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REPRESENTATION

A COLLECTION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ESSAYS

REPRESENTATION
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REPRESENTATION

An Inter-Institutional Collaboration



Volume 5

DePaul University

Global Learning Experience

2025 *Representation*

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Global Learning Experience

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Forward

The Global Learning Experience program at DePaul University (Chicago) is the creation of the Global Engagement administration. It is a university-wide program designed to broaden our students' interest and exposure to cultures, social systems, and attitudes in the vast world in which we live. One iteration of this program involves the creation and execution of a course comparing different political systems. To make this workable, each year a specific focus is identified around which the students and professors shape their inquiries and efforts. This particular project at DePaul stands out given that it directly involves university partners in five different countries. The professors at these institutions draw select students from their own student bodies. Over the past number of years our partners include the University of Dubrovnik led by Prof. Pero Maldini, the Caucasus International University in Tbilisi, Georgia led by Prof. Zaza Tsotniashvili, the Durban University of Technology in Durban, South Africa led by Prof. Strini Pillay. DePaul plays a central role in the development of the annual course. It is worthy of note that for most of our years the Catholic University of Ukraine has participated. 2025 has been very difficult for that university in Lviv, Ukraine and they paused their participation this year.

As a general rule, the course runs for a minimum of five weeks of synchronous sessions for all of the participants and concludes with independent work on a manageable research project that is reported in student essays on their findings and experiences. This year's topic was REPRESENTATION. Given that it is often imagined as a key element in democratic governing, a closer look seemed warranted. In 2024, the focus

was on ELECTIONS and in 2003 on TECHNOLOGY and governing.

The twenty-eight essays that follow are a product of each student's own decision on who to interview and how to delve into their thinking on what responsibility officials and leaders feel they have to "represent" their constituencies or their interests. Students were encouraged to follow their interests and utilize their access to various sorts of persons with authority at any level. The choices range from local government authorities to organizations in civil society to national legislators.

Many concepts in our political world avoid careful scrutiny. It is not surprising. Most people are busy, consumed by their own responsibilities, and prone to imagine that things work the way they were designed to work. It is seldom the case. Students become aware of this reality by the kind of probing that this GLE encourages. We share these ideas with you not as an enterprise in "truth" but as a signal that understanding politics is challenging and requires focus and energy. Students have invested themselves as you will see. Students were charged with applying a few basic political science concepts to their investigation of representation. They were encouraged to recognize models of behavior that enable one to distinguish various approaches to such responsibilities. For example, *delegate* is a term used to suggest that an official would mirror his or her constituents' view on an issue. *Trustee* would suggest that an official imagines and behaves believing that he or she was selected by the constituency because of the quality of their expertise or judgment. In this case, one could imagine some distance between what the popular view of an issue is and how or what the "representative" endorses. Then there is the *super trustee* who imagines his or her selection or appointment provides him or her with a *mandate* to do whatever he or she imagines to be worthwhile from a perspective

altogether detached from a public vision. These are useful points of departure for an analysis of how “representatives” behave.

The project has been supported in concept over the years by the DePaul Global Engagement administration led by GianMario Besana, Associate Provost and managed by Rosi Leon. This volume – the 2025 collection – has also been financially supported by that same office. We hope the visions of these students will persuade you that they are capable of wrestling with the challenges they face in the coming decades.

RPF

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Representation – Who Speaks for Whom?

Magda Ekaladze — Caucasus International University

Representation is a cornerstone of modern democracy, shaping how power is distributed and whose voices are heard in the political sphere. Who gets represented—and how—can expose deep inequalities tied to race, class, gender, and geography. Whether in literature, media, or government, representation influences who is seen, whose stories are told, and whose voices are heard—or silenced. In a world marked by diversity and inequality, how and by whom people are represented can have real social and political consequences. In this essay we will look at a „target“ representative and how he or she does their job, that is – representing people.

My target is a mayor of Kareli a small city in Georgia. The mayor plays a key role as a representative of the local government and community. This role involves more than just administrative duties—it requires the mayor to symbolize, advocate for, and communicate the needs and values of the people they serve. There are many documents that state what mayor must do. Generally, A mayor is the elected head of a city, town, or municipality and holds a key leadership role in local government. Their primary duties include administration, representation, policy leadership, and public service. The mayor oversees the implementation of laws and policies, manages municipal services (such as sanitation, public safety, and infrastructure), and prepares and supervises the city budget. In times of crisis, the mayor is responsible for leading emergency response efforts and maintaining public order. Ultimately, a mayor's effectiveness depends on their ability to govern fairly, communicate clearly, and represent the "best interests" of their community.

In summary, the mayor's representative role is essential for building trust, ensuring local voices are heard, and linking everyday people with the mechanisms of government.

I had a chance to interact with my target and interview him about his job and his role as a representative. It was quite challenging as a student to be granted time with a mayor, who almost always is busy. Luckily during my time in the city he was able to see me. So, after a ten minute interview with the mayor, I have concluded that the „representative“ definitely applies to him. Of course, it is hard to not feel aloof with a title like mayor. My target stated that since he is a citizen of the city and his family also lives here, he tries very hard to make this place great and support the needs of his people. The responsibility to represent such a small city, for my target, is really important. In the past, the city was in a horrible state. Houses were old, no apartments, no parks and the roads were always muddy. My target wanted to change all these for a better future. To make a future for new generations who could move out to bigger and greater cities given how destroyed their hometown was. Now some people even say, that this city is the epicenter of Georgia. Looking at the documents that state the rules for the mayor, I felt like my target was doing almost everything he could. The mayor I interviewed even said that he considers himself a delegate. And as we know, a delegate acts as a direct voice of the people, reflecting their wishes and opinions exactly. They do not use personal judgment to override public opinion and the delegate model is based on the idea that elected officials should mirror the will of their constituents.

While representation is fundamental to democracy, an overemphasis on it can create tensions that may hinder the system's overall performance. In theory, representation ensures inclusion and legitimacy, but in practice, it can lead to

fragmentation, gridlock, or symbolic politics—where officials prioritize visibility over effective action. If representatives focus too narrowly on identity or local interests, broader national concerns may be neglected. Moreover, constantly striving for perfect representation may slow decision-making and reduce cohesion. Thus, while representation is essential, when treated as the end goal rather than a means, it can potentially undermine efficiency, unity, and quality of governance. I guess, my targets role as a mayor, and as he said, "delegate," is not always beneficial. It can have its own flaws. Some people may not understand that the city they live in does not need more stores. Instead it needs green parks for fresh and healthy air. Maybe old people are trying too hard to let the city decline, to make it like it was in the past. This could be because senior citizens are often afraid of change. On the other hand, younger generations wants something different. My sense is my target is not fully a delegate, even though he said he is. And I think this is a good thing. As a father he might be listening to what his kids want to change. How they would like the city to be. He may nurture that notion to emerge as the eventual will of the majority.

At first glance, representation appears to be the cornerstone of democracy, the mechanism through which the will of the people is translated into governance. However, a deeper examination raises questions about whether this concept holds as much critical weight as is often assumed. Representation can become more symbolic than functional, providing the appearance of inclusion without genuine responsiveness or power-sharing. In practice, representatives may prioritize party loyalty, personal ambition, or elite interests over the people they are meant to serve. Moreover, in an age of instant communication and participatory platforms, direct engagement between citizens and policy may challenge the traditional model of mediated

representation. Therefore, while representation remains a key democratic ideal, its practical role and effectiveness warrants scrutiny, and its importance should not be taken for granted without considering how well it actually serves democratic aims.

While my target strives to reflect the will of the people—identifying as a delegate—his actions suggest a necessary blend of delegation and independent judgment. This balance is crucial, especially when the needs of different groups within a community clash. True representation is not just about echoing public opinion, but about making thoughtful, forward-looking decisions that serve both current and future generations. In the end, democratic representation must be flexible, responsive, and guided by both empathy and insight to be truly effective.

Representation in a Georgian Village

Natia Gakharia — Caucasus International University

Representative Nestan Qarchava is the elected mayor of Khabume, a small Georgian village. In her position, she is charged with overseeing the daily administrative functions of the village, managing its budget, maintaining public infrastructure, addressing local concerns, and representing the village in broader regional forums. Her role falls within the framework of local government authorities in Georgia, as regulated by national laws that define the responsibilities of municipal leaders.

The core expectation tied to her role is that she acts in the best interest of the villagers who elected her. While there is no specific financial penalty for underperformance, the primary incentive to represent effectively is political accountability. Failure to meet public expectations may result in loss of trust and future electoral defeat. The informal structure of local politics, particularly in small communities, also means that reputational damage can have lasting social and professional consequences.

It's also important to note that her position requires her to balance limited resources with broad community needs. In rural settings where access to funding and personnel is often restricted, local leaders must prioritize based on urgency and long-term impact. In that sense, her task as a representative extends beyond simply mirroring the will of the people. She must make executive decisions that take into account feasibility and sustainability. Thus, representation here is both political and managerial.

Interaction and Analysis

My interaction with Mayor Qarchava offered valuable insights into her view of leadership and representation. In our

discussion, she described her duties as being mainly operational: supervising local services, maintaining infrastructure, allocating the budget, and solving community problems. She also noted that she represents the village in official meetings and regional councils. However, she made no mention of formal processes for citizen consultation such as public forums or surveys. Instead, she bases her decisions on her own experience and understanding of the community's needs.

This suggests a leadership approach based on the super trustee model, where the representative uses personal judgment rather than consistently seeking input from constituents. When asked directly about how she ensures representation, she emphasized being accessible to villagers and responsive to complaints, but did not describe any structured channels for dialogue or deliberation.

From this experience, I concluded that the mayor's representation is shaped more by informal expectations and personal initiative than by institutional mechanisms. Her interpretation of representation is rooted in trust and perceived competence rather than participatory governance. Her behavior is largely consistent with this view. She fulfills her duties actively and efficiently but does not regularly consult the public in decision-making.

This aligns with observations from several villagers. Many praised her dedication and availability, highlighting her involvement in resolving agricultural challenges and improving infrastructure. Yet, these same citizens acknowledged that they are rarely, if ever, consulted in a formal way. One resident commented, "We trust her, but we don't really have a say in what happens." Another noted, "If something needs fixing, she'll fix it—but we're not asked what we think should come first."

The general tone of these informal interviews was positive, with appreciation for the mayor's work ethic and hands-on style. However, an undercurrent of resignation could also be detected. Some villagers expressed a quiet desire for more transparency and regular communication. A young teacher from the village school said, "We'd like to know more about how decisions are made. It would help us feel more involved." Another local artisan commented, "She's effective, but it's not always clear how priorities are set. Some voices get lost."

Thus, while the representative is seen as effective and trusted, her leadership style is not inclusive in the participatory sense. The absence of institutionalized mechanisms for representation limits citizen involvement, even if individual interactions sometimes occur informally.

Representation as a Systemic Issue

The case of Mayor Qarchava raises broader questions about the role of representation in democratic systems. Is the current model rooted in trust and performance, but lacking in participation a functional substitute for deeper democratic engagement? In this instance, it appears to be adequate for maintaining order and solving immediate problems, but it may fall short in empowering citizens or encouraging long-term civic participation.

This highlights a central issue: the ambiguity of the term "representation." Without clearly defined processes or expectations, representatives like Mayor Qarchava can interpret their roles flexibly. While this fluidity may allow for responsiveness and adaptability, it also opens the door to paternalism and the marginalization of less vocal citizens. In the short term, this may seem efficient, especially in close-knit

communities, but over time it can erode democratic accountability.

Moreover, the absence of formal public consultation may create blind spots. Even a well-intentioned leader may overlook issues that affect specific groups if those groups are not actively engaged. This undermines the egalitarian spirit of democracy, which seeks to give all citizens a voice in governance.

On the other hand, the fluidity of representation may provide advantages in specific contexts. In small communities, trust and personal relationships often replace formal structures. Leaders can act quickly and flexibly without being constrained by bureaucratic procedures. For citizens, the proximity to power may feel more personal and direct, even if it is not institutionalized. However, this informal system depends heavily on the individual leader's integrity and can easily be compromised if that trust is lost.

Furthermore, this raises the issue of scalability. While informal representation may work in smaller settings, it becomes less effective in larger, more diverse populations where differing interests must be reconciled. In such cases, participatory structures are not just desirable—they are necessary to prevent alienation and ensure fair governance.

Conclusion

This case study suggests that while representation is a cornerstone of democracy, its actual implementation at the local level can vary widely. In the case of Mayor Qarchava, representation is primarily enacted through performance and trust rather than formal democratic engagement. This reveals both strengths and limitations of the super trustee model.

At a superficial level, one might assume that democratic systems naturally include high levels of citizen participation and accountability. However, the experience in this village shows that representation can function effectively in a more top-down, informal way—at least in the short term. Whether this model is sustainable or truly democratic is debatable. Without institutional structures for participation, citizens remain largely passive, and the system depends heavily on individual leadership qualities.

Ultimately, for democratic representation to fulfill its promise, it must go beyond effective leadership to include mechanisms that actively involve citizens in shaping their own governance. Representation should not only be about acting on behalf of the people—it must also be about acting with the people.

The broader implication of this case is a call to action for rural governance. Institutions should support local leaders by offering training and tools for inclusive governance, while also encouraging citizen education and engagement. This would create a more balanced dynamic, where effectiveness and democracy are not in tension but are mutually reinforcing. In doing so, the concept of representation can reclaim its critical place in the democratic system, not just as a theoretical ideal but as a lived reality for all citizens.

Representation: A Conversation with the Mayor of Poti, Georgia

Mea Jakobia – Caucasus International University

This essay is about my conversation with the Mayor of Poti, Georgia. I asked him how he sees his role and how he tries to understand and help the people of the city. He shared his thoughts about listening, learning, and making decisions for the community.

From our talk, I saw that being a good mayor is not just about rules, but about care and connection with people. I also talked with him about the idea of "representation" and what it really means in real life. This conversation helped me realize how complex and important that idea actually is.

The mayor is the leader of the city and works to solve problems and improve life for everyone who lives there. I asked him questions about his job and what it means to "represent" people. He told me he was chosen by the people through voting. He follows the law, but he also feels a personal duty to listen and help the people he serves. When I asked him if there are penalties for not doing his job well, he said, "The people decide in the next election. If I don't do well, they won't vote for me again."

When I asked how he understands what people want or need, he said, "You have to go see them. You can't just stay in the office. I walk around, visit schools, talk to people at the market. I listen." This showed me that he sees part of his job as being present in the community. By staying connected to the everyday lives of citizens, he tries to make sure their voices are heard. In this way, he acts like a *delegate*—someone who carries out the

people's wishes by listening to them directly and trying to reflect their concerns in his decisions.

But I also asked whether the rules of his job ever stop him from helping people. He said no. "The law gives some limits, but you can still find ways to help if you really care." This made me realize something else: representation is not just about following what people say. Sometimes, it's about using your judgment to do what you believe is right. The mayor said that at times, he has to make difficult decisions. "Sometimes you have to make hard choices that not everyone likes," he said. This made me think about what we learned in class about the trustee model of representation. In this model, a representative uses their own experience and values to make decisions for the good of the people, even if those choices are not always popular.

So, in some situations, the mayor acts like a *delegate*, listening closely and doing what people ask. But in other situations, he becomes more of a *trustee*, using his judgment and experience to make decisions that he believes are best for the whole community. Both roles are important, and a good leader needs to know when to use each one.

One phrase he used that stood out to me was when he said he sees himself as a "bridge between the people and the government." At first, I thought this was just a figure of speech, but I realized it means something deeper. A bridge connects two sides. It allows information to pass both ways. In this case, the mayor listens to the people and brings their voices to the government, but he also brings government decisions back to the people and helps explain them. It's not a one-way role—it's about connection, trust, and communication.

Another idea I found interesting was when he said he has to make "hard choices that not everyone likes." That really made

me think. How can one person speak for so many different needs? People want different things—some want jobs, others want safety, clean streets, or just someone to listen to them. That’s when I understood that representation is not about making everyone happy—it’s about making fair and thoughtful decisions, even when they’re difficult.

Maybe that’s the problem with representation: it tries to make one person speak for many. And people are not the same. They have different problems, dreams, and priorities. So a mayor, or any representative, must learn to balance all these voices. That’s why the ability to shift between being a delegate and a trustee is so important.

Talking with the Mayor of Poti helped me see that representation is not just a word or a political title. It’s a relationship built on listening, judgment, honesty, and care. A real leader doesn’t just follow the rules—they build trust. And that trust is what makes a strong community and a healthy democracy.

Inside the Role of a Representative: Expectations, Truth and Weaknesses

Sara Bagic — University of Dubrovnik

This essay explores the role of Nebojša Čović, president of the City Council of Kutina, and his responsibility to represent both citizens and fellow Council members. Through direct communication and interviews, it examines how he goes beyond his described role to engage with local communities, sports associations, and war veterans. The essay reflects on the complexity of representation in today's politics and democratic systems, the importance of trust, and the challenges representatives face. Representation is displayed as both essential and imperfect, requiring constant balance between personal beliefs and public expectations. The essay highlights both the strengths and potential weaknesses of representation and emphasizes the need for citizens to stay involved while recognizing the system's limitations.

Nebojša Čović is a president of the City Council of Kutina. Kutina is a city in northern part of Croatia with approximately 20 thousands inhabitants. The City is ruled by its mayor and the City Council. As president, he has a major responsibility within the Council and his job is to represent every single City Council member and their needs wherever he goes, as well as needs of all the citizens of Kutina. If he fails to represent the needs of citizens and his fellow Council members, he faces the danger of losing their trust, not being elected again for his position, or even immediate dismissal from his position.

To communicate with my target, I had to get a little creative because Kutina is a very small town, and it barely has any contact information on their official internet pages. So, I decided to

contact Čović through his social media profile. I have introduced myself and explained what I am doing and why, and what would I like to know about him and his work. I made it obvious that I don't have a political agenda and that I would appreciate his honesty in answering my questions. He responded quickly and was happy to help with my research. We scheduled an interview by phone, and he easily answered all my questions. During our conversation, I have gotten an impression that he usually goes beyond his described role and tries to represent the citizens and their problems. To my question what is it that he specifically does to hear people's problems, he said that he is member of many organizations in Kutina and other villages. Čović also stated that as a president of the City Council, he goes to other local committees to be present at their sessions and to gauge what their problems are. Also, he is a sportsman and a member of Community of Sports Associations of the City of Kutina. As he said, because of that he gets in touch with a lot of people from various backgrounds and he gets to see the city and its problems from other points of view, especially at matches and other sporting events. Čović is also associated with war veterans and their organization in Kutina. So he has firsthand information about their problems. I would say that he really values people's opinions and that he does his best to communicate with them because his fellow Council members and citizens chose him for a reason. and that reason They believed that he could best represent their interests, and he takes that role very seriously. I have also talked with some of citizens of Kutina and they said that he really is a good person, and then also a good politician and representative who likes to hear about other people's problems.

In today's politics everything is about representing. Citizens of every country choose their representatives (presidents, prime

ministers, members of parliament) often every four or five years. I would say that that kind of system is hardly ideal. My target Nebojša Čović is, according to what I found out during our interview and from people, an example of a good representative. Many analysts say, those kind of politicians are rare. Most of them only work for their own benefit while pretending to work for the good of the people. In history, there were times when people could go out into the square and express their problems, but today there are so many people and it would be impossible for every one of them to find time to do that. Thus, there must be representatives. We have to trust them to take care of our problems. That is why when we get to choose who will represent us in elections. We have to exercise that right to vote. Also, those representatives have a really hard role, they have to meet the citizens' expectations. Also, those representatives have a really hard role. They have to meet the citizens' expectations. In order to do that, they sometimes have to adapt to their the situation. That fluidity can be very useful and can serve as their tool to achieve their goals in representing others. They can adapt to unexpected situations and negotiate even with those who have opposite beliefs. Nonetheless, this fluidity can be interpreted in another way. Representatives can be seen as not a men of principles but rather as someone who strays from reflecting the views of those he/she represents resulting in people losing trust.

Representation has a major role in today's politics. Representatives which are chosen to represent other citizens somehow need to address everyone's needs. But it is impossible to do that. Those representatives also have their own opinions and beliefs, and they constantly have to balance between their needs or visions and other people's needs and vision. It is a very tough job. It is often the case that people lose trust in representatives and institutions because they believe that they are not doing

anything for orpeople, but instead for their own gain. People shouldn't become to dependent on representatives to stand up for them, but rather learn how to stand for themselves in other ways. All said, in today's democratic system, politics would not be able to function without representatives.

Representation in Small Town America

KJ Ulrick — DePaul University

In small town America political representation can take on an intimate form. My target representative is Amanda Lawrence, the Village President of Middletown, Illinois. She originally came into her position through appointment, not election. When the former mayor stepped down, my target was on the town board and was subsequently appointed as Village President. Since, she has won re-election. While there is no specific charge or job description, she is a very accessible public figure. The Village of Middletown has a population of just over three hundred residents. Lawrence points out that this creates a penalty for non-performance. She is known, personally, to her constituents. In our interview she shared that people make their support or displeasure, known. Residents often call at home, or at work, even show up on her porch to share their point of view. In Middletown, the line between the governed and those governing is seemingly nonexistent.

Through interacting with my target, I have better understood how she views her role as a representative. She is not limited at all by a prescription for her role, as there is not one. Though, she does seem to be limited by her experience at times. She said herself, she lacks a background in municipal administration and often reaches out to others or uses records from previous mayors to help fill the gaps in her knowledge. She further emphasized the fact that she is “constantly” available to her constituents and will often discuss issues with community members. She is intertwined with her community, and they are always near to hold her accountable. I understood Lawrence does not view herself as a distant policy-maker. Rather she views herself as a community representative. Therefore, willing to rely on the input and

assistance of others when she may fall short otherwise. In this sense she acts largely as a *delegate*. Often taking the opinions of some others into consideration when making decisions.

On the other hand, she says that her main goal is working towards the betterment of her community. While she cannot please every resident, she lists the survival of the village as a top priority. She stated that she does her best to act in favor of the majority, only straying away when financial or ethical issues arise. This suggests she has the mindset of a *trustee*. Using one's own judgement to make decisions.

Recently, the village of Middletown has been trying to reach an agreement with the neighboring village of New Holland to merge the towns water supplies. Both towns face infrastructure issues with their water, and reaching an agreement would serve to benefit both communities. However, the residents of both villages dislike members of the other and have been voting against the merger for some years. Mayor Lawrence has voiced frustration with the attitudes of her constituents. She does not understand why her neighbors continue to vote opposed to the betterment of their homes. While she does not have the authority to veto the town's vote, Lawrence has persevered in her support of the water agenda, not because it is popular, but because she believes it is right. While the conclusion to this issue is not known, it is an example of the target's representative behavior. One can understand the aspects of *delegate* and *trustee* present within her representative thinking. She wants one thing personally while still being considerate of her constituency.

I think the focus on representation is a problem for the performance of the system. I find that many understand the word representation to mean that they elect only *delegates*, who then have a duty to mirror their constituents. This can breed contempt when disagreements between representative and the represented

arise. As most perceive representation in this way, when a representative does not act the way that a constituent believes they ought to, that constituent feels betrayed and could be disillusioned with the system.

Overall, there is not a clear expectation for what any one representative is supposed to do. This fluidity can provide an advantage in that officials can focus on things that are important to their constituents, or to themselves. However, the fluidity of the system leads to confusion. Without a clear prescription nobody is quite sure what the duty of a representative is. Many possess opinions on the right and wrong ways for their elected representatives to act, and many more prefer that their representatives make the choices that they would. Still, we find ourselves lost within the ambiguity of it all. Can she do that? How is he allowed to run? When will they listen to us? We ask ourselves these questions and are met without answer. If we did receive answers, would we accept them? I argue we would not.

Representation does indeed have a critical place in the democratic system. While this is most peoples first answer as well, it is not critical in a way that many understand it. A democracy can function without representation as Americans understand it. A body of people needs to be selected to make decisions for a larger population as direct democracy is impractical for the national scale. However, beyond the necessity of a legislative body the concept of representation holds little weight. People do not care who is representing them. Many do not vote. Fewer pay attention to what is going on in their state or national legislatures. Further, representatives do not care about who they are representing. Representatives need the people every election cycle and infrequently between. The people, broadly, need someone to hand their autonomy over to and point at when things do not go their way. When imagining a democratic system

without representation, I would argue that you do not need to imagine. We are already living it.

Representation in a Traditional South African Province

Qolile Makhubele — Durban University of Technology

Representative: Mr. Kgosi LE Mashego

Mr Kgosi LE Mashego, born in 1969 and who is serving as the 13th member associated with the Thabakgolo Traditional Council, which serves the Bushbucridge area in Bohlabela district, Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. He is the traditional leader for the Tsonga tribe, Bushbucridge community under traditional leadership in Mpumalanga. He was appointed by the chief as the rightful and capable leader of the Tsonga tribe communities under the province

Interacting with Mr Kgosi LE Mashego through his office's personal assistance who organized a cell phone interview between me and Mr Kgosi. He shared valuable information about his role as a community member, highlighting the importance of community development and cultural heritage. Interviewing him was a positive experience. He was open and responded to all the questions I had for him. As a traditional leader, he is limited by the description of his position. All of his decisions are made by following the Traditional Council structure implemented under the Thabakgolo Traditional Council for his roles and responsibilities within the community. He operates under the Traditional and Khoi-San leadership Act, which means that he does not lead or represent the Bushbucridge community based on his own judgements and opinions. He is inspired by the efforts of the National House of Traditional Leaders that seek to improve the status of rural communities. He reiterated that he leads

according to how the Act outlined his roles and responsibilities as a Traditional leader.

When he explained his responsibility to “represent”, he interpreted it to mean making decisions that help and benefit the community members. During the process of decision-making, he engages with community for their views on certain matters or decisions to be implemented. The discussions he has with the community members influence the final decision that is “rightful” and aligns with the description of his roles and responsibilities. He voices community interests by representing their needs and concerns within the community. He promotes the community cultural traditions, values and customs. His role in protecting the community cultural traditions include enhancing ways that it allows for the community members to adapt or simply live through their cultural traditions. He views his role as a steward of the community interests and resources. Mr Mashego considers himself as a trustee of the community cultural heritage and traditions. He provides services to the community, aimed at improving the lives of the community members in both cultural and traditional respects.

He also shared the challenges he faces as a community representative. Those challenges include managing different views and interests of members of the community. The challenges of maintaining community and also interacting with external entities, such as government and other organizations. He preserves the cultural integrity by ensuring that the external influences do not compromise the cultural heritage of the community.

He upholds the community values by committing himself to the community cultural heritage and traditions. In case of making decisions that benefits the community as a whole, he mentioned that he engages with other traditional leaders of the Bohlabela

region and government officials as well. This happens with those within the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sports as they develop, protect, and promote South Africa's cultural legacy. Examples include roles such as the directors of Culture, and members of organizations like the National Heritage Resources Agency which engages with communities to raise awareness about the importance of cultural heritage. They also seem to preserve and manage any heritage resources. He interacts directly with his community and open space for them to voice their priorities and needs including ways to support and protect their cultural heritage and traditions in the Bohlabela region.

The focus on "representation" in the traditional leadership system of Thabakgolo Traditional Council can be beneficial and problematic. The representative ensures that there is community engagement, whereby the community members express their interests and are working to see that they are considered. In terms of decision-making, he allows for community to play a part. The potential problems include the issue of the absence of a clear accountability mechanism. The representative may priorities his own interests over those of the community. The traditional council structure may be slow to adapt to changing circumstances or external influences.

The fluidity in the behavior of the representative may have an advantage. It allows the representative to adapt to the changing circumstances, needs and priorities. The representative might be able to handle complicated issues and conflicts that arise affecting the community. It also allows for the representative to understand specific situations in the community stemming from change or social living. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances and understanding better situations for the community can lead to innovative solutions that will benefit the community under his leadership.

In conclusion, the concept of representation plays a crucial role in democratic systems. Representation opens space for dialogue and allows for communities to voice their interests and needs. This informs the leader in the process of making decisions.. It can promote equality and diversity within the communities or citizens as a whole. Although representation can have challenges or can be imperfect given that the representatives can prioritize his own interests and avoid the communities needs and priorities. Representation in democracy is very important with its complexity and a multifaceted challenge. It is often seen as the cornerstone of democratic system and its effectiveness can be influenced by the type of intra-personal mechanism used to impact the representation of interests and groups that are different. The effectiveness of representation depends on the official's commitment to respect his constituents and their cultural heritage.

The Effectiveness of Representation in Local Government: Ward Councilor

Siyabonga Mlotshwa — Durban University of Technology

A ward councilor represents the needs and concerns of a community. Through gathering information about a ward councilor and conducting methods like interviews, this study defines the role of a ward councilor. It also provides information on the challenges the ward councilor faces and how one addresses the needs of the community. This study defines how a South African ward councilor in the local government sphere represent her community.

The Representative: Role in Local Government

Mrs. Zondi was a ward councilor. The name of the place where she was a ward councilor is Howick at Ward 4. A ward councilor plays a significant role in representing the community from which they have been elected. In concept, the ward councilor represents the needs and concerns of the people who reside within that ward. The people who reside within that ward have needs like basic services that need to be delivered to them. The ward councilor plays a major role in ensuring that those basic services are provided to the communities. This can include basic services like water, electricity, safety, community development programs, and ensuring that the community is in a healthy environment for all the people.

A ward councilor is a local government official, who is presumed to represent the people from that ward. The ward councilor plays a significant role as a link between the Municipal government and the community. The ward councilor is charged

with working with the municipal government to deal with the needs and concerns of their community.

Responsibilities

The ward councilor has various responsibilities. First, the ward councilor must be accountable to those people who elected them. The ward councilor is responsible for ensuring that in all the duties he performs he is accountable. For the people to share their interest or opinions, the ward councilor is responsible for ensuring that all the actions he takes are visible so the people of the ward can see his actions. In this way, they can have and express their opinions. The ward councilor is responsible for acting transparently.

One method a ward councilor engages with the community and where they can share their opinions, is when the ward councilor calls the community to a public hall so they can conduct a meeting together and engage with the needs and concerns of the community.

How consistent was the representation

To get better information on how she was consistent during her time as a ward councilor, I asked some of the people who are represented by her if she was consistent. Some of the community members gave information in terms of how she ensured to be consistent in terms of answering their needs, and that she always ensured that their needs were met. Some community members gave answers in terms that, at some point, she didn't answer to concerns of the community members, or she would address their issues after a very long time of not addressing their concerns. Mrs. Zondi by my standards was consistent in her representation. Many roads were fixed during her term. She also fixed the issue of poor water supply within the area. She fixed the challenge that

was faced around regularity of electrical service. The area had issues before her term. Some households within the area did not have any electricity.

How the ward councilor was limited by the description of her position.

The ward councilor is limited by her job description and by expectations. A ward councilor is guided by frameworks, which are municipal laws and policies. These frameworks guide the ward councilor. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides a guide for principles that councilors must understand and always follow. The Constitution also provides rights.

To further that discussion of the frameworks that guide the ward councilor is the Local Government Act of 1999. This defines how services need to be provided to the citizens. Their services must always be provided with a high quality, ensure to must always respond to the needs of the citizens. The ward councilor must ensure that services are provided fairly for all citizens. Also, those services are provided to all the people who need them.

Experience with the Representative

I will turn to the way the ward councilor becomes informed about the issues affecting her ward. First, she identified five ordinary people from the community who were willing to stand for election that she had certain people from the community who were ordinary people who would allow the community to elect them, and function to share ideas on a regular basis with the councilor. The role of these people is to always communicate the issues from the community especially those issues which the councilor can not see. These people are ordinary people who

stayed in the community and knew all the day-to-day issues. She also tracked issues by using online resources. For example, using Facebook accounts of the local leaders and public responses. that includes committee members from that area. In this way, many more ideas are shared and become part of a public dialogue.

Challenges

She identified the challenge of not getting enough financial resources from the municipality to be able to implement development within the area. She mentioned this as a huge challenge, as she couldn't solve some issues due to a lack of financial resources. When certain issues were not fixed within that area, the community members would blame her as their representative and would not understand that they are not receiving enough financial resources from the municipality. She further mentioned that when people were frustrated, they started to strike and destroy some of the facilities within the area. This can include the community going to damage their community hall when they feel that she is not representing them as promised. So the way she tried to deal with these challenges is by trying to get investment from private sector organizations. Businesses within the area or close to the area to assist with financial resources, where she would engage with them so they can assist with financial resources.

Some other challenges include that some community members are unable to use the platforms to engage, especially online platforms. For example, elderly people are unable to use online platform to give voice to themselves. So, the way she addresses this challenge is by having community engagement by conducting meetings at community halls, so she can engage with the community people in a face-to-face environment. By doing

this she would get the opportunity to understand and gauge the needs and concerns of the community much better.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of representation plays a crucial role in a democratic system. The democratic system promotes the involvement of citizens, and they have the right to vote for anyone they would like to represent them. Then the representation concept has a critical place in a democratic system to ensure that the voices of the citizens are heard. This can lead to citizens having a major impact on the formulation of public policies and can accommodate their involvement in the decision-making process.

This essay has highlighted the role of ward councilors to ensure to represent their communities. It highlighted the importance of their role. The case study of Mrs Zondi, who was a ward councilor, identified the challenges she came across and how she addressed those challenges. As ward councilors are limited by their job description, they still play a significant role in their communities. This study provided an understanding of the role of a ward councilor in local governance and representing the needs and concerns of the communities and promoting development.

The Role of Representation in South Africa's Democracy: A Case Study of Induna Nkunzebovu Ndelu

Mjoka Bheki — Durban University of Technology

Representation is a fundamental aspect of democracy, allowing citizens to have their interests and voices heard through chosen individuals. In South Africa, representation takes various forms, including elected officials and traditional leaders. This essay examines the role of representation by focusing on Induna Nkunzebovu Ndelu, a traditional leader in Mbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal. We will explore his position, responsibilities, challenges, and how his role fits within South Africa's democratic framework.

Identifying the Selected Representative

Induna Nkunzebovu Ndelu serves as a community leader within the Embo Traditional Council in Mbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal. As an Induna, he acts as an intermediary between the community and higher traditional authorities, and other governmental structures. His responsibilities include resolving disputes, particularly those related to land, crime matters and security, community development and conveying community concerns to relevant authorities.

Even though there might not be official sanctions for poor performance, his efficacy is largely dependent on the community's respect and trust in him. Inadequate performance may cause community members to lose faith in him, which could lead to his replacement. The significance of preserving solid ties

and candid communication with the community is highlighted by this informal responsibility.

Interacting with the Representative

Engaging with Induna Nkunzebovu Ndelu demonstrated that his obligations go well beyond official job definitions including a wide range of duties essential to the well-being and unity of the Mbumbulu community. One of his primary duties involves mediating land disputes, a common issue in rural areas where land ownership and usage rights are often governed by customary law. As a mediator in these situations, Induna Ndelu uses his extensive knowledge of regional traditions and customs to help parties in dispute negotiate peaceful solutions that preserve social harmony.

Beyond property disputes, Induna Ndelu is essential to preventing crime. In order to detect and resolve security issues, he works with local law enforcement and community members. He frequently calls community gatherings to talk about safety tactics and promoting increased awareness. His proactive approach makes the community safer by encouraging a sense of shared responsibility among its inhabitants.

Induna Ndelu has a strong commitment to fostering young people's potential in the field of youth development. Recognizing that youth empowerment is critical to the community's future success, he starts and supports initiatives that offer educational chances, vocational training, and leisure options. He assists in guiding young people away from harmful influences and towards constructive paths by serving as a mentor and encouraging positive role models.

An additional crucial component of Induna Ndelu's responsibility is addressing poverty. In order to make services

like food aid, housing help, and job opportunities accessible to families and individuals in need. He promotes sustainable development initiatives with the goal of improving the economic standing of the entire community through collaborations with governmental and nonprofit institutions.

Induna Ndelu's dedication to becoming a dynamic leader is evident in his flexibility and response to Mbumbulu's changing needs. His ability to resolve disputes, promote development projects, and negotiate difficult social issues highlights the crucial role traditional leaders play in modern South African culture. He serves as an example of how traditional leadership may successfully support the country's democratic framework by combining traditional customs with contemporary governing techniques.

Evaluating the Focus on Representation and Its Impact on System Performance

Focusing too heavily on representation can sometimes present challenges to the overall performance of the democratic system. For instance, South Africa's electoral system employs proportional representation, where citizens vote for political parties rather than individual candidates. This structure can lead to representatives feeling more accountable to their parties than to the electorate, making it difficult for citizens to hold their representatives directly responsible for their actions.

However, the flexibility inherent in certain representative roles, such as that of Induna Ndelu, can be advantageous. This adaptability allows representatives to address issues that may not fall within their official mandates, leading to more responsive and effective governance at the local level.

Nevertheless, excessive flexibility without clear guidelines can result in ambiguities regarding accountability and performance evaluation. Without defined responsibilities and benchmarks, it becomes challenging to assess the effectiveness of representatives and to ensure they are acting in the best interests of their constituents. Therefore, while some degree of flexibility is beneficial, it must be balanced with mechanisms that promote transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

A fundamental component of democratic governance, representation acts as a medium for the input of citizens' opinions, interests, and concerns into the formulation of public policy. People give representatives the power to make decisions that represent the “will of the people” by electing someone to act on their behalf. In addition to making managing big, diverse societies easier, this approach supports the ideas of accountability and popular sovereignty.

The complexity involved in representation practice can affect how well governance works. Finding a balance between representatives' liberty and their duty to represent their citizens' choices is one major difficulty. This conflict is demonstrated by models such as the trustee and delegate frameworks, where representatives are given latitude to act in what they believe to be the public interest while the latter demands disciplined compliance to the views of citizens.

The case of Induna Nkunzebovu Ndelu illustrates the dual nature of representation. On one hand, his role facilitates the articulation of community concerns, fostering inclusion and participation. On the other hand, the broad scope of his responsibilities and the flexibility of his role can lead to challenges in accountability and clarity of mandate.

This example underscores that while representation is vital for democratic engagement, it must be accompanied by clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms to ensure that representatives effectively serve their constituents. Therefore, representation holds a critical place in democracy, but its success depends on the structures and practices that support it.

“REPRESENTATION”

*Luyanda Mandisi Magubane — Durban University of
Technology*

This research examines representation in a democratic system through the case of Ward 101 Councilor Mr. S.M. Khanyile in Durban’s eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. Although councilors understand their duties, their actions often do not match their promises, causing poor service delivery and declining public trust. The study reveals a gap between the ideal of representation and actual service outcomes. This could cause a reasonable person to conclude there are flaws in the current governing model. Key issues include cadre deployment, lack of accountability, and limited transparency. These findings highlight the urgent need for reforms to strengthen democratic institutions and improve both representation and service delivery.

Background

I identified a target “representative,” Mr. S.M. Khanyile, a councilor in ward in 101 in Mayville, Durban, under the eThekweni Metropolitan. The Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1980, in Chapter 3, outlines the establishment of Municipal Councils, which serve as the governing body of a municipality as required by law. It is established that a councilor is an appointed member of a municipal council. The role of a councilor is to participate in the municipal council, which is responsible for accomplishing the objectives set out in section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996. The meetings are tasked with assessing the community's needs, setting priorities, community engagement, and overseeing municipal performance. Councilors are either elected directly by

the voters in the wards or through the proportional party lists, as outlined in sections 22 and 23 of the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998.

Councilors may also be appointed as representatives of local councils to district councils, as specified in section 23. The term of office lasts until the next council is declared elected. The prescribed objects of local government are- "(a) to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities; (b) to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner; (c) to promote social and economic development; (c) to promote a safe and healthy environment; and (d) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organizations in the matters of local government." These principles guide councils and municipal employees, ensuring that their actions support the delivery of services to the community effectively and efficiently.

Consequences for Non-Compliance

In principle, ward councillors are guided by accountability, community involvement, ethical conduct, and effective service delivery, as outlined in the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act. They must work to achieve municipal objectives, engage with the community, adhere to a Code of Conduct, and maintain required qualifications. Failure to comply with these principles can lead to serious consequences, including removal from office. This can happen by a variety of means. They can resign, lose their qualifications, cease their party membership, violate the Code of Conduct, or be replaced by their local council. Removal processes require due notice and proper procedures to ensure fairness. Once removed, councillors lose all associated privileges and immunities. These measures are designed to

ensure that councillors remain responsible and responsive to their communities while upholding legal and ethical standards.

Capturing the experience of interacting with my councillor

Welcome to Durban, where meeting with a councillor becomes a long-overdue process. As if you are meeting with a mayor, it is close to impossible accomplish. A person who is meant to be closest to the community should be a call away or a few buildings away from his/her people. In ward 101, it is impossible to meet with the councillor, even when I went to his office in City Hall.

In local government, a representative is not just someone with a job title, but a person who was appointed to perform roles and responsibilities that they are expected to follow during their term. A councillor must understand the expected duties and work to meet the standards set. In the case of Ward 101 area, a councillor is a bearer of a title that leaves with him the nature of his behaviour. In this case, all evidence suggest that he does not perform the duties prescribed for him. This brings me to a point that cadre deployment has a lot of influence on who takes these leadership positions and the nature of their loyalties when they are placed there. Cadre deployment is a term that is used to describe a strong political party strategically placing its loyal members in key positions in government institutions (Naidoo 2023). This allows that party to have control over how the appointed person behaves. This often has negative consequences for the constituency because the councillor's commitment to providing essential services can be compromised. Effective service delivery is a necessity for the constituency to be able to trust their representative.

Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to meet with him. Nonetheless, I was able to discover that Mr Khanyile claims to understand his representative responsibilities. That said, his actions do not align with his words. When he is asked about his responsibility in the community, he will give a well-rehearsed answer: "As an elected representative, my primary responsibility is to act as a liaison between the community and the municipal council. My role entails actively listening to the concerns of my constituents, effectively representing their interests, and diligently working to address their needs. I am committed to maintaining transparency, responsiveness, and accountability to ensure the highest level of service to the people I represent." The rhetoric is sound, but to properly implement it is a different story. I was relegated to observing from a distance but I enlisted help from people that are close to him. He uses cadres to implement policies which appear to be of the sort a "trustee" would make.

Further observation suggests that he is not as consistent with his constituency as he should be. Dismissing my inquiry draws one to thinking that he feels no need to connect directly with constituents that could help others understand him better.

Where does "representation" fit?

The focus on representation is indeed an intrinsic problem for the overall performance of the council system. This is evident in observations regarding the council system that reveals a disconnection between a councillor's responsibilities as a representative and the actual work they do for their constituency. This indicates that the representation model may be flawed, prioritizing the interests of representatives over those of their constituents. Service delivery in the community can be challenged in terms of value for investment. Cheap materials are

bought to fix electrical transformers. Systemic issues like inadequate accountability mechanisms and insufficient incentives, may contribute to this problem. Ultimately these undermine the effectiveness and efficiency of the council system. If representatives are not held accountable for prioritizing their constituents' needs based upon constituent input, poor outcomes and decreased trust in the system will likely result.

The attempt to interact was frustrated. As a result impressions prevail that might have been refined had we met and talked. A councillor must be a people's person. His election is a reflection of the constituents' hope for a connection. If the distance grows between councillor and the public, it becomes less likely that the community feels a tangible role in policy-making. This brings a lack of trust between the representative and his constituency. If the environment lacks transparency, it will be challenging for constituents to understand the councillor's priorities, values, or goals.

Conclusion

Representation does play a critical role in a democratic system because the concept of representation is fundamental to democratic systems where elected officials represent the interests and needs of their constituents. They allow their voices to be heard, and so allows the councillor to see their interests. However, this concept is taken lightly by too many representatives including my target. Councillors would do well to re-examine their understanding of the concept and consider building new connections with their constituents. A deeper understanding of representation's role can help identify areas for improvement, ultimately strengthening democratic institutions.

Representing at the Most Local Level

Cebo Nxumalo — Durban University of Technology

This essay will discuss my representative and her position and responsibilities in the local community.

Interaction Experience

My interaction with Councillor Nomusa Mkhize was enlightening. As a community councillor, she is responsible for addressing the needs and concerns of our local residents. During our meeting, I was impressed by her dedication to her role and her willingness to listen to the community's needs for infrastructure, healthcare and education. My interaction with councillor Nomusa Mkhize was a profound experience that left a lasting impression on me. We met at a community gathering where she was addressing concerns about the local infrastructure. Her approachability and willingness to engage with the community were evident from the outset. As she listened to the various issues raised by residents, I noticed her taking detailed notes and asking clarifying questions to ensure she fully understood each concern. Her demeanour was calm and composed, even when faced with criticism, which I believe helped to de-escalate tensions and foster a more constructive dialogue. During our conversation, Councillor Mkhize shared stories about the challenges she faces in her role, from managing limited resources to navigating bureaucratic red tape. Despite these hurdles, her passion for serving the community was palpable. She spoke about the importance of building trust between the council and the community, emphasizing that transparency and accountability are key to achieving this goal. Her commitment to her constituents was clear in her words and

actions, and it was inspiring to see her dedication to making a positive difference in our community. She told me that she wants to build a park where there will be many different activities for children to play. According to her, she is doing this with a purpose of drawing the community's youth away from taking drugs and drinking alcohol. I love the idea.

Limitations of the representative role

After interacting with Councillor Nomusa Mkhize, I have concluded that her role is indeed limited by the prescription and description of her position. As a Councillor she operates within a framework defined by local government regulations and policies. These limitations are evident in her need to prioritize certain projects over others based on budget constraints and bureaucratic processes. For instance, she mentioned the challenge of allocating sufficient funds to all the projects proposed by the community. Despite these limited resources, councillor Mkhize demonstrated a strong commitment to finding creative solutions and collaborating with other stakeholders to maximize impact. In bureaucratic settings, the council's decision-making ability is often slowed due to the need for multiple approvals and consultation. This can delay the implementation of projects and initiatives frustrating both the community and the councillor. And, the policy restrictions, certain policies, and regulations limit the scope of her role, dictating what she may not have the authority to unilaterally do without higher approval. After interacting with Councillor Nomusa Mkhize, I also found that another of her role limitations stems from the community's expectations. Sometimes, the community's expectations can be unrealistic, given the resources and powers available to her. Managing these expectations while still being responsive to the community's needs is a delicate balance she strives to maintain.

Despite these limitations, Councillor Mkhize demonstrated a strong commitment to finding creative solutions and collaborating with other stakeholders to maximize impact. One particular example that stood out was her initiative to partner with local businesses and organizations to fund community projects that fall outside the Council's budget. This approach not only showcased her resourcefulness but also highlighted the potential for community-driven solutions when collaborative efforts are made.

A Gauging Consistency in Representation

Consistency is a crucial aspect of effective representation, particularly in roles such as that of Councillor Nomusa Mkhize. To gauge her consistency, I observed her actions, words, and decisions during our interaction and through feedback from the community. She is consistent in her words and actions, Councillor Mkhize's words and actions demonstrate a high level of consistency. During our meeting, she emphasized the importance of transparency, accountability, and community engagement. Her actions align with these values, as evidenced by her regular community meetings, open office hours and active use of social media to keep constituents informed. For example, she provided detailed updates on ongoing project, explaining the rationale behind certain decisions and the expected outcomes. This level of transparency helps build trust and demonstrates her commitment to consistency in her representation. She considers multiple perspectives, weighs the potential impact of different options, and strives to make informed decisions that benefit the community. While she may not always be able to please everyone, her approach is guided by a clear set of principles and values. For example, she mentioned prioritizing projects that benefit the most vulnerable members of the community. She is

consistently attuned to community feedback. Many constituents appreciate her approachability, willingness to listen, and efforts to address their concerns. While there may be some criticism about the pace of progress or resource allocation, the overall sentiment is that she is working diligently to serve the community. This consistency in community's perception is crucial, as it reflects her ability to build trust and maintain relationships over time. To conclude Councillor Nomusa Mkhize demonstrates a high level of commitment to her representation. Her words and actions align with her values, and her decision-making process is guided by a clear set of principles.

Speculating on Representation as an Intrinsic problem

The focus on representation can indeed be an intrinsic problem for the overall performance of a system. When representatives prioritize their role above all else, it can lead to a narrow focus on serving specific constituents rather than the broader community or system as a whole. This can result in fragmented decision-making, where individual interests are prioritized over collective needs. A lack of clarity in the behaviour of representatives can stem from various factors, including ambiguous role definitions, inadequate training, or conflicting priorities. This ambiguity can lead to inconsistent decision-making, confusion among constituents, and decreased trust in the fluidity that can provide representatives with the flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances and navigate complex issues. While a lack of clarity in representatives' behaviour can be a problem but there may be potential advantages to this fluidity such as adaptability which means representatives can respond more effectively to unexpected challenges or opportunities, leveraging their discretion to make

decisions that benefit the community. In a rapidly changing environment, some ambiguity might allow representatives an innovation problem solving, which means the ambiguity can allow representatives to think creatively and develop novel solutions to complex policies. Rigid guidelines might inhibit that.

The concept of representation in democratic system

At first glance, representation seems to be a cornerstone of democratic systems, with elected officials serving as the voice of their constituents. However, upon closer examination, the concept of representation becomes more nuanced. To conclude, representation does hold a critical place in democratic systems, as it obligates representatives to allow citizens to have a say in the policy-making process.

The Boundaries of Representation: Representing Students and the Role of Student Voice

Karla Sabljic — University of Dubrovnik

This essay explores the representative role of Marko Tolja, President of the Student Union at the University of Dubrovnik, as a student representative. It begins by outlining the formal (normative) responsibilities assigned to his position and compares them with how Tolja actually performs his duties. Drawing on observational insights and existing documentation, the essay evaluates how effectively he bridges institutional expectations and student needs. Through this case study, it also questions the limitations of representation in student governance and reflects on whether the concept of “representation” maintains its democratic value beyond formal definitions.

Identifying the selected target “representative”

Representative: Marko Tolja Position: President of the Student Union

Organization: University of Dubrovnik

As the President of the Student Union at the University of Dubrovnik, Marko Tolja holds a position that gives him the authority and responsibility to represent the interests and needs of the student body within the university’s governance structure. His role is defined by university statutes, student union regulations, and national higher education policies in Croatia.

Normative responsibilities of the role include representing all students in the University Senate, advocating for student rights and interests, organizing and coordinating student

initiatives, acting as a link between students and faculty/university administration, ensuring that student voices are heard in decision-making processes, ensuring that student voices are heard in decision-making processes, promoting transparency and accountability within student governance. In essence, encouraging and enhancing active student participation in university life. These responsibilities are supported by internal regulations of the Student Union and the Statute of the University. While there is no formal financial incentive for fulfilling the role, the position comes with prestige and access to university leadership. Failure to represent students adequately can lead to public criticism, student dissatisfaction, and pressure to resign or be replaced.

Experience Interacting with the Target

In the interview with Marko Tolja, I have observed his public communication, student interactions, and media presence. Tolja appears to take his duties seriously and often uses social media to update students about university meetings, and upcoming opportunities. He has also participated in several public events and forums where student concerns were raised.

From a normative perspective, Tolja's role is clearly outlined. However, in practice, some ambiguity arises. He is expected to "represent all students," yet student populations are diverse, and their needs are not always aligned. There is no formal mechanism ensuring he consults students on every issue which limits the depth of his representation. Furthermore, his real influence in university policy seems constrained. While he can raise concerns, most decisions are made by collaborating with faculty or administrative leadership.

Tolja seems to perceive himself as a mediator rather than decision-maker. His reasoning reflects this. He describes his

work as “building trust” and “translating students needs into institutional language.” Tolje offers that judging based on available social media feedback and informal conversations, he is generally viewed as approachable and reliable even though they sometimes question the overall impact of the Student Union.

Based on observations, Tolja tries to remain consistent with his formal duties. However, the effectiveness of his representation is limited by structural constraints, such as the advisory (not executive) nature of his position and the lack of binding power in many university-level decisions.

Speculation on “Representation” and Systemic Performance

This case invites reflection on whether the concept of representation itself contains structural weaknesses. While Tolja fulfills his formal duties with commitment, his ability to enact real change is limited. This exposes a critical issue – even well-intentioned representatives may be constrained by systemic inertia.

A lack of clarity in representative behavior can sometimes lead to flexibility. For example, when roles are not rigidly defined, representatives like Tolja can interpret them creatively – engaging in informal dialogue, initiating student projects, or expanding communication through social media. This fluidity can be an advantage, allowing adaptation and response to evolving student needs. But it also introduces risks of vagueness and reduced accountability.

The larger issue may be that representation in student systems often lacks enforcement mechanisms. Without clear rewards or consequences, much depends on personal motivation and leadership style. This makes the system heavily reliant on the

individual's sense of duty rather than institutional support. This is particularly relevant in smaller university settings, where personal reputation and social capital play a major role in determining the perceived effectiveness of a representative.

Moreover, when institutional bodies treat student participation as a formality rather than a collaborative process, the meaning of representation is weakened. Representation should involve dialogue, negotiation, and even dissent—not simply attendance and symbolic agreement. If representatives lack mechanisms to consult their constituencies regularly and meaningfully, they risk becoming isolated voices disconnected from the broader student body they aim to serve.

Conclusion

Marko Tolja's role highlights the complexity of democratic representation within educational institutions. Normatively, his responsibilities are well defined. But in practice, systemic limits, vague mandates, and the diversity of student voices complicate his ability to “represent” effectively.

The concept of representation remains vital in democratic systems. However, this case study suggests that its effectiveness depends not only on the role, but on how it is interpreted and supported. When seen only at a superficial level—titles and responsibilities—it may appear functional. But a deeper look reveals the tension between structure and action, between institutional power and individual capacity. This insight is not just relevant to student unions, but to all democratic systems that rely on individuals to act on behalf of others.

It is also important to remember that a representative is not merely a role-holder but a human being. Tolja, like many in similar positions, navigates emotional, social, and academic

pressures while trying to remain a trustworthy spokesperson. His motivations, personal values, and leadership style inevitably shape how he embodies the role. The representative, therefore, is not a neutral transmitter of group interests, but rather an active interpreter, often balancing competing demands. Understanding the representative as a person, as someone who must continuously earn trust, reflect critically, and act ethically, adds a deeper layer to the analysis of democratic systems. It reminds us that effective representation in a community depends as much on institutional design as on the character and commitment of the individuals within it.

Ultimately, student representation should not be judged solely by how closely it aligns with normative expectations, but by how well it facilitates real communication, trust-building, and advocacy between students and the institutions that govern them.

The Representative Role of “THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS’ STUDENTS’ COMMAND”

Eyami Lulama Nyawose — Durban University of Technology

Representing and promoting the interests of students on campus is a major function of the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT). The EFFSC was founded as a component of the larger EFF movement with the goal of addressing several issues that impact students, especially those pertaining to social justice, economic empowerment, and educational access. Promoting the rights and wellbeing of students is one of EFFSC’s main responsibilities. This entails advocating for free education, better housing circumstances, and easier access to educational materials. The EFFSC has been outspoken in calling for laws to assist underprivileged students who might encounter financial obstacles to their education.

TARGET REPRESENTATIVE WITHIN THE DUT EFFSC

My target representative is Sihle Nkosi, who had been elected to be the Financial Officer of the Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) Student Command's finance officer is essential to making sure Durban University of Technology students have the financial resources they need to support their programs and requirements. This role is essential since it includes not just overseeing the student command's financial resources but also promoting the welfare and economic

rights of students. The finance officer oversees managing expenditure plans, allocating money to different student initiatives, and making sure that financial transactions are transparent. As part of this duty, financial reports that show the revenue and expenses associated with student initiatives, events, and campaigns that improve students' educational experiences must be completed.

Sihle serves as an intermediary between students and the university dealing with financing options, grants, and scholarships. By doing this, he enables students to get the learning resources they require to reduce the financial strain of paying for textbooks, tuition, and other educational costs. Along with these duties, he is also responsible for making sure that DUT's exterior policies and the EFF Student Command's internal regulations are followed. Infractions of these rules might result in sanctions including suspension or exclusion from future organization offices. These steps are intended to maintain integrity and accountability within the student leadership system.

EXPERIENCE INTERACTING WITH SIHLE NKOSI, FINANCE OFFICER

With what I have gathered by interviewing him, Sihle is, in fact, limited by the prescriptions for his position. The general membership are the stakeholders that frequently provide feedback on significant financial issues via voting. This constraint has the potential to reduce the power of any one person by restricting his choices based on the requirements of his position. EFFSC's regulations place limitations on the usage of money and require approval before making large purchases. This implies that although Sihle Nkosi can make daily financial decisions, more significant strategic financial decisions could call for consensus from other officers and strict adherence to

established procedures. Moreover, the amount of financial and human resources that are available also affects the options. Sihle's capacity to carry out *his* financial vision for the organization may be hampered if there is a lack of cash or if fundraising activities are restricted by university regulations or other circumstances.

Nkosi emphasized that representing students' interests in financial conversations and decision-making processes is one of his most important responsibilities. According to him, being a finance officer entails more than just managing finances; it also entails standing up for the interests and concerns of students. He takes the larger student body into account when suggesting financing for activities. His objective is to guarantee that funds are allocated to projects that benefit all members, not just a chosen few. Mr. Nkosi also emphasized the value of cooperation with other EFFSC executive officials. He sees his position as intertwined with those in charge of outreach, advocacy, and programming. Working directly with these people enables him to have a deeper understanding of their goals and needs, which improves his ability to debate and deliberate about the funds that are required.

Sihle demonstrated dedication to the objectives of EFFSC throughout our conversation, especially regarding resource allocation for student activities and financial empowerment. His mention of initiatives meant to improve support services and student participation shows that he is in line with *the organization's* overarching goals. Sihle Nkosi's justification as SRC Finance Officer stems from a sense of obligation to protect the interests of students by maintaining financial openness, pushing for more funding, encouraging academic success, arming students with information, and creating a welcoming and safe campus community. He views his position as a means of

influencing students' lives in a real way and establishing a benchmark for next student leaders.

Sihle did admit that he had certain difficulties carrying out his duties. Effective financial management is occasionally hampered by bureaucratic barriers and financing limits inside the university system. But instead of seeing these difficulties as failures, he saw them as chances for development and creativity, a proactive attitude that is consistent with good leadership.

SPECULATION ON REPRESENTATION BEING AN INTRINSIC PROBLEM

According to Sihle Nkosi, representation is essential because it guarantees that a range of student voices, particularly those from underrepresented groups are heard and that their needs are met. This is especially crucial at DUT, where many students have urgent concerns about things like finance, housing, and resource access. As a representative organization, the EFFSC actively participates in these issues, promoting structural improvements and defending the rights of students.

Nonetheless, Nkosi conjectured that an excessive focus on representation, particularly when it becomes emotionally charged and highly political, may occasionally impair the student government system's ability to work effectively. For instance, significant political rivalry and conflict within student groups can result in strikes and protests, which disrupt classes and make administrative procedures more difficult. The efficiency and efficacy of governance systems may be hampered by this politicization, which may cause the emphasis to shift from cooperative problem-solving to power clashes.

Representatives can swiftly adjust to the changing demands and concerns of the student body when they exhibit fluid behavior

-- that is retaining a measure of flexibility characteristic of a trustee. Student priorities might change quickly in a dynamic university setting because of social challenges, legislative changes, or academic constraints. Representatives may react to these changes more successfully if they are flexible in their approach. Negotiations with other student organizations and university administration are typical in student politics. Representatives with adaptable behavior can be more successful negotiators, changing their strategy to improve results for students. Furthermore, university settings are frequently inconsistent. Representatives who can function without strict rules and are at ease with ambiguity are probably more resilient and able to lead in uncertain or crisis situations.

CONCLUSION

On the surface, one may think that representation just entails choosing representatives to work on behalf of a group, like the students in the Student Representative Council (SRC) at Durban University of Technology (DUT), where Sihle Nkosi is the Finance Officer. This basic principle is true: representative democracy enables voters to assign decision-making authority to elected officials, relieving the broader student body of the burden of day-to-day governing while preserving a means of having their opinions heard. Despite being a fundamental component of democratic regimes, representation depends on more than just the election of representatives. Sihle Nkosi's focus on openness, cooperation, and student involvement at DUT serves as evidence that genuine representation necessitates constant communication, responsibility, and a dedication to diversity.

“Representation” and it’s Many Faces

Abbey Puckett — DePaul University

This essay is a case study of “representation” through the analysis of a community organizer’s role in a democratic system. The community organizer I chose to interview is Cameron Samuels. Through the analysis of my experience talking with Cameron, I reflect on the conversation and what “representation” can mean in multiple settings. I conclude that “representation” plays a critical role in a democratic system but can take many different forms in a society.

The Representative, Cameron Samuels

When looking for a target “representative” for this project, our opportunities were endless. Representation can be found everywhere in our everyday lives- in corporations, student organizations, grassroots campaigns, local, state, and federal government, non-profits, and even in family structures. For my target, I wanted to focus on the new generation of activists, advocates, and representatives. Generation Z is uniquely positioned to interact with a new form of representation that requires representatives to be more accessible, present online, and to interact with their constituency on a more intimate level. For those reasons, I chose Cameron Samuels as my target “representative”. Cameron is currently serving as Executive Director of the advocacy group Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT).

To be transparent, I knew Cameron before completing this assignment. Going to high school together in Katy, Texas, we had the unique experience of trying to create community in a space that was not always built for us as queer students in a Texas public

school. The idea to create SEAT began when Katy Independent School District and other districts across the state began to ban books from schools' public libraries. Cameron and the fellow co-founders of SEAT recognized the fact that they were seeing themselves represented more in the banned books than in the books allowed in the libraries. Cameron and the fellow founders, saw this as a loss of agency for students across the country, and the nation, and as a small part of a larger problem in schoolboards in Texas. Cameron recognized the skewing of representation on schoolboards towards those with wealth, influence, and the time to do something with both. SEAT as an organization was created to try and counteract that over-representation of majority groups in Texas public education. SEAT is meant to give students of all ages the ability and agency to voice their opinions on what they think they should be learning and matters to which they should have access.

When describing the role of representation in SEAT and in the position of "Executive Director," Cameron emphasizes the idea of group ownership and representation. Cameron describes the organization as being a "two-sided movement", framing the movement as a grassroots campaign for students led by students. Cameron, serving as Executive Director, sees the role as a sort of support for SEAT working to get students into political arenas that are usually closed to them. As a university student, Cameron has more accessibility to school board meetings, State Legislative Assembly's or town halls than the typical elementary, middle, or high school student. Cameron oversees action days and trips to the Texas capitol, as well as testifying before the United States Congress but always framing it as an extension of the students who cannot attend those days or meetings.

The goals of SEAT as a movement, according to their website, is to create opportunities for young people to take an

active role in their own education, policymaking, and to cultivate skills that will enable student activism, political participation, and civic transformation (SEAT). Their slogan “nothing about us, without us” advocates for a seat at the table for students in educational policymaking. Backed up by their “Student Bill of Rights” which outlines their movement goals as 8 separate mandates outlined below.



This “Student Bill of Rights” was written with the intent to outline what is necessary for students to be able to participate fully in the political arena of education policymaking, as well as to have an equitable education experience universally across Texas.

While Cameron’s role is vaguely defined on the SEAT website, there is a list of accomplishments in organizing and movement mobilization specified for Cameron’s position. This points to a critical leadership role for this movement that relies upon Cameron’s public persona and advocacy that has reached a national level. This allows Cameron the ability to decide what is

and is not their responsibility but also creates the opening for a lack of accountability within the movement. The lack of description of responsibilities does not mean there is a lack of direction for Cameron's role in representing the SEAT movement.

The incentive to follow through comes from the public representation of the organization that is tied to Cameron's name on a national level. Within Texas, Cameron is claiming to represent and train student leaders to be able to advocate for themselves and their peers. On the national level, however, Cameron is acting in a more trustee representative role, advocating for the rights of students in Texas on issues such as book bans and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Experience

When speaking to Cameron I probed the "Executive Director" role and how it intersected with the idea of representation. Cameron framed the role as an administrative one and pushed the idea that each member of SEAT is learning to advocate for themselves. This creates a paradox where Cameron is representing SEAT while also not taking full ownership of that constituency. On the national level, Cameron is the trustee that is tasked with representing students in Texas. Cameron is the conduit through which their opinions are shared, and their well-being is advocated. In some settings, there are more students able to participate in action days and lobbying so the connection between representative and constituent becomes closer.

The grassroots nature of the "movement" allows members of SEAT to claim they are representing themselves. This may seem to some to contradict that SEAT is fighting for their agency in policy-making decisions. This relationship enables Cameron to represent students in political arenas such as Senate hearings and

in the Texas Legislature, while also allowing them the space to claim their own role in the movement. This design allows Cameron to act as a representative of Texas students. The students are learning how to advocate for their own peers.

The model of SEAT as a movement is centered around fighting for students to have the knowledge, skills, and confidence in educational policymaking and to be able to grow into engaged citizens as they grow out of the Texas education system. SEAT aims to empower all Texas students who choose to be politically active to understand the policies being made about them. Cameron reasoned that through SEAT's peer mentor program, action days, and workshops, more seasoned activists and advocates can foster these skills in select young people, who want to be full participants in the democratic process enabling them to do more work and pass along more knowledge. This is in line with Cameron's claim that SEAT fosters group ownership through an idea of collective representation. As more and more students join SEAT's movement and foster skills that enable them to be advocates for their communities, they expand the network that counts as "representation". The connection can be expanded from Cameron and the SEAT headquarters to the other student activists located throughout Texas. This network will continue to grow and change as students grow and change, but it will hopefully continue to expand so that all students feel they have a voice.

While talking, Cameron was hesitant to claim the title of "representative" and claimed that the idea of "representing" students in Texas is complicated by the nature of SEAT as a movement, and the goals of SEAT to empower students to claim a seat at the "table". Cameron was consistent in the fact that the purpose of SEAT and the "Executive Director's" role in it is not to be the sole representative of students in Texas, but to try to

train all young Texans to represent themselves and advocate for themselves, while also breaking access barriers to the spaces where their voices are critical.

Reflection on the Experience

Throughout our lives we, as United States citizens, have been told that our elected officials are meant to represent the will of the “people.” They are meant to be a voice for their constituents, advocating for them and fighting for what is best for them. But as we know all too well, this is not exactly the case. The pillar of “representation” in a democracy is complicated by the fact that not every person in a constituency is being represented, and there are large swaths of the population that feel they have no voice. Further, what does “representation” come to mean when elected officials are influenced by donors and coercive forces. What does “representation” come to be when there is nothing holding the representative accountable within a system that enables inequality and discrimination on a large scale.

When talking to young people in the United States who are engaged with politics, we see them looking for different forms of “representation.” There is a sense that the “system” that we are living in is broken. “Representation” in this country is becoming perceived with corrupt, for sale, and out of touch with real people. For people like Cameron Samuels, who is a queer young person in Texas, it is easy to understand why some might feel that way. Their “representatives” who are supposed to work in their best interest are actively fighting against their existence, banning books that even mention people like them, and taking away resources that could help them live their life, including healthcare and food aid. In this experience, the role of “representation” is clouded by political interests. On one hand, you have elected

officials in their “representative” role working in a government mandated position, sometimes working against the wishes of their constituency, acting as a super-trustee of sorts and doing whatever they see necessary. This in turn creates the alternative grassroots “representative” who is more central to the people in their community and who has no formal role. The relationship between a grassroots or community organizer and their neighborhood or larger community is essential to the system of “democracy” and to. “representation” in today's society. Career “representatives” cannot always be counted on to work in the best interests of the people they represent, so it becomes necessary for these grassroots or community organizers to step in and help cultivate civic participation to incentivize the elected officials to behave in a way conducive to a representative’s role in a democratic society. When you have community leaders such as parents, religious leaders, or other forms of community leadership acting as dissident figures against government officials responsible for representation, it can put pressure on the elected officials to examine how they are executing their obligation to perform their duties reflecting all of their constituents interests. In essence, to be a more genuine delegate.

Now, when we rely upon “representation” as an intrinsic part of the political system, it may become problematic in the sense that our definition of what a representative is is unclear. Some elected officials may see their role as a delegate to voice the opinions of their constituency, whereas others might understand representation to mean the actor is a trustee to their constituency and has license to use their own judgement on policy-making decisions regardless of the opinions and views of their constituency. I don’t believe this wide interpretation of “representation” is inherently a problem for the performance of the system. Rather this lack of clarity engenders a lack of

accountability for the representative. It allows the representative an excuse to say they are doing what they think is best, even if they are disregarding the views of their constituents, and they can do this because they were previously voted for and given authority (a "mandate") by those same constituents. But I also think this fluidity can become an advantage because sometimes a constituency is not knowledgeable on all policy-making issues, or the majority view is harmful to minority groups in the constituency. If legislators were to listen to the students in Texas and those working with SEAT, they would hear what Texas students are wanting to see in educational policy—making. They can then use this information to legislate in ways that will make a segment of their constituency pleased. There is potential for this fluidity in the representative's role to be used to champion marginalized citizens and to make informed policy decisions, regardless of their majority constituent groups' opinions.

Conclusion

When asking if “representation” has a critical place in a democratic system, the answer depends on who you are asking. It seems if we examine this question from the majority point of view, the answer would be yes in the traditional sense of what “representation” is supposed to be. Someone who is a part of the majority population in a constituency feels a deeper sense of connectedness and agency in their relationship with “representation.” They have an expectation that they will be represented in their democracy in a direct way that is inherent in the system and owed to them. However, when you shift this point of view, and look at it from the minority constituents' view, we lose this sense of agency, and the role of the representative becomes contradictory, and something placed in opposition to them. This does not mean representation does not have a critical

role in a democratic system. If anything, it is even more critical to those who feel under-represented because they know what it means and feels like to be neglected in a system that is claiming to be built for them. They may turn to different forms of representation in community organizing and activism, removed from the institutionalized “representative”, but no less important or critical to the system.

By recognizing other forms of representation, and their critical place in a democratic system, we must also grapple with the role of power, influence, and connections that reinforces their importance. When a democratic system is skewed and compromised by the role that money, power, and influence play in politics and policy making, the role of direct representation from community organizers becomes an even more important. Advocates attempt to force elected officials to remember their responsibilities to their constituents and their opinions, especially those not represented in the rich and influential. The responsibilities of representation can become clouded by power and influence, but their role is still critical to the democratic system and cannot be extracted as a separate issue. Community organizers provide a, alternative form of representation that ensures an alternative link between the government and its citizens.

Without representation citizens lose a crucial avenue of communication of their opinions and views in a democracy. Representation of all groups is critical to ensure a legitimate democracy continues to be committed to the wants and needs of its citizens. Whether that representation takes the form of elected officials, community organizers, student advocates, a democratic system must foster these avenues of free speech and civic participation regardless of the opinions and views being championed. An open conversation between a democratic

institution, a representative, and a constituency is at the crux of maintaining legitimacy as a democracy and is crucial to the progress of a society.

Youth Voice in Kutaisi – The Representative Role of Vakho Abashishvili

Lile Svanadze — Caucuses International University

This essay explores the role of Vakho Abashishvili as a representative within the Kutaisi Youth Advisory Council in the context of contemporary local democratic processes. It examines his function as a representative, the mechanisms of the Council, the effectiveness of representation, and specific cases in which the voices of young people have translated into tangible outcomes. The essay also offers an analysis of the adequacy of the form of representation in the Council and assesses its critical role in democratic governance.

Identification of the Representative

Vakho Abashishvili is a member and representative of the Kutaisi Youth Advisory Council. The Council was established in 2023 at the initiative of the Mayor of Kutaisi and functions as a consultative body aimed at integrating the needs and perspectives of young people into local self-government. Vakho's role includes representing the interests of the youth of Kutaisi at the local level, actively participating in decision-making processes, and promoting youth engagement in the city's development.

Although Council membership is not financially compensated, it holds significant symbolic and practical value. Based on legislation and internal regulations, Vakho has the right to propose initiatives, participate in deliberations, and issue recommendations. His collaboration with the city hall and municipal council makes his role functionally important.

Description of Experience

Vakho's role in the Council involves both formal and informal means of identifying the needs of young people. He relies on surveys, open meetings, direct contact with youth across different neighborhoods, and his own experiences. The problems and perspectives voiced by the youth are later discussed during Council sessions, where they are processed and shaped into formal recommendations.

One notable case illustrating the impact of Vakho and the Council's activities is the implementation of free public transportation for school students. The initiative was proposed by a student, and the Council succeeded in placing the issue on the agenda and negotiating with the authorities. As a result, a concrete change was achieved, lifting a financial barrier for thousands of young people.

Council decisions are made through committees. Each idea undergoes discussion and is then put to a vote. Every member, including Vakho, has equal rights to propose amendments, support, or oppose initiatives. These procedures are designed to be as transparent and democratic as possible.

Reflection on the Challenge of Representation

The representation model upon which the Kutaisi Youth Advisory Council is based is largely effective, though not without challenges. One major issue is the lack of real enforcement mechanisms—being an advisory body, the Council's decisions are subject to the goodwill of local authorities.

Moreover, during the decision-making process, differing perspectives often emerge within the Council. While this can complicate discussions, such diversity is a core element of democratic dynamics, providing youth with genuine

opportunities for participation and engagement. Vakho notes that despite occasional skepticism, the Council's recommendations are frequently taken into account.

A persistent issue in representation is how effectively one member can reflect the diverse interests of the groups they represent. However, Vakho's approach—maintaining close contact with other youth, working across diverse committees, and engaging beyond the Council—enhances the legitimacy of his role as a representative.

Considering all this, Vakho Abashishvili's representative model is most consistent with a mixture of *delegate* and *trustee* models, although I would attribute it more to the trustee model.

Why trustee?: Vakho uses his own judgment to determine what is best for young people — that is, he is not just a voice transmitter, but also analyzes, summarizes needs and formulates recommendations. He has the right to independent initiative and actively participates in discussions, which is a typical characteristic of a trustee.

Elements of a delegate: he constantly contacts young people, conducts questionnaires, open meetings — that is, he tries to reflect their opinion directly. Accordingly, at some level, he “mirrors” their positions, which is characteristic of a delegate.

Conclusion

The experience of the Kutaisi Youth Advisory Council, as illustrated through the work of Vakho Abashishvili, demonstrates the critical importance of representation at the local level. Although the Council formally only provides recommendations, its influence on decision-making is tangible, and its members—including Vakho—create a space where young voices are heard.

This experience highlights that a democratic system functions properly only when all groups are granted the opportunity to express their views. Vakho's work stands as an exemplary case of both civic activism and effective representation.

Representation - Opportunity with Responsibility

Tamar Okujava. Caucuses International University

Democracy is a form of governance that continuously develops and evolves. The fundamental characteristic of democracy is citizen participation in governance, which is precisely why it is called government by the people. Contemporary democratic systems can exist in various forms, but their common foundation is the voluntary and informed participation of citizens in the political process and adherence to political principles. In democratic states, citizens elect representatives who are charged with making decisions on behalf of the larger community. The purpose of this essay is to examine the obligations of a "target" representative, specifically how they represent people.

For this analysis my target is Georgia's Youth Representative to the United Nations for 2022-2023. Georgia's Youth Representatives to the UN are responsible for organizing meetings with Georgian youth and planning and implementing activities. The special responsibility of the representatives manifests in the following tasks:

- 1. They speak at the UN General Assembly and present the interests of youth and the country;*
- 2. They participate in informal agreement processes at the UN and take part in drafting resolutions;*
- 3. They travel to Georgia's regions and gather information from pupils and students about their needs;*

4. *They prepare written reports on the information received, conduct training sessions and lectures on sustainable development issues, among other activities.*

The representative's role for Georgian youth is essential for increasing the centrality of young people in the country's development, developing their motivation and engagement, and restoring trust. In addition to these formal duties, my target draws attention to several interesting details about his service and his representative role.

My target distinguished himself from his predecessors by bringing "occupied territories" issues to the forefront and communicating with Abkhazian and Ossetian youth. In this regard, he explains that he is from occupied Abkhazia (Russia occupied since 2008). For this reason, he particularly understands the significance of the problem and the necessity of discussing the needs of young people living there. Besides the activities he mentioned, the target's annual report indicates that he was fully committed to serve his community.

While representation theoretically ensures the effectiveness and scalability of citizens' participation in political processes, it can sometimes have a negative impact on processes and create deadlock situations. This may be caused by the local interests of specific groups or radical positions.

A main challenge may stem from different perceptions of those in different generations. This ultimately can develop into disagreement and dysfunction. Youth representatives regularly face this pressure. Naturally, the representative must be a person who acts according to the interests of young people. But he must also be able to find a balance - a harmonious middle ground between past and present - through which he can claim the status of one of the builders of the country's successful future. The main

skill of the target representative is reflected precisely in establishing and maintaining balance.

At the beginning, we noted that representation is fundamentally important for democracy, but more reflection on this topic is needed with detailed analysis of positive and negative aspects. Perhaps representation must be used according to the interests of society and the country, rather than according to the will of specific individuals or groups. Who is represented matters.

Therefore, although my target tried to reflect the will of young people in their speeches and actions, a diplomatic and political balance is essential. Without it, discussion of conflict regions' and their problems causes regression and confusion.

In conclusion, true representation involves more than simply voicing public opinion. Effective representatives must engage in careful analysis and deliberate decision-making. Only through such thoughtful governance can representation truly serve the development of the country's democratic future.

Reflecting on Representation

Nina Grujičić — University of Dubrovnik

This essay explores the meaning of democratic representation through the perspective of Nenad Antolović, the director of the Rijeka Development Agency Porin, which serves as a partner in the Europe Direct Rijeka Center. It examines how representation functions outside of elections by focusing on communication, community projects, and education. This example raises questions about whether traditional views of representation are sufficient to tackle modern issues such as low trust and public disengagement. The essay argues that representation should be viewed as an active process, rather than only being tied to elections or official roles.

In the European Union, connecting with citizens is an essential priority. One way this happens is through the Europe Direct network, which consists of local centers in many EU countries. My target representative is Nenad Antolović, the director of the Rijeka Development Agency Porin. The Center aims to help Croatian citizens, particularly in Rijeka, better understand EU policies, decisions, and opportunities. According to Antolović, this kind of representation differs from the typical view of elected officials. Rather than holding political power or making laws, the Europe Direct Center shares information about the EU with the public and listens to their concerns. It is designed to serve as a bridge between EU institutions and citizens. While there are no official penalties for failing to do its job, the center is still expected to show results through citizen involvement, feedback, and evaluations from the European Commission. This approach to representation shines light on communication and trust rather than authority. It aims to help people feel more connected to the decisions that affect them. During the interview,

Antolović suggested that the “representative” in this context is not someone who speaks for the public, but works to create conversation with them.

The example of the Europe Direct Center in Rijeka shows that representation is not limited to elections. The role seeks to tie itself to daily life. Through school programs, community events, and volunteer projects, the Center attempts to bring people closer to the ideas and values of the EU. During the interview, significant emphasis was placed on the challenges associated with public disinterest and distrust. Antolović argues that many individuals feel as if they have no voice in political decisions. They believe decisions are being made without their input. This perception leads to low voter turnout and weak civic participation. However, he believes the solution is not to give up, but instead to work harder to involve people in the process. One suggested solution is to make the roles of small but important civic positions, like local council members or volunteers, more visible. Although these positions do not receive much attention, they can have a significant role in everyday life. When these efforts gain recognition and support, people may feel more connected and motivated to take part. Education is crucial in this approach. Projects with schools and youth initiatives help young people understand their rights and the importance of being active in their communities. Activities like cleaning beaches or participating in public events may seem small at first, but they create habits of participation and show individuals that their actions matter. The interview also highlighted that the representative role can be flexible. There are many ways to adjust the work based on local needs and public input. Methods for information sharing and group engagement can be applied more creatively. This flexibility allows for a better response from different communities and under different circumstances.

Antolović believes that he doesn't feel limited in his role, since there are many possible ways to present EU policies, regulations, and guidelines. However, the success of this type of representation relies heavily on individual motivation. Building relationships with citizens, listening to their concerns, and including them in discussions requires commitment and care. According to what I found from our interview, I believe Nenad Antolović is an example of a effective representative.

When it comes to representation generally, it's a very big responsibility. When provided with power, individuals should do their best to represent the people who chose them or who make up their constituency. Even if they weren't chosen directly by them, representatives should focus on the quality of their work and their ability to represent. Having a flexible role offers several advantages. When representatives can shape their own approach to action, they can connect with individuals in more meaningful ways. They can visit schools, host local events, and help people understand how policies impact them. This builds trust and fosters a stronger bond between people and institutions. But, with positives come the challenges. Many individuals that contribute, especially volunteers, often remain unnoticed. Without public recognition or institutional support, their contributions may not reach their full potential. Another concern is that this flexibility relies too much on personal effort. Not every representative may be equally dedicated or skilled. If the system depends solely on individual motivation, quality and consistency will vary. Some communities will be better represented and may gain more than others. To address this, Antolović suggests that institutions should offer greater support and set clearer standards for these roles. Another challenge is the public understanding of representation. When people hear the word "representative," they often picture presidents, ministers, or other politicians. However,

civic organizers, and local leaders also play key roles by helping individuals understand and engage with decisions that impact their lives. Broadening the definition of who can "represent" others can make democracy feel more inclusive and accessible. Despite the challenges, the interview suggests that expanding the concept of representation has important benefits. When citizens are presented with more opportunities for participation beyond voting, they may be more motivated to engage. This can help restore trust in institutions and strengthen democratic life.

Conclusion

The example of Europe Direct Rijeka shows that representation in a democracy exists beyond those designated by elections. It should be understood as also encompassing the daily efforts of informing people, fostering participation, and building community. This requires good communication, active presence, and respect for citizens' voices. A representative's job involves not only speaking, but also creating an environment where others can be heard and involved. From this perspective, even those without formal power or an authoritative position can contribute to making democracy function. By recognizing everyday forms of representation, supporting local initiatives and valuing volunteer work, democracy can be strengthened. This broader view of representation is very crucial today when many feel disconnected from politics. Institutions should remain open to more flexible and creative ways for individuals choose to represent themselves and their peers. Ultimately, the quality of representation relies not only on laws or elections, but on everyday actions that draw people to public engagement. When done well, representation helps individuals feel seen and heard. It can then become a part of something bigger.

Representing the Community Beyond Politics

Marina Zec — University of Dubrovnik

In democratic systems, we often think of representation as tied to elected officials and formal political roles. Yet, many impactful decisions come from professionals and appointed leaders who hold significant positions in their communities.

This essay reflects insights I gained from interviewing Darian Husko, the director of LIRA Lipik, a local Croatian development agency. I wanted to understand how someone in a non-elected position sees their role as a community representative. My focus was on how he communicates with citizens, sets priorities, makes decisions, and views his responsibilities. To get a well-rounded perspective, I also chatted with a former and a current employee of LIRA, who offered different views on Mr. Husko's approach.

Darian leads LIRA Lipik, an agency established by the City of Lipik. He was appointed by the mayor, who in this case also serves as the sole member of the agency's Assembly, the body responsible for appointing the director. This means Mr. Husko didn't go through traditional elections. His position stems directly from city leadership. Although he officially represents the city's interests, he really serves as a link between citizens, entrepreneurs, institutions, and funding organizations at national and European levels. His authority comes from the public trust he's built and the results he's achieved, not from an electoral mandate.

My interview with Mr. Husko was engaging and full of insight. He was friendly, honest, and open about his experiences.

It was evident that he genuinely cares about his role, and his thoughtful responses showed a balanced approach.

I asked several questions regarding representation during our chat:

- How did he become the director of LIRA, and who appointed him?
- Who does he formally and practically represent?
- How does he identify the needs of the community?
- How involved are citizens in decision-making?
- How does he manage divided opinions within the community?
- What does accountability to the community mean to him?
- Would he consider himself a delegate, a trustee, or something different?

He made it clear that he doesn't just echo public opinion. He actively listens, interprets, and works to turn those needs into concrete projects. Often, citizens express their needs in broad terms without clear plans, and his team plays a critical role in transforming those ideas into development initiatives.

Collaboration was another key point he emphasized. While citizens don't directly make decisions, some of them participate in consultations and informal discussions that shape project priorities. He mentioned a significant challenge: managing high community expectations alongside limited resources.

Mr. Husko also pointed out that being in his role requires constant adaptation to changing community needs and shifting funding opportunities. He has to stay attuned to new public concerns, demographic changes, and broader socio-economic

trends. This ongoing adaptability is crucial for effective representation, even outside traditional politics.

After the interview, I spoke with one former and one current employee of LIRA to confirm and enhance my impressions. Their feedback affirmed that Mr. Husko leads with professionalism and accountability, focusing on collaboration, flexibility, and long-term planning.

From our discussions, it seemed to me that Mr. Husko approaches representation as a pragmatic trustee. He combines active listening with his judgment and experience to make effective, realistic decisions.

Despite lacking political backing through elections, he earns trust through his achievements, transparency, and community engagement. This type of representation may not fit the classic political model, but it demonstrates that democracy can flourish when dedicated professionals like Mr. Husko take their roles seriously.

This experience has changed how I view representation. It's not just about voicing public opinions. It involves mediating between needs and possibilities, balancing vision with reality. Mr. Husko is more than just a project manager; he actively contributes to the community's development.

Through this project, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the complexities of public representation, especially beyond traditional political arenas. I've learned that effective representation hinges on active listening, responsiveness, and the ability to turn community needs into tangible outcomes. This journey has highlighted that leadership can take many forms, and individuals like Mr. Husko play a vital role in enhancing local life, often working quietly in the background. I've also come to

understand the importance of looking beyond job titles to recognize someone's real impact within a community.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned is that representation is not just about speaking for others but involves action that bridges community needs and solutions.

The Paradox of NGO Representation in Bosnia & Herzegovina

Marin Luka Brekalo — University of Dubrovnik

Note: The country of focus in this essay is Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is abbreviated „BiH.“

This essay explores the role of civil society in Bosnia & Herzegovina, where weak institutions and post-war ethnic divisions have left democratic representation fragmented. Through the case of Abida Pehlić and the Novi Put association, it examines how grassroots organizations have stepped in to support vulnerable populations, in this case women and children, affected by violence and trafficking. While Pehlić's work shows dedication and local trust, it also raises questions about accountability, legitimacy, and the limits of non-institutional representation. The essay argues for a rethinking of democratic representation in systems where informal actors often fulfill roles abandoned by formal institutions.

It was the mid-1990s. The ashes of war had barely settled when, under international scrutiny, a peace deal was brokered — establishing „fair and equal representation“ as the foundation for a new, yet troubled, country on the map of Europe: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nestled in the Dinaric Alps of the western Balkans, at the crossroads of the old eastern Ottoman, Italian Mediterranean, and western Austro-Hungarian worlds, Bosnia and Herzegovina is home to three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, previously known as Bosnian Muslims; Serbs, who are mostly Orthodox Christian; and Croats, who are mostly Catholic. These with groups competing national and religious identities played a central role in the country's brutal conflict. Under communist rule, this Yugoslav Republic had experienced decades of relative

stability and coexistence, though ethnic tensions always simmered beneath the surface. That uneasy peace came to a head with the outbreak of Croatia's War of Independence. While Slovenia and North Macedonia managed to break away relatively peacefully, internal divisions within Bosnia and Herzegovina made a similar outcome impossible. Serbs wanted to preserve the remnants of Yugoslavia and expand their influence, Croats aimed to unite their territories with their kin across the border (Croatian sin Bosnia). Bosniaks sought to finally establish their own independent republic. The Dayton Agreement, while ending the bloodshed, also entrenched ethnic divisions into the very fabric of the country's political system, while the lack of lustration meant that many of the political figureheads remained the same (Catic, 2008). It split Bosnia and Herzegovina into two parts — The Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina, to be shared between Bosniaks and Croats, and the Serb Republic, for the Serb population. This *new* system, though instrumental in maintaining peace, left behind a fragmented and often dysfunctional state, where political deadlock and weak institutions have become the norm (Bieber, 2006). In the absence of effective governance and reliable public services, new actors have emerged — civil society organizations, often working with limited resources, but wide community outreach. Over the past three decades, non-governmental organizations have stepped in to fill critical gaps, addressing social issues the state has failed to pmanage. These groups — many of them small and targeting local communities — have become key players in advocating for marginalized voices and promoting democratic values in a system that more often than not falls significantly short of its basic principles. In order to determine just how successful they have been in transferring the idea of representation to this developing nation, I sat down with Mrs. Abida Pehlić, president of the **Novi Put Association** (*New Journey*), a grassroots civil society

organization focused on the issues of gender-based violence, human trafficking, child pornography, and paedophilia. It functions primarily in Herzegovina, an area where much of the population in BiH is Croatia in the southwest and south of the country. The recipients of their services are predominantly women and children who have been victims of domestic violence or human trafficking.

Sitting across from Mrs. Pehlić, one is immediately struck by her composed and warm demeanor. “In our association, everyone is equal,” she said. “I, as president, do not have any more authority or privileges compared to my other colleagues. You see, after ten years of being the president, my colleague expressed the wish to step down and I was unanimously voted in as a replacement.” When asked about the internal structure, Pehlić hinted that the position of president is largely a formality, implemented in order to comply with Bosnian-Herzegovinian law¹ — a requirement that may not fully capture how representation is practiced within grassroots settings. For Pehlić, “representation” is not about holding authority, but about engaging in real-life fieldwork alongside the members of the association who form an assembly of staff and volunteers which convenes at least once a year. When prompted about whether her personal perception of her duties aligned with the way she fulfills them, Pehlić explained that the role of the association is limited to issues that largely remain constant. In her view, this lessens the necessity for regular re-evaluation of her mandate by those served by the Association. Services. those services include help lines, safe houses, and both psychological and legal counseling. Pehlić reiterated several times that many past survivors of abuse

¹ The full English translation of the Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina Law on Associations and Foundations can be found here: https://www.icnl.org/research/library/bosnia-and-herzegovina_bih/

have gone on to become volunteers, with two even becoming employees. She envisions these former victims now employees as central to providing feedback on new activities. Additionally, major decisions are debated in open forums within the assembly, where survivors themselves, when willing and able, are invited to participate. Novi Put also engages in research with both survivors and the general public on the societal perceptions and on prevalence of trafficking and violence. The aim is to inform policy within the association, as well as informing government institutions. This participatory atmosphere speaks volumes about how consistent Pehlić is to her own concept of representation. She seems to see herself not as a spokesperson, but as a steward — someone temporarily entrusted with a role that ultimately serves others. Pehlić also emphasized that while her organization enjoys productive cooperation with state institutions, the majority of its funding has historically come from external sources such as USAID, whose pending closure has placed significant strain on the organization — a situation mirrored across the civil society landscape in the Western Balkans. Despite challenges like financial insecurity, political instability, and the bureaucratic labyrinth of BiH, Pehlić's dedication to representing marginalized voices remains steadfast. Her experience reveals a broader reality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the absence of truly accountable political leadership and with underperforming or idle social institutions, much of the country's functional democratic representation has been left in the hands of foreign-funded civil society. (Mulalić, 2011).

Mrs. Pehlić's answers inevitably lead to deeper questions of what it even means to "represent" something in Bosnia and Herzegovina's societies. While her efforts are undeniably noble and the association's impact substantial, one cannot ignore the implications of relying on individuals, no matter how committed,

to stand in for broader systems of public service and accountability. Is this model subtly empowering civil society and foreign players, or quietly allowing the state to abdicate control and responsibility? Representation in BiH remains structurally fragmented, partially attributable to the lack of ethnic, religious and territorial logic in the Dayton Agreement. So called "peace agreements" oftencurtail the violence, in the case of BiH it also introduced rigid power-sharing mechanisms that obstruct progress, change and quality representation that could work in the interest of the people. This type of political environment raises critical questions about Pehlić's own position. Her authority, though deeply respected, is not the result of democratic election, nor is it routinely evaluated by those she claims to serve. Although survivor participation is encouraged and former beneficiaries are included in organizational roles, the formal structures of accountability are minimal. There is a risk that "representation" in this context might become more symbolic than participatory — an exercise in mere media visibility rather than real lasting change. Moreover, while Novi Put's ability to be function in multiple areas from advocacy to services and research is undoubtedly a strength, this broad spectrum complicates the role of Pehlić as a representative. Who does Pehlić ultimately speak for — the victims, the members, the volunteers, the foreign donors, or herself? *Can anyone truly represent the layered and often contradictory needs of such a vulnerable demographic in such a divided country?* And yet, it is precisely this ambiguity that brings both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the informal authority wielded by people like Pehlić allows for efficacy, creativity, and trust, especially on a local level — attributes that the politicals of BiH sorely lack. On the other hand, without clearer systems of evaluation and feedback, the validity of these services come into question.

Ultimately, the case of Abida Pehlić and the Novi Put Association reveals a fundamental paradox: in Bosnia and Herzegovina, representation is often most effective when it operates outside of formal political structures. While the notion of representation remains central to democratic systems, its practice in multicultural societies like BiH demands a more nuanced understanding — one that embraces informal, community-led actors as essential contributors to democratic life, but that also questions the limits of their mandate.

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Representation Beyond Ideology: Political Flexibility in Service of the Public Good

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The subject of this essay is an example of the political representation of a very specific social group - pensioners - at the local level (Dubrovnik City Council). Apart from the fact that it is a minor political party based on a very specific set of policy issues.

I decided to talk to Mrs. Olga Muratti, member of the Dubrovnik City Council and representative of the local Croatian Pensioners' Party. She used to be a member of the Social Democratic Party, one of the leading parties in Croatia, but is now the head of the local branch of the Croatian Pensioners' Party. Interestingly, her party is in a coalition with another political party in Croatia. The ruling party at both national and local level heads a coalition of parties and is a rival of her former party. She is also an advisor to the mayor of Dubrovnik on pensioners' issues (Grad Dubrovnik, 2024). Officially, this means that she pursues projects and the implementation of goals in this policy area. Her favorite channels to stay in touch with people are personal contacts. She has a television program in which she discusses important issues for pensioners with her guests. She often invites doctors to explain symptoms and illnesses in an understandable way. She is active in numerous organizations and socializes through social media and social gatherings.

If you look at what the media reports about her, they have given her a negative review. One of their favorite observations is the fact that she has switched parties. Not just parties, but also

worldviews (presumed because of the connection to the coalition). Why did this happen? In my conversation with her, I came to the conclusion that it was necessary. The Croatian Pensioners' Party is a small party. Alone, it will probably never win a larger political role either in Croatia or in the city of Dubrovnik. That is why she felt it compelling to participate with the dominant political coalition. She concluded that If she was "ideologically inflexible," it would mean declining support or even electoral loss. Small parties must ally themselves with either the party/coalition in power or with the opposition. Their hope is that by choosing to work with the leading party/coalition they can achieve so much more on their issues. It is said that politics is the art of the possible, expressed as the ability or art of testing one's possibilities. (Maraš 2020, 854) By being part of the ruling coalition, they expand their leverage and thus manage to do the best for their constituents. There are prospects that would not be likely if they remain independent -- on their own. Compromise is key when we talk about politics as the "art of the possible." Her constituents are not united in their worldviews, but they are united in their policy-specific interests and their socio-economic status. Given their electorate is politically heterogeneous, Mrs. Muratti believes she can rationalize joining a coalition with any other party. Communication with her constituents and compromise with Croatian leadership is a must. She claims that she will never change her personal worldview. She claims that she does not abandon her own political views or those of elements of her constituents. Her pragmatic goal is advancing realizing common goals. That is her sense of "representing" her Party's members.

Communication is the key component in working with people, especially in politics. If one wants to represent the people, one needs to know their needs and wishes The Croatian

Pensioners' Party is small. It does not immediately impact the majority of people in the society. Obviously, over time most citizens will become invested in the issues relating to seniors.

Hobbes said that every government is a representative government because it represents its subject. (Pitkin, 1967, p. 4) Her main task as a representative is to listen to the people and their needs. By listening to them, she can understand them and therefore represent them. If we think about the concept of representation, she falls into the category of *trustee* or *super trustee*. She listens and tries to understand the broader picture and then votes based on her experience and knowledge. She doesn't claim that she needs to consult with constituents. She believes judgment is sometimes enough. She claims that she votes for what the people need. From the criticism in the media, it may be that people don't understand the bigger picture. They make negative comments about Mrs. Muratti supposedly changing the worldview without understanding that a coalition may be a meaningful way to achieve the political goals. Her constituents must be able to trust her judgment and actions that could lead to the achievement of their goals. One of her most important projects she is has championed the construction of a Retirement Home. It is in this project that we can best recognize her commitment. She listened to the voice of her constituents -- people with dementia, those who need day care, those seeking reasonable housing costs, etc. She worked within ruling coalition to maximize the chances of getting the project done. Overall, she listened to the needs and found the best possible way to accomplish the goal. She also "teaches" people. She explains the political process to them. Mrs. Muratti acknowledged that communication with each age group is not at the level it should be. People are not thinking about their future. They don't understand that they need to act now if they want to have better

conditions when they become pensioners. In our conversation, she told me how much she would like to change the name of her party to the "Party of Pensioners and the Working Class." She hopes that she can nurture the synergy between older and younger people

When we talk about coherence, we need to understand the situation clearly. The Croatian Pensioners' Party has developed around specific interests. It does not have a rigid worldview. It is neither strictly left nor right. Its voters are divided, some lean to the right, others to the left. But what unites them is the main goal: help for older people. They seek a coalition with any leading party. They can't do much for pensioners when they are in opposition. They want to raise standards and they can only do that if they are in a leading coalition. For Mrs. Muratti, representation means accepting the fact that you have to change your approach and political tactics to achieve your goals.

In Mrs. Olga Muratti's case, representation is best understood through the lens of politics as a capacity of possibility. Her actions reflect a pragmatic approach. Her party is small, interest-oriented and must adapt through coalitions to achieve its goals. As a *trustee* and sometimes super trustee, she prioritizes strategic compromise over ideological purity. Purity would be impossible to achieve given her heterogeneous constituency. Through personal communication, coalition building, and responsiveness to community needs, she demonstrates that effective political representation involves both listening to the public and navigating power structures to realize their shared goals. Even when her personal views differ from their ideology, she does what is best for her constituents. Mrs. Muratti uses all available opportunities to represent the interests of her constituency.

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A Conversation about Representation

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This paper aims to focus on the concept of representation through my interview with Wendy Osirus, who serves as a representative in a non-profit he founded 20 years ago. My essay suggests through both this interview and some background research, that there is a tension on the relationships common in democracies between a representative and his constituents. This tension is increased with polarization.

Wendy Osirus, founder and leader of the non-profit organization MONDHA, spoke to me about his experience establishing the organization and his fight for rights in Haiti.

I first was acquainted with Osirus during a study abroad trip to the Dominican Republic, where our group witnessed first-hand the struggles of the Haitian population in the DR. During this trip, we visited a predominantly Haitian village in Santiago, where MONDHA is active. MONDHA focuses on a variety of issues Haitians face prioritizing immigration status and rights.

After speaking with Osirus, I found that his need to represent came from his own personal experiences as a Haitian immigrant. Immigrating to the Dominican Republic at the age of six, Osirus' first-hand encounters with discrimination, prejudice, and struggle, led him to the leadership position he is in now. Through his position, Osirus aims to provide a voice to those who feel voiceless. Though there is no obvious direct political or financial gain, Osirus has taken it upon himself to act as a representative for the Haitian people.

My experience interviewing Wendy restored my faith in the prospect of honest and effective representation. Osirus makes it

his priority to give his constituents what they want and need. When it comes to effective representation, having a guideline as to what your position entails is incredibly important. The prescription in concept specifies the limits of a representative's power and identifies duties. However, as our conversation continued, Osiris explained that there is no official document or statement which describes his position. His job and the responsibilities that come with it, change on a daily basis.

Wendy Osiris claims representation starts with intention. His intentions seem clear, unwavering, and rooted in his lived experience. In contrast to some leaders or politicians who may pursue positions of power for personal gain or prestige, Wendy's leadership appears to be fundamentally service-oriented. He represents his community not because it is easy or profitable, but because it is necessary.

Representation, at its core, is about voice and accountability. It means standing up for those who cannot always stand up for themselves and functioning as a conduit through which their needs, hopes, and fears can be heard. Wendy embodies this ideal. He listens to his community, adapts to their evolving challenges, and makes decisions grounded in their collective well-being. Furthermore, MONDHA is structured to reflect this ethos of community representation. The organization includes community members in its decision-making processes, ensures that programming is responsive to actual needs rather than imposed assumptions, and creates spaces where Haitian identity is celebrated rather than suppressed.

Over time, the concept of representation has changed, based on the political context and a transforming world. In Bellamy and Kroger's book Representation and Democracy in the EU, the authors explain how there was a time in which thinkers believed representation was "intrinsically elitist because it displaces the

direct involvement of citizens in collective decision-making (Rousseau 1968, 141). From this perspective, representation creates a democratic deficit by its very nature. The eventual conceptual linkage of representation with democracy was a product of "the gradual emergence of territorially confined nation states and competitive party systems," (Bellany and Kroger 15).

The quote highlights how representation has evolved over time emphasizing the fact that it is not exclusively a democratic practice. Representation, depending on how it actually functions, is not intrinsically a problem. It becomes problematic when it reinforces stereotypes, excludes marginalized voices, or distorts realities to serve dominant interests. When approached thoughtfully and inclusively, representation can be a powerful tool for visibility, understanding, and social change. Representation became central to political thinking as democracy was rooted in the rise of nation-states and political parties where not every individual could have a say.

Mark Brown's book Science in Democracy, shares Machiavelli's notions on representation. He suggests that representation aimed to end elitist control over citizens. Machiavelli believed that in order to have a good nation and good representation, you must have good institutions. Institutions must actively enable public contestation and challenge of elite decisions.

Wendy Osirus aims to be a good representative resonates with this democratic vision. Osirus's vision of his approach posits that his goal is not to merely transmit the preferences of his community, but to engage with their concerns critically and advocate for them effectively within political institutions.

Conclusion

Wendy Osirus' dedication to honest and pure representation is reflected through his work with MONDHA. By using his lived experiences immigrating to the Dominican Republic from Haiti, he has created a foundation which fosters political empowerment and aims. to protect the Haitian population.

Representation and Faith-Based Leadership: The Case of Sister Marijana Puljić

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Representation is often associated with political institutions, labor unions, or student councils. However, it also plays a key role in religious organizations that shape the lives of many people, especially the young. This essay focuses on a particular form of representation through the example of Sister Marijana Puljić, a Catholic nun and the director of the Paola di Rosa Dormitory in Dubrovnik, operated by the Daughters of Mercy. Her role is especially interesting because it combines elements of spiritual leadership, educational responsibility, and institutional management. In her case, representation is not based on democratic election, but on vocation, mission, and the trust of her religious community.

As a member of a Catholic religious order, her responsibilities are defined by both formal and informal sources: the constitutions and internal rules of her congregation, the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, the Croatian Ministry of Education's regulations, and a set of Christian ethical and spiritual values. Formally, she represents the order and the institution to the students, their parents, and society. She is responsible for organizing the daily life in the dormitory, ensuring a safe and encouraging environment, and promoting Christian values. While there is no direct “penalty” for failing in her duties, she bears a moral responsibility to her order, to her students, and, in her view, to God. A failure to fulfill her role appropriately could lead to a loss of trust and a reassignment within the religious hierarchy.

In my interaction with Sister Marijana, through a brief exchange and available materials, I sensed that her role is not defined by authority, but by service and care. When asked about her function, she made it clear that she does not see herself as a “representative” in the political sense, but rather as someone called to live and embody the values of her community. Her approach to leadership is based on example, presence, and daily interaction with students—not on formal hierarchy or power. In this sense, she believes that authenticity is the key to representation: to be a witness, not just an administrator.

Considering her responsibilities and how she carries them out, one might say that Sister Marijana acts as a sort of “super-trustee”—not only representing the interests of her community, but shaping its internal dynamics through personal example and consistent engagement. Her understanding of representation is deeply rooted in faith and ethics, not strictly regulated by law, yet extremely powerful in its influence. When asked whether she feels limited by her formal role, she answered that while certain expectations do exist, her work is guided by discernment, prayer, and experience, which allow for flexibility and personalized responses to students' needs.

This kind of representation stands apart from conventional democratic systems. There are no formal checks and balances, and no elections, yet there is a strong ethical bond between the representative and the people she serves. The fluidity of her role—often seen as a weakness in political structures—can be a strength here. It allows for adaptability, compassion, and individualized care in a way that rigid bureaucratic systems may not accommodate. At a time when many young people experience disconnection and uncertainty, this kind of representation can offer stability, empathy, and guidance.

Ultimately, the concept of representation should not be confined to politics alone. The example of Sister Marijana Puljić shows that representation can have deeply personal, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Rather than speaking on behalf of others, she embodies the values her community strives to live by. This form of representation may not be measured in votes or policy decisions, but it has a profound and lasting impact on the lives of those she encounters daily. In a democratic system, such a role might seem unusual or even lacking accountability, but it reminds us that the most powerful form of representation can sometimes come not from words, but from living one's mission with integrity and presence.

Examining Representation

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This essay examines the concept of “representation” through an interview with Dr. Jason Primer, an internist at Northwestern Medicine. Dr. Primer’s role aligns most with the description of a trustee, but he embodies many forms of representation—to patients, institutions, companies, and the public. I sought to interview a doctor instead of a traditional political representative as it can offer a richer, more nuanced perspective on the concept of representation. This case challenges the traditional view of representation, in that it is not clearly defined, it is fluid and limited.

Jason Primer is a doctor at Northwestern Medicine in Chicago, specializing in internal medicine. He, along with all practicing physicians, take the Hippocratic Oath, a traditional pledge that outlines the principles of medical ethics and professional conduct. It is a baseline ethical code considered mandatory to follow. The Hippocratic Oath includes stipulations such as do no harm, act in the patient’s best interest, and maintain patient confidentiality. Once a doctor-patient relationship is established, a doctor is obliged to meet the standard of care expected of them as prescribed by the Oath.

Dr. Primer believes his ultimate responsibility is to serve his patients, however, he states that now more than ever, medical decision making is a shared process. There is paternalistic care, doctors who have sole power in decision making, overriding the input of their patient. And there is patient-centered care, a cooperative decision-making process between patient and doctor.

There has been a paradigm shift to patient-centered care, which operates under the assumption that patients are capable of making informed decisions.

In Dr. Primer's own experience, he believes patients are currently more involved in matters they shouldn't be. People think they know more than they do. Specifically with the emergence of the internet and self-diagnoses, patients are less inclined to believe in medical health professionals. I asked, Do you think patients understand how decisions are made in their care? To which Dr. Primer replied firmly, no. They hope the doctor knows best, but they simply do not understand, do not comprehend the amount of studying, and effort, and hours put in.

Dr. Primer cannot simply state, I am the doctor, I know what is best, but he can make his patients aware of the possible outcomes for their decisions. If they do not want to follow his judgement, he can inform them of risks and benefits, but Dr. Primer has to work with the patient, meet them half-way for what they believe is correct along with what he believes is correct.

There is a hefty penalty for non-performance in his occupation. If Dr. Primer comes into conflict with a patient, if his medical advice is incorrect, or has adverse results, he risks serious legal consequences. A patient may sue for a variety of reasons—an unfavorable outcome, because a medical professional went against what they wanted, that their autonomy was ignored, a belief that their doctor failed to meet the standard of care expected of them—truly anything could be turned into grounds for legal actions in our particularly litigious cultural. Thus, with the constant looming threat of a medical malpractice lawsuit, there is more pressure for Dr. Primer to work with his patients to give them the proper care. There is danger in assuming you know what is best for someone else, even with the best intentions.

The interview was held over the phone and was rather casual. Dr. Primer was very open to discussing the details of his job, what is expected of him in his profession, and the inner workings of his day-to-day tasks. While he does not formally describe himself as a representative, Primer agreed that the term trustee was an accurate description, as he relies on his expertise to make decisions that are best for his patients and the community. Specifically in cases of STIs or infectious diseases, he believes a doctor has an outreaching obligation to the public at large.

Additionally, Primer states that he is a representative of the hospital he is employed at, as Northwestern Medicine has a good-standing reputation that is dependent on its staff.

I have concluded that Dr. Primer is limited by the description of his position. Our conversation highlighted the tension between paternalistic and patient-centered care models, a push and pull between respecting patient autonomy and acting based on expertise. To uphold his Oath to serve the patient at any cost, Dr. Primer must put aside his own beliefs at times to not override the wishes of the patient.

Further, Dr. Primer is limited by systemic constraints—insurance, time, hospital policies—and has oftentimes found himself in situations where he cannot do what he believes is right. Sometimes, he can not deliver the standard of care a patient needs because their insurance won't cover it. And when insurance won't cover certain tests or medicines, he has to call the insurance company himself to plead his case. This authorization process is known as peer-to-peer review, where a physician speaks directly to a medical representative of the insurance company who denied the test, medicine, procedure, etc. It happens frequently.

Dr. Primer emphasizes that his biggest limit is time. For example, if a patient comes in with many problems that need attention, it is difficult to have it sorted within one meeting.

Moreover, every hospital has different policies—how many patients a doctor can see, how long a doctor has with each patient, that you give enough diagnosis, even how you write your notes. Ultimately, he finds that his time per patient allotted by the hospital is his biggest handcuff.

I gauged that Dr. Primer is consistent in his representation, even though his approach varies between patients. If he had an older or sicker patient, he wouldn't put them through the same rigorous testing or screening processes as he would a younger, healthier patient. You don't want to do a test unless you are going to act on it, thus his approach would be less aggressive. Overall, he doesn't take a cookie cutter approach, he takes his job patient by patient.

The focus on representation in the context of the medical field does give way to problems for the overall performance of the system. One would like to believe that the healthcare system has patients' best interest at heart, that their ultimate goal is to ensure the good health of the public. However, as previously stated, medical insurance companies bar physicians in many ways from doing their job. They create obstacles when trying to give care to a patient—having their patient's coverage denied, slowing down the process, having the doctor stop and justify their reasoning to an assessor. The performance of the healthcare system breaks down when physicians must focus on advocating against large corporations. A physician should not have to focus on being a representative in this aspect, at least not to a degree that overwhelms their main goal of caring for their patient's health.

Additionally, the focus on representation gives way to problems in the performance of the system as hospitals themselves bar physicians from doing their job. Being too focused on representing an institution, and not the individual, can muddy the waters of a doctor's prescription. Having to worry about upholding the reputation of a hospital to attract donors, research grants, media coverage, etc. overwhelms their main duty of providing health care.

Take for example, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician who exposed the water crisis in Flint Michigan in 2015 after noticing rising lead levels in her patients. When Hanna-Attisha tried to go public with her findings, she was met with backlash from government officials, calling her an "unfortunate researcher." Even though she carried critical medical information that affected her patients and the city, she was pressured to avoid conflict with state actors and to protect her hospital's image from bad press. This illustrates how prioritizing institutional loyalty can compromise the performance of the healthcare system. Northwestern Medicine, being the top most rated hospital in Illinois, likely wants to protect their good standing as well, hiring physicians that meet stringent standards, those who will uphold their ranking. If a case similar to Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha were to ever arise with Dr. Primer, it will likely interfere with his primary ethical obligation to protect his patients.

I did discover a lack of clarity in the concept of representation as the term carries fluidity to it. In my findings, a physician is a representative in many ways—to the hospital, to their patient's health directly, to their patient's health against insurance companies, to the broader community, and to the medical profession itself. The parameters of representation are murky.

While a physician is not a representative in a political sense, their representative duties extend far beyond what is prescribed in the Hippocratic Oath.

At the superficial level, one may think of representatives as messengers, carrying the people's voice to those in power, or a mirror, solely reflecting the views of the public, or like a fierce leader, smart and confident in their own judgement. It's assumed that the concept of representation is an inherent component of democracy, if not the main pillar that sustains it. But, upon deeper examination, systems of representation are faulty in reality, no matter in what package they are presented.

Representation and the Illusion of Inclusion in Jalisco's Energy Policy

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As part of a larger project, students focused on analyzing an individual in a representative role of their choice. My target was a political liaison from the Ministry of Energy Development in Jalisco, Mexico. The assignment required students to investigate whether the subject's duties were clearly defined in formal or informal documentation, explicitly outlining their responsibilities. In this particular case, no formal job description or public record was accessible to confirm the range of the target's authority. Despite requests for an interactive form of communication, the interview was conducted via text. The case raises concerns regarding undefined roles and public service as a matter of performance.

Identifying the Representative

The selected representative is a political liaison at the Ministry of Energy in Jalisco, Mexico, and serves as the coordinator of the Ministry's Biofuels Working Group. According to his description, he serves as a bridge between the Ministry and other government sectors, including businesses throughout the state, ensuring that these constituents comply with national energy laws. This includes monitoring carbon emissions and advising companies on how to reduce their environmental footprint through eco-friendlier practices. Despite the complexity of his responsibilities, there is no public record available through the official Government website that confirms his position and what the job entails. There are approximately 84,000 businesses in Jalisco (El Economista). The representative claimed that he is

responsible for ensuring that all these entities comply with environmental regulations. In his words, “We represent millions of Jalisco residents and Mexicans who seek real change in the field of sustainable energy and generate a positive impact on our planet.” If this is true, it raises questions about the logistics and capacity of his office. How can one person, or even a small team, realistically monitor and guide tens of thousands of businesses across a large and diverse state?

Additionally, the fact that his authority comes from an appointment rather than an election adds another layer to the vagueness of his position. If his name and position are unknown to the public, through what channels can his constituents express their concerns? Without public approval or a clear checks system, their legitimacy relies heavily on internal structures which, in this case, appear to be neither transparent nor readily accessible. When there is no feedback or electoral cycles, incentives for success become largely reputational.

The Experience Interacting with the Representative

The interview was conducted via text message, despite my initial request for a phone call or Zoom meeting. Answers arrived approximately a week after each message was sent, and follow-up inquiries received similarly delayed replies. The responses were polished statements about the importance of collaboration, equality, and community improvement, but lacked specificity. For instance, when asked about how he balanced the interests of citizens and industrial actors, the representative insisted that large corporations have transformed into “agents of change.” I proceeded, intending to deepen his answer, bringing up the marginalized communities of Jalisco, particularly those areas struck by insecurity and poverty, and how he assures their voices are heard. He cleverly deflected the question with a blank

statement, “We are currently working to reduce energy poverty in every corner of our state”, leaving out any sort of outreach tactics or concrete examples. Although he stated a commitment to reducing energy poverty, he provided no details on how that policy is implemented in practice. The vagueness left me questioning whether his authority is more symbolic than functional.

My interaction with him made the impression that his perception of representation served more of an “ought to be” narrative than a mediation between the reality of competing interests. Although encouraging on the surface, the portrayal he painted of himself as someone whose core values are completely aligned with his political goals provided hardly any room for reflection or admission of difficult decisions.

Representation as Image Management

The most revealing aspect of this dialogue was not what was said, but what was left for the imagination. His answers avoided addressing any flaws in his position or any of the challenges of the job. He claimed that businesses, communities, and the government are all aligned in their goals for sustainability, a highly unlikely scenario in a nation infamous for corruption within its institutions and private sectors. Thus, bringing up a more serious question: is the idea of "representation" being applied as a branding strategy rather than an instrument of democratic accountability? When officials present themselves as perfectly aligned with all stakeholders, they are lacking transparency, especially a highly competitive and capitalist system.

At the core of the issue is that there is no universally accepted job description for what it means to “represent” the public. In theory, representatives act on behalf of constituents’

interests, but there is no defined system or mechanism in place to monitor their activities. No evaluations or penalties if they abuse their power or neglect the public. Representation, in this form, is an intellectual sedative. It enables power to remain unquestioned while presenting citizens with an illusion of involvement. That's why, in political theory, we turn to more specific models such as delegate, trustee, super trustee, and mandate. A delegate reflects the views of their constituencies, a trustee exercises personal judgment, and a super trustee has more of an ideological objective and a mandate entitles one to do what he wishes. Yet, even these concepts rely on one essential component: accountability and consistency. What procedures are in place to guarantee that representatives successfully carry out any of their obligations? And what effort is made to gauge the consistency with which a representative behaves?

Conclusion

At a superficial level, the concept of “representation” is seen as the basis of a democratic system -- one of the key aspects that distances that political system from an autocracy. However, as this case illustrates, representation is a blank statement, a performance shaped by individuals and their interpretations of what they wish to do. If we continue to use the term representative without precision, we risk legitimizing roles that lack substance. Instead of relying on vague labels, we should adopt specific conceptual models, such as delegate, trustee, or super trustee. Even though these categories do not solve the accountability problem on their own, they open the floor to inquiries like, whose interests are being prioritized. Ultimately, representation cannot be left to interpretation, it must be defined and continuously challenged.

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Representation in Georgia's Democratic Government

Zurab Gvishiani — DePaul University

This essay analyzes the experience of interviewing Baia Kvitsiani, a former member of the Georgian Parliament and a member of the Georgian Dream Party regarding her role as a representative of the Georgian people. I found that she acted as a *delegate* for committees and thematic inquiries, but in general as a *trustee* of the Georgian Dream party. This is the result of mechanisms in the Georgian constitution. The proportional representation party system, weak punishments for misrepresentation, and a lack of communication with voters are the root causes.

Baia Kvitsiani became a member of the Georgian Parliament in 2021, as an appointed member by the Georgian Dream party. She was invited due to her political alignment with the Georgian Dream party, her qualifications, and the systemic quota of women that needed to be met. I believe that she was very honest with me regarding her experience

The Georgian constitution charges the members of Parliament as the supreme representative of the interests of the people, “A Member of Parliament of Georgia is a representative of all Georgians. He/she shall enjoy a free mandate and shall act according to his/her conscience and not be bound by any imperative mandate.”² Since the Georgian political system has moved to a proportional representation system with closed party lists, citizens do not vote for individuals, but parties. Hence, she

²*Constitution of Georgia*, Art. 39, accessed June 9, 2025, parliament.ge/en/legislation/reglament.

didn't have a direct electorate; rather, the voters for the Georgian Dream party voted for a list of potential members, who would be appointed by the party proportional to their electoral support. This sort of representation seems to favor MPs to act as *trustees*. Since she didn't have a specific constituency, Baia felt that she was representing the entirety of the voters of the Georgian Dream Party, and this meant she was representing the ideals and postures of her party. She mentioned that the formal training provided by the Parliament about her role was very vague and didn't prepare her for the real experience. "The formal training was very vague; we were on our own."

When questioned about her connection with the citizens of Georgia, Baia mentioned three ways she communicated with them. First, was the system of thematic inquiries, where committees chose and researched issues like challenges for women in the system. She then connected with target groups who provided feedback. Another was by email, which members of Parliament are required to answer and address. However, she mentioned that not many people were using this as a form of communication. Third, was social media, which Baia felt was very limited in its value, since it was usually used to send hateful comments and insults. Systems to check if members of Parliament were listening to these inputs and acting on them were unclear. There were a few other consequences for not showing up or breaking procedures during Parliament sessions which ensured that people's interests were represented in these meetings. The most extreme form of punishment were warnings, salary deductions, and public criticism. However, the lack of formal punishment for misrepresentation, like recall or removal for failing their constituents, were not a part of the Georgian system. Realistically, the media and opposition do not have the power required to ensure that the ruling party is listening to

voters. Since Georgia has a party-based system (vs. a candidate-centric system), it is assumed that the ruling party is justified in its policies given their electoral support by the majority of the voting people. There isn't much to be done if members of the ruling party decide to act as *super-trustees*. I believe this hurts the Parliament's ability to represent the needs of the people. Even if the party has the mandate of the majority of voters, there are no systems in place to check them if they stray from the interests of their voters.

Baia mentioned that the most effective way for her to connect to the people was through thematic inquiries. Social media is usually used to insult or send antagonistic messages. She said that most people from the opposition or media didn't approach her calmly, but rather aggressively, whether on social media, in Parliament meetings, or by mail. Members of the ruling party are perceived to be distant and usually aren't open to direct dialogue. Debates and discussions between the ruling party and the opposition aren't fruitful and result in antagonistic exchanges. Hence, people who voted for opposition parties feel underrepresented and approach the ruling party more aggressively. While the voters for the ruling party are usually less active in seeking out and contacting their representatives. Baia mentioned that during the passing of the Foreign Agent Law, most communication she received from the opposition and their voters was hate mail and insults.

Revisiting our interview, I saw systemic challenges and limitations for representation in the Georgian political system, as it favors the *trustee* model under the party list system. Since Baia had no specific constituency, she was representing the voters of the Georgian Dream party, rather than a smaller-scale constituency. This does make her a representative of the majority of the people. However, it dilutes accountability, The Georgian

political system seems to have very weak enforcement of responsibilities for representation. There are no effective legal mechanisms to ensure that MPs remain in touch with their voters. The voters of the opposition parties believe themselves marginalized and oppressed.

Lack of direct electorate ties to MPs, dominance of the party structures, and absence of binding accountability measures weaken the aim of the democratic system's ideal of representing the interests of people. Committees and thematic inquiries allow MPs to act as *delegates* on certain issues, resulting in some form of representation. However, on a larger scale, the political structure seems to lack the required systems to enforce meaningful representation, allowing more MPs to act as *trustees*. Ultimately, representation remains a foundational ideal in democracy, but in Georgia's current framework, it lacks the mechanisms necessary to function effectively.

Sources

1. *Constitution of Georgia, Art. 39, accessed June 8, 2025, parliament.ge/en/legislation/reglament.*

Exploring Democratic Representation Through the Role of Batumi's Mayor

Anastasia Kontselidze — Caucuses International University

This essay explores the concept of political representation through an interview with the mayor of Batumi, Georgia. I. It examines his responsibilities, motivations, and perceptions about representing citizens. I aimed to understand how a representative balances public interests with structural limitations, how they interpret their duties, and what kind of representative they are in practice. The essay analyzes my personal experience interacting with the mayor and reflects on how representation functions — and struggles — within a democratic system. Ultimately, the experience highlighted the importance of engaged, reflective leadership and public participation in preserving democratic values.

My selected representative was the mayor of Batumi Archil Chikovani. As the head of the local municipal government, he holds executive authority over city governance. His responsibilities include urban planning, infrastructure development, public service administration, and the implementation of national policies at the local level. He also oversees the city budget and engages with citizens through public forums and digital communication platforms.

The reason I chose the mayor was to gain insight into local representation, where decisions directly affect people's daily lives. Mayors are often more accessible than national politicians, and their impact can be seen in tangible outcomes — such as roads, schools, or waste management. Understanding how the mayor perceives and carries out his representative role offered a grounded example of how democracy operates on the local level.

Incentives for effective performance in his position include public approval, the potential for re-election, and positive public recognition. On the other hand, failing to perform adequately could lead to a loss of public trust or even political pressure to resign. This balance of reward and accountability makes the mayor's role a dynamic example of democratic representation in action.

Before the interview, I carefully prepared a set of questions designed to reveal how the mayor interprets and practices representation. I focused on key areas such as decision-making, public engagement, ethical responsibility, and practical challenges.

One of my first questions was:

“How do you balance the interests of different groups in Batumi?”

He admitted that representing everyone equally is nearly impossible. The needs of business owners, tourists, long-time residents, and youth groups often conflict. He explained that decisions are usually guided by long-term public interest rather than short-term popularity. This raised an important point — representation, in his view, includes making strategic decisions that may not always satisfy everyone today, but will benefit the broader community over time.

Another question I posed was:

“What does being a good representative mean to you?”

He responded with three words: trust, accountability, and vision. He explained that trust is built through honest communication, accountability means accepting both praise and criticism, and vision refers to anticipating future needs and planning accordingly. I found this answer especially meaningful

because it showed his deeper understanding of leadership beyond daily administrative tasks.

I also asked:

“What are the biggest challenges you face in representing citizens?”

He cited limited resources, national-level policy constraints, and sometimes unrealistic public expectations. For example, citizens may request services or programs that fall outside the city’s budget or legal authority. In such cases, it’s important to clearly communicate limitations without ignoring public concerns.

Another important question I asked was:

“Have you ever changed a policy or decision based on public feedback?”

He said yes — several times. He explained that while not every suggestion can be implemented, recurring feedback often signals a deeper issue that needs to be addressed. This showed me that true representation includes listening and adapting.

From these responses, it became clear that while he aims to be transparent and fair, he operates within structural limits that prevent full responsiveness. However, his efforts to include public opinion — through community meetings, online surveys, and open communication — suggest a sincere attempt to bridge the gap between ideal and practice.

Through this experience, I gained a deeper understanding of the complexity and imperfection of political representation. On the surface, democracy implies that elected officials simply do what the people ask. But in reality, representation involves ethical judgment, long-term planning, and decision-making under pressure. Even when a representative has good intentions,

external factors — such as bureaucracy, legal limits, or conflicting public interests — can complicate their actions.

From the four traditional types of representation — delegate, trustee, partisan, and descriptive (mirror) — the mayor most closely aligns with the trustee model. He listens to citizens but ultimately makes decisions based on his informed judgment and long-term vision. He does not simply follow public opinion as a delegate would, nor does he act primarily to support a political party. While he shares certain demographic and cultural traits with many citizens of Batumi, which may lend him some descriptive credibility, his role is not defined by identity politics.

This understanding of his representative style helped me appreciate that democratic leadership is not just about responsiveness but about strategic responsibility. He demonstrated that rigidly following public opinion could sometimes lead to poor outcomes, especially in areas requiring expert knowledge or future-oriented planning.

What I found especially thought-provoking was the idea that a lack of full transparency or predictability can actually help a representative. Sometimes, flexibility and ambiguity in leadership allow for better responses to unforeseen events. This reminded me that democracy is not about perfection — it's about participation, trust, and shared responsibility.

The concept of representation plays a central role in democratic systems, yet it is more complicated than it appears. It is not merely a transactional process between elected officials and voters, but a dynamic interaction that requires vision, judgment, and adaptability. My interview with the mayor of Batumi showed me that true representation is a balancing act — between public demand and practical constraints, between short-term satisfaction and long-term benefit.

Though imperfect, representation is essential for democratic health. It requires both accountable leaders and engaged citizens. This experience deepened my appreciation of the real-world struggles behind political representation and helped me see that meaningful democracy depends not only on elections but also on the ongoing relationship between representatives and those they serve.

Representation: The Chicago School Board

Gabriela Caballero — DePaul University

My interview with a member of the Chicago School Board revealed how representation differs in practice from the prescribed roles.

I chose to interview Cydney Wallace, a Chicago School Board Member. Wallace was appointed to the position in early 2025 and represents a portion of the southwest side of the city. According to the official literature of the city of Chicago, board members are responsible for; “hiring and evaluating the Chief Executive Officer; establishing the direction, goals and priorities for the District; approving District policies; and approving purchasing decisions, contracts and interpersonal agreements.” (Chicago School Board) While the requirements of this position are clearly stated they are less strictly monitored. Those on the school board simply need to appear to be well informed, active members.

By interviewing Cydney Wallace I gained much respect for the people who serve on the school board and value the knowledge that was shared. Since Wallace was appointed to her position the role looks different to her. But she approaches the job the same as the other elected members seem to approach representation. Those on the school board typically have a full-time job apart from the work they do for the city. This creates a hectic schedule that demands heavy commitment from the members and their staff. Wallace detailed to me that her husband has been a great help in this time with all the household duties while she has been extremely occupied with her new board role. Wallace also emphasized the role that her community continues to play even when she is in an office in the center city offices.

She claims to stay connected with neighborhood groups and relies on them to “guide” her decisions. Wallace does not see herself as a representative.

When asked how she sees herself in the machinery of government, Wallace stated that she sees her responsibility “to make the community know about the role of the board and bringing attention to systemic school issues.” Wallace sees her representation to be for all of Chicago, not her singular community. She sees herself as a trusted parent from her community that has been entrusted with making large scale decisions. Wallace listens to community ideas by tapping into it to bring forward broader issues. There is a stark contrast between how Wallace conducts her role versus how the role is structured. She attends meetings and does what is required, but goes about the representation task differently. The role is also much different from the way it was laid out to her. It is extremely political. Wallace went on to suggest, “....Everything seems to piss off one half of the city. The job is extremely susceptible to the outside world.” By interviewing her, I now understand how intensely judged all political positions are. Cydney Wallace is an atypical politician much like numerous municipal government employees in this country. She has multiple foci in her life, creates ideology from the core ideas she held before her appointment, and wants to help the entire community. I have respect for what she does.

It was drilled into me, by educators and family members alike, that representation is the cornerstone of government and is deserving of that value. In reality, the varied performances of representatives in politics reflect a different reality of representation. There are delegates, trustees, and those that work claiming a mandate. Delegates are those who aim to represent the exact thoughts of their constituency. Trustees believe they were elected on the assumption that their views would be the guiding

force for political decisions. Politicians who work based on a mandate assume the ultimate power of their role is to act out their policies in the most effective manner. Cydney Wallace is best described as a trustee. Every politician has their own unique blend of perceptions of what representation roles involve or do not involve. This can often be separate from the role imagined by society. People in representative roles go into the roles with a given mindset about the act of representing. The societal pressures we have created to be 'perfect' representatives has little influence on how these people perform. The fluidity that is expressed in every person's form of representation seems based on who the person is, who elected them, and what their understanding of their role is. The blurring of lines around methods of representation is helpful to those in those roles. They will tell you every situation calls for a different approach. Representation is important. The idea persists, but the idealism connected to it proves to be little help in predicting representative behavior.

Representation is a topic of much concern among governments and the masses. What is representation? Every common person as well as most officials would have a different answer to that question. The lack of clarity embedded in the term though is a clear signal that the focus we put on representation is problematic. I have gained knowledge into the true function of representation. Before this course, I was only taught the dreamed-up version of representation. I have trust in many elected officials due to their clear dedication, but I am now much more skeptical of how they perform. The current state of our country under an authoritarian leaning leader has made us question all typical expectations of the government. With the knowledge of current events, lasting education about democratic systems, and the analysis of the performance of representatives I am led to

question the focus we put upon representation. Simultaneously, representation continues to hold importance for me and for our system.

Alderman Timmy Knudsen and Representation

Jane Sullivan — DePaul University

The representative I have chosen as my target is Alderman Timmy Knudsen. He is the Alderman of Chicago's 43rd ward. He is charged to represent the 43rd ward and its residents on the Chicago City Council, which is the legislative branch of the city government. The City Council performs functions pertaining to its government and affairs, with Alderpersons specifically voting on "all proposed loans, grants, bond issues, land acquisitions and sales, zoning changes, traffic control issues, mayoral appointees, as well as other financial appropriations and reviewing proposed ordinances, resolutions and orders". The legislative process specifically charging them to draft and introduce legislation to the City Council, where it is assigned to a committee, which then sends it to the full Council for a vote on if approved the legislation becomes law.

Alderpersons are also "by custom, a source of information and intermediary on behalf of their constituency about city functions and services within the ward". However, I was able to find little distinct information about that specific function. In general, his charge to "represent" as an alderman seems to serve on the city council and filter the interests and views of the 43rd ward. There seems to be little incentive to perform these functions well, however. Knudsen was initially appointed by Lori Lightfoot to fill a vacancy in the 43rd ward after the resignation of Michele Smith, and this was approved. Then he won the 2023 election for the seat in a vote where only 30.10% (Chicagoelections.gov) of registered voters cast a ballot. Being appointed to his position followed by a low voter turnout could

mean he has little true incentive to listen to most of the ward's residents. Every year, each ward receives a \$1.5 million budget of "menu money" to spend on infrastructure in the ward, which gives him control of funding for infrastructure projects. Further, there's a principle of "Aldermanic privilege", which means that although major projects like building a high rise or a grocery store need approval from the city council, in practice the ward alderman has final say on what happens in their ward. The rule of Aldermanic privilege, in particular, means there seems to be little constraint on how the alderman spends this money. This means Timmy Knudsen has little need to be accountable to the voters. The control over infrastructure budgets could give an incentive to misbehave.

My primary experience interacting with Timmy Knudsen was a brief one. I never spoke to the Alderman himself. Instead, when I sent an email I was responded to by his office, which asked me when I needed the interview to happen by and for a list of questions. Although I quickly shared a list said list of questions, his office stopped responding after that point-I was apparently subscribed to their mailing list, as I continued getting emails about local events in the 43rd ward, but I never received a follow up to my sending of the questions, nor to the several emails I sent afterwards inquiring about the interview. The interview thus never happened, and I have to rely to a large degree on what Alderman Knudsen says on his website to infer how he views his representative responsibilities. On his website, he claims to be a "public servant", and says he seeks to be "an advocate and consensus builder". He also directly speaks of the time he has spent engaging with individual residents to hear their perspective on the state of the city and the issues that are important to them. He specifically mentions that he has "spent the last six weeks engaging with residents one on one to hear

what's on their minds related to the current state of our city": and emphasizes his "one-on-one" interviews with ward residents to find their thoughts on important issues. This all suggests that he wants to present himself as a delegate moreso than a trustee, and that he wants readers to think he believes in the importance of his constituent's input into his work as Alderman. However, the drying up of responses when I sent in my questions after his office previous acceptance of an interview with him (or possibly a member of his staff if that wasn't possible), and the fact the calls I sent weren't answered even though the number was on his website as a way to contact him, suggests to me a lack of desire to take criticism. His talk of interviews hardly means much, because a most likely carefully selected group of constituents who support you isn't representative of the population at large. It seems to me that although he wants to present himself as someone who listens to his constituents and cares about what they think, he isn't very willing to actually follow through on that. It's for show. Although there are doors to access the aldermanic government, they appear to be easy for the alderman to close, and to be in large part an illusion. So, although he speaks a lot of being a public servant, I'd gauge that he isn't consistent with his representation. It's a very bad sign that the image he presents is so at odds with the actual reality of trying to contact him, it shows a lack of respect for the people he is claiming to represent.

I think the concept of "representation" is an inherent issue for the system in that "representative" has a very loose definition, and so it's very hard to police what a representative is actually meant to do. I think Timmy Knudsen's responsibilities as an Alderman are a good example of this: although he's expected to represent the 43rd ward as a member of the Chicago City Council, the many additional responsibilities of an Alderman seem rather

poorly defined and have much too little oversight, and as a “representative”, there is little info about HOW he is supposed to represent his constituents, except by drafting legislation. A representative is supposed to be the filter through which the views of the constituents are communicated, but Timmy Knudsen was appointed to the position and won an election where relatively few people voted. He speaks a lot of representing the ward, but seems uneager to communicate with his constituents. It’s very hard to hold someone accountable for not properly representing their constituents when what it means to be a representative does not have a strict definition or set of responsibilities we can hold them to. There is a lack of clarity on representatives (or at least, Aldermen) function that closes doors to the government by making it less transparent, and thus more inaccessible, which is in many ways contradictory to democracy.

In conclusion, although the principle of representing the population is a good one, there is a critical lack of clarity in the definition of a representative’s responsibilities in our political system. There are many obstacles to ensuring that a representative is indeed serving as a filter for the views of their constituents and not merely for their own views, and if a representative does not have defined responsibilities, it’s nearly impossible to do so. For Chicago Aldermen like Timmy Knudsen there is a lack of accountability, which the lack of clarity makes hard to address. The lack of clarity in their role is a significant hinderance to holding them accountable or influencing them. For a system to be democratic, it is important to understand how it works, and the lack of clarity in the representative’s role is significant.

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Julia Ramirez, Pragmatic Representation in the Twelfth Ward

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Representation is a construct often laced with vague principles. Therefore, it is commonly believed that representation differs significantly across ideological systems. However, this essay seeks to understand the generally indeterminate prescriptions, ad hoc decisions, and delicate balances of representatives through the perspective of a local official in one of United States' largest cities. The following project reveals a dedicated, pragmatic civil servant navigating a hazy political system through her personal experience and creative, community-centric problem-solving. Conceivably, this example will supplement a global tapestry of stories furthering the understanding of representation as a universally challenging endeavor.

The subject of this study is Julia Ramirez. Ramirez serves on the Chicago City Council as the alderwoman of the Twelfth Ward. This study involves a close look at the formal definition of her role as a representative. Reasonably, one could expect a clearly defined set of powers and restrictions laid out in one authoritative source. Realistically, the role of Chicago alderperson is loosely described across several sources.

Namely, the general basis of the position can be found in two state documents. The Illinois State Constitution describes Chicago as a "home rule" municipality which offers the city's officials freedoms "including, but not limited to, the power to regulate... public health, safety, morals and welfare; to tax; and to incur debt" as long as it follows state law (Ill. Const. art. VII sec. 6). Additionally, the Illinois Municipal Code details several

institutional aspects of an alderperson's role including qualifications, term limits, elections, and the general parameters of the constituency (65 ILCS 5/3.1-10 and 20). Interestingly, Article 3 of the code provides the intriguing charge that municipal officers "perform duties in addition to those which may be prescribed by law" (65 ILCS, 5/3.1-10-40). Overall, the formal state instructions grant broad powers and offer few requirements for how one must represent their constituencies.

More specifically, the code of conduct in Chicago's Municipal Code requires that city officials "put forth honest effort" in their work, that they "act impartially" in their decisions, and promote "equal opportunity" (Municipal Code of Chicago, 2-156-005). The code also includes the mention of a "fiduciary duty" that city officials must uphold (Municipal Code of Chicago, 2-156-020). Essentially, there lies a responsibility to act as a trustee during matters in which a representative cannot mirror the direct mandate of the people.

Moreover, the motivations for diligent representation are equally ambiguous. Predictably, Illinois law states that an alderperson "who is guilty of willful and corrupt oppression, malconduct, or misfeasance" will be removed from office (65 ILCS 5/3.1-55-15). Of course, such an action would result from judicial proceedings. However, as of this date, there is no law or code that has been passed for the public recall of alderpeople in the State of Illinois or the City of Chicago. The only direct way that performance is evaluated by the constituency itself is through elections. In that case, pressure and incentives to act as a functioning representative must be self-motivated.

Notably, Alderwoman Ramirez views her election to office as a "growth of the immigrant story" and as a "reflection [of an] extremely changing city council" that includes the most women, Latina, and LGBTQ members in the history of the city (Ramirez).

As someone who was born and raised in the ward that she represents, she attaches personal responsibility towards her duty to represent the residents' interests. Particularly, she feels it is her duty to represent the interests of a growing electorate of Latin-American constituents in the community in which her grandparents were among the first. Her priorities focus heavily on "public safety" and "social service" approaches which reflect Ramirez's experience with the murder of her brother (Ramirez). The alderwoman's pride and care for her community is evident in the way she interacts with its members on a personal level. Her dedication to accessibility is unmistakable.

Upon investigation, the alderwoman is certainly approachable. A simple call to the ward office will connect you to Junteng Chen, the alderwoman's constituent service coordinator. From there, any constituent has the option of arranging a direct meeting with the alderwoman herself. In addition to one-on-one meetings, a constituent of Ramirez's ward can easily provide their input through the "12th Ward Survey" found on the official ward website. This survey directly impacts how the office will spend its annual infrastructure funding from the city. According to the alderwoman, "typically it's Northside aldermen that offer opportunities like that" due to the disproportionate access to funding and civic engagement on the city's North Side. However, Ramirez has chosen to be one of just a handful of alderpeople to offer their constituents a say in infrastructure spending. This measure is just one example of how Ramirez approaches her role with creative engagement. In 2025, she also hosted a community "bike ride" to raise awareness for "pedestrian safety" and offered constituents a chance to read and give feedback on proposals for new pedestrian and biking improvements. Furthermore, her office is working on "youth engagement surveys" and committees for "art installations" to

reach the youth in the community (Ramirez). In these ways, this alderperson's efforts to represent go well beyond the official charge of her office through direct interactions, surveys, and committees.

It is important to note, Alderwoman Ramirez's commitment to delegate-style engagement is traceable through the start of her campaign. Ramirez states that it is "part of the reason people elected us... they wanted to be more involved, and they wanted to understand" in ways that her predecessors did not offer. She firmly believes that regardless of who is in office "people should understand the system on... what the city owes them." However, there are often institutional challenges that prevent the people from reaching their representatives in Chicago and beyond. The Twelfth Ward is comprised of "humble neighborhoods" in which Ramirez urges the residents to reach out for feedback. The alderwoman lists a lack of "community space... green space... outdoor accessibility...[and] pedestrian safety" as barriers for communication. Fortunately, these are issues that are on the forefront of the alderwoman's agenda.

Additionally, the breadth of responsibility that the office holds has an impact on an alderperson's representative role. Due to how broadly the office is defined, much of the job is centered around direct service which Ramirez describes as the maintenance of "anything that you see outside." Handling reports, permits, and repairs takes a significant amount of time away from an alderperson's schedule that could be used to filter public opinion. In addition to these quotidian functions, an alderperson must also divide their time between their community and the city council. Alderwoman Ramirez explains the challenge of being "pulled downtown" often because "if you're not a committee chair... you don't have staff" to handle City Council matters of policy and deliberations. Every freshman

alderperson must navigate between these competing responsibilities, but the Twelfth Ward representative is committed to keeping community engagement at the center of her daily schedule.

In such a political system with large constituencies, varying levels of community infrastructure, and schedules full of multidisciplinary duties, it is inevitable that any representative takes on a fiduciary role. It would appear that, for most officials, this is actually the case more often than not. While Alderwoman Ramirez recognizes the necessity of exercising her own judgement at times, she strives for a “balance” between “what people have elected [her] to do in terms of a vision... and where [she has] to listen and maybe be more... flexible.” Therefore, she handles matters such as “public safety” differently than issues such as “finances” (Ramirez). Public safety is directly related to the progressive campaign platform that caused her electoral victory. On the other hand, financial issues, important to her constituents but not central to her platform, are treated with more compromise and prompt the representative to listen closely to what her constituents are saying despite presumptions that she would simply follow left-of-center ideology.

In summary, representation should be treated with much scrutiny when evaluating a political system. The majority of public understanding about representation comes more from normative rhetoric and formal directions than the empirical workings of actual officials and institutions. Regardless of the type of government, the idea of direct representation often becomes impractical or inconsequential. Governments often run with minimal representative input. Even the cultural idea of representation contains paradoxes and contradictions. Questions remain regarding how closely a representative must follow public direction, how much personal expertise shall be demonstrated,

and the extent in which minority opinion is protected. Fortunately, there are officials like Alderwoman Julia Ramirez who take it upon themselves to balance these competing notions while focusing on public dialogue. A pragmatic figure that acknowledges functional constraints while pushing the boundaries of their office should be the standard of modern representation.

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