruent but sometimes opposed. Assuming conflicting interests between constituents and representatives, the more adversary sanctions model focuses normative attention on the power relations between them. Assuming relatively common interests, the more unitary selection model focuses normative attention on the communal relations between them. In the ideal sanctions model, the constituents' sanctions would induce the representative to act completely congruently with the constituents' preferences, serving as a conduit or "transmission belt" (Schwartz 1988) of those preferences to the legislature. In the ideal selection model, the constituents' accurate selection would allow the representative to act more independently, on the grounds that the representative's overall goals were sufficiently aligned with the goals of the constituents even when some of the representative's actions might deviate from the constituents' preferences.

Normative theorists tempted to prefer the sanctions model should ask why citizens themselves seem so strongly to prefer the selection model. It seems reasonable to prefer a representative who intrinsically wants to do the same things I want to do over one who is doing what I want her to do only in order to get my vote. The relation of congruence not only fits my psychological needs; it fits my normative ideal of a world that values non-instrumental relationships.

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Research Colloquium

Principals and Agents: The Structure of Business

Edited by John W. Pratt and Richard J. Zeckhauser

Illustration 1

Principals and Agents: The Selection Model

Illustration 2