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Worlds Apart? Political Theorists, Parliamentarians and the Meaning of Unequal Representation

Abstract: Although political equality is guaranteed in the Constitutions of modern democracies, few members of disadvantaged groups are parliamentarians. Political theorists, free to imagine varieties of democratic processes, increasingly pay critical attention to this problem and to the idea of representation of social groups by members of these groups, i.e. descriptive representation (DR). Yet, surprisingly few political theorists have asked the parliamentarians themselves how they conceptualize and debate the merits of DR. We use the constructivist approach to explore the meaning of unequal representation by comparing the claims of political theorists to data from a recent survey of Polish parliamentarians. We find that parliamentarians and theorists overlap in many of the basic arguments for and against descriptive representation, but with two major differences. First, parliamentarians embed their arguments in the practicalities of their job to such an extent that it is impossible to meaningfully separate theoretical ideas from their relentlessly practical approach. Second, many parliamentarians have an unyielding faith in existing democratic processes, and believe that the democratic system will, eventually, lead to equal representation. That theorists and parliamentarians inhabit different social worlds is one of the main reasons why so many theoretical ideas on how to improve contemporary democracy are rarely implemented: many of them are simply at odds with the people who are supposed to do it.

Keywords: descriptive representation; Poland; parliamentarians; constructivist method; political theory; democracy; inequality; survey.

Introduction

Despite a trend towards diversity in the political elite, disadvantaged groups are numerically and substantively underrepresented in the national legislatures of modern democracies. Many scholars argue that the representation by certain groups, for certain groups, is essential to democratic functioning (Dryzek 1996; Manin et al. 1999; McDonagh 2002; Pitkin 1972). This “descriptive representation” is the extent to which the composition of parliament resembles the demographic and experiential diversity of the citizenry.

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Shortly after universal suffrage diffused across the globe, some political theorists raised the concern that many previously disadvantaged groups remained unequally represented. Nevertheless, for a relatively long time most academics did not view it as a social problem, mainly due to common and persistent faith that democratic procedures will eventually narrow existing gaps.¹ The thought lying behind this conviction was as appealing as it was simple—if the rules of the game are exercised properly, then how can they lead to unequal results? Any intervention in the procedures was seen as a violation of the fundamental principle underlying the modern democratic state, namely the neutrality of the law.

As the years passed and the democratic inclusion of historically marginalized groups continued to be more slow than sure, this model of thinking received more and more critical attention, mainly from feminist theorists concerned with women's descriptive representation (e.g. Mansbridge 1999; Philips 1993, 1995; Young 1990). Modern theoretical debates on unequal political representation now focus on the tenability and "philosophy and ethics" of descriptive representation as a governance solution, especially in light of the current state of disadvantaged group representation (Chaney and Fevre 2002: 897). Currently, political theorists of all stripes debate reasons why the composition of national and local political bodies should be more representative.

Yet, surprisingly few theorists have asked the parliamentarians themselves how they conceive of descriptive representation (hereafter, "DR") (but see Kurczewski 2000). As such, aspects that are meaningful for these essential actors in the legislative process may be missing from theorists' conceptions, waiting to be revealed by the parliamentarians themselves. Inattention to how social actors in legislative arenas think about DR has both theoretical and practical consequences. Although it has long been on the academic agenda, across Eastern Europe DR still has difficulty in gaining acceptance of political decision makers.

In order to find a possible explanation for this state of affairs we use a form of the constructivist approach (Harris 2006) by listening to how Polish parliamentarians in the post-communist era conceptualize DR. A basis of the constructivist approach is the presumption that people live within socially constructed realities where interactions with friends, strangers, co-workers, family, and the like determine the meaning of social things (Lemert 2005). In a reciprocal relationship between methods and theory-building, constructivist methods allow for actor-led improvements to social theory (Charmaz 1983). To understand how and why theorists and parliamentarians think differently, it is necessary to visit their social worlds.

One may be tempted to simplify the problem of incompatible perspectives by repeating the famous opinion about academics locked up in the "ivory tower" of university life untouched by reality, but we prefer to phrase it in a different manner. We take the expression from Max Weber's "Science as vocation" and argue that because politicians and academics "serve different gods" (see Weber [1918], 2004), they

¹ Even as late as in 1970's many scholars in the United States believed that the problem of racial underrepresentation in politics will solve itself through "one man—one vote" principle and a just mechanism of aggregating voters preferences (see: Philips 1993, Introduction).

vary significantly in the way they think about the same problems. That theorists and parliamentarians are worlds apart is one of the main reasons why so many theoretical ideas on how to improve contemporary democracy are rarely implemented: they are simply at odds with the people who are supposed to do it.

As both theorists and parliamentarians work in an environment of imperfect information, the constructivist approach has both advantages and disadvantages. Much like any actor embedded in their social milieu, parliamentarians are likely to define reality as they have personally experienced it. In the midst of their political network, parliamentarians may not recognize all potential conceptions of DR—insider's knowledge can act as blinders to the entirety of the social scene. However, insider's knowledge also enables unique insights that are hidden from outsiders' view. Moreover, analysis of DR guided entirely by theorists can serve to reinforce preconceptions that should be redefined (Charmaz 1983: 110–111). In this sense, the advantages of the constructivist approach outweigh the disadvantages.

The Social Worlds of Theorists and Parliamentarians

Political Theorists' Social World

Political theorists living in academia enjoy a relatively high level of free expression which is rooted in a traditionally respected autonomy of the university. They are not responsible to the citizenry at large, but rather to a group of largely academic specialists in their field and to “the world of ideas.” Even that limited constituency to which they are accountable cannot so easily deprive them of their position if their ideas do not meet with widespread approval. Since in most cases political theorists are not government officials they are free to disapprove of official policies and can even suggest radical changes to the very democratic enterprise on which the state is based. At the same time there is no direct necessity to implement the suggested reforms—producing actionable policy ideas is an option, not a necessity.

One may argue that growing economic pressure and marketization of universities force academics to abide by free market rules; the result is a loss of academic autonomy. Universities and other academic institutions are increasingly dependent on state funds or external resources such as grants from private companies (Furedi 2004). Yet, this process has not blurred the differences in positions occupied by theorists and practitioners of political life (Brown and Malone 2004).

Parliamentarians' Social World

Contemporary mass democracy exercises some pressures on political actors that theorists do not feel. Above all, freedom of expression for politicians is constricted by their own political interest and accountability to the citizenry. The notion of accountability lies at the very heart of a representative government and creates fierce disputes over what representation actually means (Pennock and Chapman 1968: Chapter 1). Unlike academics, politicians are accountable to a constituency consisted of citizens

who, via the democratic succession of political actors, have the power to deprive the elected member of his or her position. Far from freedom, politicians are often forced to oppose an idea they personally value in order to keep in lockstep with the opinion or interest of their constituency.²

Differing levels of constraint within the parliamentarians' social world leads to a couple hypotheses. First, parliamentarians are charged with the omnipresent and inescapable burden of creating laws that impact the lives of their constituency; we assume that parliamentarians are continually reminded of and thinking about their practical duties. Thus, *while we expect differences within the parliament in how parliamentarians conceptualize DR, the vast majority will be relentlessly practical*. Second, in a post-communist context such as Poland, faith in democracy is as much due to a love of Western political systems as it is a reaction against the Communist past (see Kurczewski 2000). Thus, as functionaries and representatives of the democratic state, *we also expect parliamentarians to place considerable faith in the democratic process as the sole mechanism to solve unequal representation*.

Descriptive Representation: Theorists' Conceptions

Detractors

Descriptive representation has been criticized on various grounds (as catalogued by Pitkin 1972, Mansbridge 1999, 2003 and Bird 2003). Most common is that demographics are not valid political categories as demographic qualities bear little or no relationship to deliberative capabilities. According to this logic, all legislators have the capacity to legislate on behalf of even the most dissimilar others. For the detractors, there is no direct—or legitimate—route from DR to adequate substantive representation, i.e. representation of interests. At worst, the link between descriptive and substantive representation may lead to unacceptable forms of discrimination. Others of this ilk argue that by overemphasizing group differences DR erodes the bonds among legislators whose job it is to produce policies for all—rather than a demographic subset—of their constituency.

Other complaints focus on the difficulties of implementing DR. Choosing which groups from a multiplicity of genders, races, ethnicities, religions, age groups, physical handicaps, and social classes are worthy of DR could be so complex that random or arbitrary assignment to legislative bodies is the only reasonable solution (Andweg 2003: 149; Philips 1995, chap. 2). Some fear that implementation of this form of representation would lead to a selection of less qualified legislators drawn from the bottom of the talent pool. Akin to this is the argument that descriptive representatives vary as much within their group—including multiple social identities such as Muslim

² Not all parliamentarians are equally constrained. We note that some parliamentarians have gathered enough political capital that they are freer than their colleagues to express contrary opinions and that some parliamentarians are popular because they act less restrained than their *Sejm*-chamber colleagues (see also Kurczewski 2000).

lower class woman, or young Silesian émigré, and other likely permutations—as they do between groups. In its implementation, DR oversimplifies a complex set of demographics, leaving some subgroups underrepresented and discriminated against, thereby undermining the very purpose for which it was intended. Its critics therefore maintain that only fair and “difference-blind” procedures of liberal democracy can lead to truly representative government.

Proponents

Proponents of DR reply to these arguments by asserting that, in most cases, those elected officials who share similar demographic and experiential characteristics of their constituency have the sufficient empathy to evaluate and construct representative policy (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995; Young 1990). In this sense, demographics are valid political categories, and political structures should encourage representation by empathetic demographic insiders. In contrast, delegative representation makes no provisions for demographic representation, relying instead on the stewardship of sympathetic demographic outsiders (Birch 2001). By its direct link to substantive representation, DR safeguards the interests of the disadvantaged and ameliorates inequitable social conditions by providing historically marginalized groups opportunities to become political elites. Diversity is good, and enhances the whole of democracy.

Counter to criticisms of detractors, DR is not an absurd call for an exact microcosm of the citizenry, “such that children represent children, lunatics represent lunatics” (Bird 2003). The goal is (a) substantive representation through making the legislative body demographically closer to the citizenry and (b) situation specific selection of groups in need of representation made after careful, rational deliberation and under particular conditions (Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999). Some explain this phenomenon in terms of legitimacy, in that “constituents are more likely to identify with the legislature and to defer to its decisions to the extent that they perceive a significant percentage of ‘people like themselves’ in the legislature” (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005: 413–414). As for faith in democracy, proponents of DR argue that if structured inequalities in political accession are not overcome, then these inequalities will be infinitely maintained.

Proponents argue that DR makes a measurable difference in the representation of the disadvantaged (Mansbridge 2005; Ogmundson 2005: 319–323). Any impact of descriptive representation could be felt in two main ways: (a) raising constituents’ political engagement and (b) descriptive representatives’ impact on legislative processes. While some find that descriptive representatives make little difference in either of these areas (Lawless 2004; Swain 1995), others show that descriptive representatives do have a measurable impact. In terms of raising constituents’ political engagement, whites and blacks in the U.S. are more likely to contact representatives of the same race (Gay 2002) and women are more likely to become politically active in the American states with competitive and visible women candidates (Atkeson 2003). As for impacting legislative processes, research is mixed on whether demographic characteristics influence roll-call behavior, but is more definitive on policy introduction

(for a review, see Swers 2002: 7–17 and Reynolds 1999: 548). Partisanship seems to have a larger impact on roll-call voting than demographic ties to their constituency (Hero and Tolbert 1999). African Americans consistently vote more liberally than whites and support more African American issue bills, a phenomenon dating back to Reconstruction-era America (Cobb and Jenkins 2001). Swers' (2002) study of the policy impacts of women legislators strongly suggests that women are more likely to introduce women's issues and feminist bills into legislative consideration than their male colleagues.

Data and Methods

In order to discover politicians' arguments for and against DR we use data from the Polish Parliamentary WebSurvey 2005—a survey of Polish parliamentarians in the *Sejm* on their attitudes on democracy and descriptive representation (N = 86), conducted June–July 2005, before the elections in the autumn of that year. The publicly available webpage of the *Sejm* provided the sampling frame of potential respondents. By the standards of studies of elites, the response rate of 19 percent is a bit lower than average (for a discussion on problems with securing interviews with politicians, see Maisel and Stone 1998). However, the WebSurvey is representative of the 2001 *Sejm* (see Appendix), reducing the problems of selection bias (Winship and Mare 1992).

The questionnaire was in Polish and consisted of a total of 10 questions, seven of which were fixed-choice. A research team constructed a webpage where parliamentarians, invited to participate via email, could access the survey. The survey was on one webpage, as opposed to multiple webpages, meaning that respondents had the opportunity to pick and choose which questions they want to answer, much like a paper and pencil survey.

In a sense we ask both theorists and parliamentarians the same question: what are the arguments for and against descriptive representation? For theorists, the answers lie in their academic work. For parliamentarians, the answers are coded in their response to the survey question, “What arguments for and against the idea that the Polish parliament should mirror the composition of the society are voiced in your parliamentary club?” For the open-ended questions, although no limit was set, responses were brief, ranging from one to three sentences. We view the brevity of their responses as encapsulating, in a pithy manner, the essence of their thinking.

Our coding methods are based on the Chicago school of symbolic interactionism, emphasizing the need to “get inside the actor's world and ... see the world as the actor sees it” (Meltzer and Petras 1970). In contrast with the Iowa school, which attempts to understand the individual through a series of researcher conceived categories, our constructivist minded approach allows the respondent to guide the researcher (Harris 2006). Eschewing the variable analysis of the type derided by Blumer (1956), we began our analysis by using an inductive coding method situated in grounded theory (Charmaz 1983). We identified main themes of the parliamentarians' conception of DR as voiced in their parliamentary club that continuously emerged throughout

the interviews. Then we compared the themes of DR acquired through inductive observation of the data to those identified by contemporary political theorists. We then compared our codes, discussing similarities and discrepancies in light of our criteria for the coding categories, resolving discrepantly coded cases through focused discussion.

Political Context of Polish Parliamentarians during the Post-Communist Era

Empirical research into attitudes of the intellectual elite (Krzemiński 1995) and parliamentarians (Kurczewski 2000) in the 1990s provide context for understanding early 21st Century Polish parliamentarians. Krzemiński analysed the most important challenges Poland faced in the mid-1990s as defined by the Polish intellectuals in response to a 1994 President's Office survey. He finds Polish public discourse dominated by liberal economic solutions as separated from liberal political issues (see also Szacki 1994). In an environment subjugated by economic concerns and the question of settling accounts with the Communist past, the issue of political representation had difficulty finding a foothold in public debate. Krzemiński is struck by how little Polish intellectuals cared about questions of representation: "The problems of 'human and civil rights' and constitutional guaranties of individual and minority rights were almost completely neglected in the constitutional postulates" (ibid.: 135). Kurczewski (2000: 218) supports this claim and believes that another reason behind the reluctance to discuss DR is that parliamentarians feel the idea of socio-occupational parliamentary representation is a relic of the communist propaganda. Due to illusory sovereignty of the Parliament and lack of free elections in these times, such notion was looked upon with suspicion and often ridiculed by the population at large. Yet, at one point in his article Kurczewski notices a change in regard to DR such that "there is the pressure for gender quotas on the electoral lists." (ibid.)

This is of particular importance in the light of the contemporary Polish political debate. In December 2010 the Parliament voted for 35% gender quotas on electoral lists. This decision, however, did not meet the expectations both of many academics and women activists who demanded 50% quota and regulations on gender-equitable placement on candidate lists. Prime Minister Donald Tusk's argument of why parliament did not meet the aforementioned demands was that it would be too radical in "present political circumstances." His answer brings us back to the question of differences between political theorists' and practitioners' perspectives.

How Parliamentarians Think about Descriptive Representation

In identifying the themes, we discovered that parliamentarians and theorists overlap in many of the basic arguments of DR. Yet, there are two major differences. First, parliamentarians embed their arguments in the practicalities of their job to such an extent that it is impossible to meaningfully separate theoretical ideas from their

relentlessly practical approach. Second, we find parliamentarians to be creatures so much devoted to the ideals of democracy and the practicalities of making democracy work that in response to the question, some refuse to engage in abstractions at all.

Parliamentarians' arguments fall into three main sets of themes. The first two align fairly well with that of the political theorists. The last one is so substantively unlike what political theorists have said that we feel it is a category of its own.

Detractors

A. Demographics Do Not Constitute Valid Political Categories

Like many theorist detractors, parliamentarian detractors argue that implementing DR leads to lower quality legislators: “We can’t allow poorly educated representatives to become a majority,” and, somewhat more ambiguously, “This manifests itself more in the requirement for ‘good parliamentary representation’ than it does in the thesis that a certain percentage of places on the ballot should be reserved based on social background.” They feel that “The Parliament should be made up of the most competent people, who are also honest and engaged in social issues,” with the converse being that DR leads to less competent legislators.

Yet, unlike the theorists, parliamentarians embed their comments in their faith in the democratic process. Parliamentarian arguments for acting in the ‘national interest’ were expressed as, “The Parliament has to reflect national interest. In this light, ‘reflecting’ class, age, professional or any other interests is of no significance,” and “It is only important that the politicians strive for the good of all the people, not just a particular social group.” One combined their faith in democracy with the practicalities of legislating, all the while denying demographics as a valid political category: “The Parliament has to represent the interests of the whole society, and not reflect its structure. What is discussed in the Parliament is the programs and solutions, not structures. Those are two different and separate things.”

B. Liberal Democracy Means No Discrimination

Political equality for all—in opportunities, but not outcomes—is guaranteed in the Constitutions of modern liberal democracies, Poland included. In this second major theme, parliamentarians refer to the existing democratic apparatus to explain why DR in liberal democratic states is akin to the ills of political discrimination. One referred to the Polish Constitution: “In the eyes of the Constitution, all citizens are equal independent of their gender, age, social background, income, etc. This being the case, no one should be given special favor.” Another argued that the existing electoral system, comprised of voters, voting, candidates and delegative representation, is sufficient: “The Parliament ought to represent the voters based on their own opinions, not because of them belonging to a particular social group.”

C. Be Practical

As functionaries and guardians of the democratic process, many parliamentarians are so fixated on the practicalities of policy implementation while expressing great faith

in democratic procedures that these two aspects are frequently not separated in their responses. These parliamentarians refuse to engage in abstractions. For example, “[My party is] inclined to be ‘for’. Parliament should be a democratic institution, and the foundation of democracy is the rule by the people, thus by representatives. The proportions of how that representation is made up [*sic*] is a separate question. But this is why we have elections.” One was worried about how the implementation of DR was not only problematic, but that in its implementation it would damage the already well-functioning democracy: “Election results are conclusive and there is no way to define what proportions of certain social elements should be reflected [in Parliament]. If we tried to define this, it would undoubtedly lead to attempts of manipulation.” Others admitted that even if democracy did not produce descriptive representatives, it worked well enough: “The make-up of the Parliament and Senate is decided by democracy, even if it is wobbly and not established.” One was so dismissive of the idea and so strong in their faith in the democratic process that refused to engage in any arguments whatsoever: “Why discuss this? It’s the voters who decide the make-up of the Parliament and that is way democracy works.”

Proponents

A. Demographics Do Constitute Valid Political Categories

Proponents are more apt to argue that it is the duty of parliament to speak for the disadvantaged. Some argued simply that DR is necessary for “Equality between sexes.” Others were more elaborate, claimed that DR is “Looking out for the interests of the poorest social groups, those that do not have the power to break out of deprivation, and fighting against the liberalization of the economy as well as the deepening of social differences.” One connected the idea of disadvantaged groups as more likely to receive lesser economic resources with practical thinking about the economic cost of running and winning seats in parliament: “Financially weaker candidates definitely have less of a chance in the fight for the seat.”

B. Diversity is Good (and Practical)

In agreeing with the theorists on the virtues of demographic diversity in politics, not one parliamentarian expressed this in abstract terms; rather, they promoted the idea solely via the belief that diversity made legislating better. While some stated that “It’s necessary to look at various issues from different points of view” (or, conversely, “[the current situation] does not provide a proper reflection of all the various of points of view”) and that descriptive representatives have “Familiarity with the problems connected with a wide variety of issues,” another argued that descriptive representatives are better equipped to recognize the consequences of legislation that directly impact them: “Parliament often makes decisions regarding the problems of particular social groups rather than all the citizens of the country. The representatives of these particular interests can better recognize the dangers and problems that result from these decisions.” Another argued that “voters like a younger representation (...) because it is more dynamic and engages in action more quickly.” We note that the parliamentar-

ians used words like “necessary” and “issues,” words that come from their day-to-day lives in making priorities and solving “problems.”

Other Themes from Detractors and Proponents

There are four sub-themes that fall outside of the theorists conceptions of DR. The first three deal with the very premise of this topic, which a substantial number of parliamentarians consider trivial, self-evident, or neither. There are three of these: (1) denial (it is obviously false), (2) full acceptance (it is obviously true), and (3) ignorance (there is no discussion whatsoever). The fourth sub-theme deals with the socialist past.

A. Denial (Obviously False)

Some parliamentarians who responded to the questionnaire seemed surprised by our inquiry which in their opinion referred to an entirely artificial concern having no bearing on reality. This position assumed two slightly different forms. One of them was a simple objection and a flat denial of the problem. In perhaps the most explicit example of the opposition between theorists and parliamentarians, one argued that “The Parliament does reflect the make-up of the society,” and added “This is an artificial problem that perhaps is of interest for scientific research and nothing more.” The other denial we received referred to the faith in democratic procedures and in this sense was somehow similar to those opposing DR by reference to existing democratic apparatus. One of the MP’s stated that “The Parliament is chosen in elections by the citizens, and as such it assembles representatives of various classes and societal strata from all regions of the nation.” Although he added that “certain candidate requirements should be defined such as education and experience within the framework of the national administration” the message in this case was fairly clear—the problem of unequal representation obviously does not exist and could not even appear in a properly functioning democracy such as Poland.

B. Full Acceptance (Obviously True)

Others argued the exact opposite. In full acceptance, the problem of DR is in obvious need of a solution and, for that reason, the “pros and cons” are not even worth discussing in their parliamentary club. “There are no opposing arguments,” said one. Another parliamentarian shared the point of view: “There’s no argument. My party is for it.” From this perspective they see the issue as self-evident—Parliament should mirror the composition of society. One of the parliamentarians assured us that their party was already addressing the problem and for that reason did not discuss it any more: “This topic isn’t discussed—in putting together a ticket we try to reach out to representatives from the most diverse backgrounds.”

C. Ignorance (No Discussion Whatsoever)

By far the largest faction of parliamentarians we included into this category claimed that the question of DR is rarely, if ever, discussed in their parties. This is similar to

one of the aforementioned in which the respondent claimed that in his party there are no arguments raised about DR because it is simply “for it.” However, the quotes placed in this section show us clearly that this time the reason for lack of debate is not DR’s unanimous acceptance but rather ignorance towards it. One of the respondents stated that he has “not come across such arguments.” Others maintained that “There is no special discussion on this topic” or that “There was no such discussion” while yet another admitted that “Such arguments [either for or against] are not put forth in our party.” Those remaining in this group struck the same chord.

These three theme sub-categories suggest that, to some parliamentarians, DR is such a strange, unique idea that it is excluded from formal political debate. Odder still, parliamentarians can have completely different reasons for why it should be excluded. Some of our respondents relegate DR to other authorities, others claim that it may be solved indirectly by improving different areas of life, yet others ignore it, deny it or accept it to a point where no further discussion is needed. We were told that, “This is a crucial issue, but it shouldn’t be regulated with additional statutes. The real task is to educate everyone on the opportunities for which the law already provides.” Another parliamentarian echoed the Democratic Party rallying cry of the 1992 U.S. Presidential elections of, “It’s the economy, stupid!” by writing, “In my party, the motto is: ‘First, it’s the economy, stupid!’, the development of which allows the country to grow, as well as to raise the standard of living of all social groups.” In other words, DR is important, but not our problem. Living in different social worlds influences both the opinions on how to deal with certain issues and whether a given issue is even worth talking about.

D. Return to the Socialist Past

Considering the context—Poland, a former Communist Party controlled country—we expected more parliamentarians to make explicit references to the previous regime. We found only one:

The Parliament is a legislative body, whose aim is to create laws for all citizens, not for the special interests of any social, ethnic, religious, etc group. The state stands for all equally, whether they are red-headed or blond. If we accept the idea that the make-up of Parliament is to mirror that of society it would mean that we are returning to the time of socialist realism, where a 32-year old teacher with three children from a small town could become a representative. This is nonsense.

Possibly the timing of the survey is the reason we found only one explicit reference. The survey was conducted in 2005, one year after Poland’s accession to the European Union and years after the 2001 parliament focused on the economic and political aspects of rejoining Europe. Perhaps the general refusal to refer to the socialist past is a product of this parliament’s relentless focus on the future.

Conclusion

Theorists and parliamentarians are not always worlds apart in their thinking about DR. Among detractors and proponents, we clearly discern some overlap between political

theorists and parliamentarians. However, although the conclusion is often the same, the thought process leading to it differs very much. For most theorists the problem of DR evidently lies within the realm of the political, whereas for politicians it lies within the realm of the technical. Parliamentarians are more likely to make reference to practicalities, existing aspects of the democratic apparatus, and present an unyielding faith in democratic institutions.

This conclusion supports a general claim we expressed at the beginning of this paper—if political theorists want to appeal to policy makers, they first need to know how policy makers think. Understanding the nature of difference is a crucial first step to narrowing social worlds' divide.

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Appendix

Comparison between WebSurvey and POLCAN^a

Variable	WebSurvey	POLCAN
<i>Gender</i>		
Women	20.9	20.2
Men	79.1	79.8
<i>Age</i>		
Young (21–35)	4.7	8
Middle (36–55)	87.2	85.4
Old (56+)	7	6.5
<i>Party</i> ^b	100 ^c	100
<i>Percent of Total number of Districts</i>	93	100
<i>Candidate List Position</i>		
1–3	66.3	67.2
4–6	16.2	15.43
7+	17.5	17.37
N	86	460

^aPOLCAN covers all parliamentarian candidates from the 1986 to 2001 national legislature elections in Poland. Data include demographics, electoral status (elected or not elected), party affiliation at year of election, and position on *Sejm* candidate list. Data were collected from a variety of sources, including the official election report (*Wyniki Wyborów do Sejmu*), the official webpage of the Polish parliament (*Strona Internetowa Sejmu*), and the annual statistical almanac (*Rocznik Statystyczny*). See Zielinski et al. 2005 for more details.

^bSLD, AWS, UW, Samoobrona, PiS, PSL, PO, LPR, Mniem.

^cTo ensure confidentiality, the exact percent for each party who responded to the WebSurvey cannot be revealed. However, response rates per party closely match that of POLCAN 2001.