

# Legislatures, Legitimacy and Crises: The Relationship Between Representation and Crisis Management

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**This article presents a theoretical argument that the study of representation can yield important insights for crisis analysts. The argument is presented through a claim that the representative systems, legislatures and individuals of a state – defined here broadly as ‘representative institutions’ – should be factored into political analyses of crisis management, as they provide a lens for novel explorations of crisis issues. In particular, the use of parliamentary perspectives, and the examination of specific legislature functions during crises, can lead to valuable insights into the legitimacy dynamics that characterize political crisis episodes.**

## 1. The emergence of political perspectives in crisis analysis

The majority of crisis management literature remains characterized by a strong orientation towards technical, managerial and organizational studies, which tend to be rational, positivistic and designed for the practitioners of crisis management (e.g., Palm & Ramsell, 2007; Mayer, Moss, & Dale, 2008; Moynihan, 2008). However, the starting point for the analysis within this article is the claim that political perspectives are crucial to understanding crisis episodes and that many non-executive, non-bureaucratic institutions and actors can shape state-led responses to crisis. Such a claim is neither novel nor exclusive to this article. Studies of the changing nature of crises and contingencies have shown over a number of years that government crisis responses are becoming more political and polycentric in terms of the numbers and ‘mix’ of actors (’tHart, Heyse, & Boin, 2001, pp. 181–182; McConnell & Stark, 2002, p. 664; Boin, ’tHart, Stern, & Sundelius, 2005, p. 47).

The increasing diversity and politicization of crisis management has a number of implications for analysts.

First, broader conceptualizations of what crisis management is and who is involved warrant investigations into non-executive, ‘non-operational’ institutions that may be germane to the ‘bigger picture’ of crisis resolution. Second, new analytical lenses are required because crisis scholarship, as always, ‘implies shooting at a moving target ... [as] the borderlines between the familiar territory of crisis analysis and the vast expanses of mainstream political, administrative and organizational theory begin to blur’ (’tHart et al., 2001, p. 185). Third, as politics increasingly intrudes into the technical realms of crisis management and, conversely, as political rewards and punishments are increasingly attached to the performance of state crisis managers, so the utility of political science approaches for crisis analysis has grown. To some extent, these implications have been recognized academically as the field of crisis management has evolved.

However, the case can be made that certain political perspectives and institutions remain largely ‘forgotten’ in the consideration of crisis management. This finds reflection in the simple fact that studies of state-led crisis responses exhibit a predisposition towards the

examination of executive decision-making, bureaucratic implementation and relationships within 'operational' or 'front-line' networks. The purpose of this article, therefore, is to begin to redress this imbalance by extending the 'political' and the 'polycentric' perspective in an entirely new direction. This can be done through the championing of one core claim: that representative institutions should be factored into the analysis of crisis management, as they can play a practical role in the politics and operations of a crisis response, and also provide a lens for theoretical and analytical explorations of crisis issues.

Before laying out the steps that the article takes to forward this argument, it is first necessary to define what is meant here by the term representative institution. As a unit of analysis, the representative institution is defined here in a rather elastic sense in order to focus on three dimensions of representation. First, the definition covers what could be called the 'standard' interpretation, namely the national or the regional legislature or assembly, within which we must examine how collective, interactive political behaviour produces outputs relevant to crisis management. Following on from this, the definition also encompasses individual elected members who are 'constituency-facing'. In this regard, the definition allows an analysis of more direct linkages between individual citizens, localized concerns and the state during crises. Third, the definition covers the norms, values and informal rules that are reflected through the representative system (legitimacy, authorization and accountability, for example). In this regard, the definition is being stretched, to some extent, so that the formal dimensions of representation noted above are complemented by analyses of more informal, tacit influences on political and bureaucratic behaviour. The article examines each of these three dimensions – assembly, individual and system – under the one definition and presents a number of claims about their relevance to the management of crises. However, as a pretext to this discussion, the importance of representative institutions, the rationale for analysing them during crises and the conceptual connections between representation and crisis management are outlined immediately below.

## 2. The study of representative institutions: unfashionable but not unimportant

The absence of representative institutions within crisis management studies is noticeable but not entirely unexpected, given the nature of the political crisis management literature. Existing research pertaining to crises makes occasional reference to representative assemblies, particularly in relation to post-crisis

accountability and the social construction or the 'framing' of crisis narratives (Jackson, 1976, p. 226; Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p. 293; Boin et al., 2005, p. 108; Resodihardjo, 2006, p. 199). However, while reference is made to parliaments in many studies, only one piece of research (at the time of writing) offers any substantive analysis of their role (Staelraeve & 'tHart, 2008). Outside of this solitary effort, representative assemblies are usually referred to incidentally, as a footnote within research concerned with other crisis management issues or as passive institutions – neutral parts of the empirical landscape rather than units of analysis worthy of any sustained attention (see Brändström & Kuipers, 2003; Boin et al., 2005; Resodihardjo, 2006). Admittedly, representative institutions and parliamentarians cannot (and should not) be considered to be priority responders in an emergency. However, the lack of parliamentary consideration within crisis research is still peculiar when considered against the high frequency of incidental references to legislatures that appear across crisis literatures. The existence of such references, and the almost total absence of detailed research, provides one strong rationale for making representative institutions a unit of analysis in their own right, even if the eventual outcome is to discount them entirely as a source of interest for crisis scholars.

To some extent, the tendency of crisis researchers to 'skate over' the potential role of the representative institution is indicative of the nature of political science writ large. As the *de rigueur* concept of 'governance' has grown within political science, perspectives on the state have emerged that, *inter alia*, present a picture of many Western European political landscapes as 'post-parliamentary' (see Gallagher, Laver, & Mair, 2006, p. 81; Judge, 1999, p. 121; Norton, 2005, p. 2). Correspondingly, the declining importance and popularity of national parliaments has been emphasized (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003, p. 198; Hay, 2007, p. 28). Those political scientists who have turned their attention to the management of crises over the past two decades have undoubtedly been conditioned by this context – their work reflects as much in that the familiar pre-occupation with policy science and public administration often comes at the expense of 'old' institutional analysis. Indeed, the increasing use of 'post-parliamentary' perspectives by political science academics, and the preference they are given in political crisis studies, suggests that while politics may be crucial to an understanding of contemporary crisis management, representative institutions may not be essential to an understanding of contemporary politics.

Doubts about the relevance of representative institutions to political life, however, can be dispelled from the outset by reiterating the classic (and irrefutable) argument that the principles and practice of representation constitute 'an essential term in the language of

legitimation used by decision makers to establish their credentials to act on behalf of those not actually present at the point of decision, and also to assert their responsibility and accountability for decisions taken' (Judge, 1999, p. 19). Political scientists must appreciate this importance because the major problem for the kind of 'post-parliamentary' perspectives preferred by crisis researchers remains: they do not forward alternatives to the essential legitimation generated through a representative system. Without such alternatives, political life within a liberal democracy cannot be labelled 'post-parliamentary' and the relevance of representation to politics cannot be understated. While the role of state institutions is certainly changing and is becoming more complex in an era of governance, this should not be equated to a reduction in importance as they still 'retain crucial legitimating and co-coordinating roles' (Lister & Marsh, 2006, p. 255).

Ultimately, the claim that emerges from the simple logic of legitimation is straightforward. Representation is important to understandings of politics and governance. Governance and politics are important to understandings of contemporary crisis management. Representative institutions should therefore be considered potentially relevant to analyses of crisis management. This argument can be developed further because certain crisis analysts and parliamentary scholars, despite existing in isolation from each other, share an interest in legitimacy.

### 3. Bridging the analytical 'divide': legitimacy and legitimation

The strongest shared concern between the study of crises and representation is undoubtedly legitimacy. As already noted, arguments about the importance of representative institutions in a modern polity often return to the irrefutable claim that such institutions are important because of the legitimation they provide government actions (Packenham, 1990, p. 86; Judge, 1999, p. 2; Flinders, 2002, p. 38). On the other side of the analytical 'divide', certain scholars use legitimacy as a referent within their crisis definitions. Thus crises are conceptualized as 'a breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political order' (tHart, 1993, p. 40) or as 'dynamic forces in ongoing processes of legitimization, delegitimation and re-legitimation' (tHart & Boin, 2001, p. 31). Other studies use legitimacy as an analytical tool to explore certain political and policy-oriented dynamics. Studies relating to policy sectors, for example, use legitimacy to explain how 'institutional crises' are caused within government (Alink, Boin, & tHart, 2001). Indeed, the definition of an institutional crisis presented by these authors outlines how 'a policy sector is in crisis when

its institutional structure experiences a relatively strong decline and unusually low levels of legitimacy' (Alink et al., 2001, p. 290). Legitimation is also an issue in analyses of network responses to crisis (de Vroom, 2001, p. 530) because of a perceived need to legitimize crisis policy in the eyes of all of those involved in a variegated multi-agency response. Another important strand of research examines the interaction between leadership decisions and legitimacy (Jackson, 1976; Hansén & Stern, 2001; Rosenthal, Boin, & Comfort, 2001). Such studies suggest that a mutually reinforcing relationship exists between the decisions made in one period of a crisis episode and the legitimacy that actors and organizations experience in another. Regardless of their different nuances, the point of interest about these studies is that when considered as a whole, they indicate that 'the currency of crisis is legitimacy' (Boin, 2004, p. 167).

This shared concern with legitimacy reinforces the claim that representative institutions can be a useful lens for the study of crisis management. For a discipline in relative infancy, a representative lens offers a number of specific advantages over other 'post-parliamentary' political approaches. One of the most significant advantages is that representation can be used to examine legitimacy in 'micro', 'meso' and 'macro' terms simultaneously, which has been a goal of certain crisis scholars for some time (see, e.g., Hansén & Stern, 2001, p. 179). Each of these levels will now be examined in the context of another claim – that representative institutions are important to the management of crises because of their ability to influence the legitimacy of political objects.

### 4. The 'macro' level: representative systems, 'diffuse support' and crises

The representative system can be viewed as a mechanism capable of generating 'diffuse support' (Easton, 1965), which, it is argued below, provides a number of benefits for the management of crises. Diffuse support was first defined by David Easton as a widespread form of attachment to political objects that is unconnected to specific political or policy outputs. Instead, diffuse support is grounded in more 'rudimentary', 'psychic or symbolic' beliefs about the appropriateness of liberal democracy. Support of this nature is primarily produced through evaluations of the political 'rules of the game', which are in turn partly formalized through the structures, ideologies and institutions of a representative system.

Representative structures can generate diffuse support by allowing members of a polity to express conflicting points of view; to vent grievances; to mobilize support for demands; and to influence centres of

authority (Easton, 1965, pp. 251–256). To a large extent, however, diffuse support can also be attributed to a tacit acceptance of the liberal–democratic principles that underpin political structures, even if such principles are not always observable in operation. In this regard, Easton draws attention towards a ‘legitimizing ideology’, which he defines as ‘ethical principles that justify the way power is organized, used and limited and that define the broad responsibilities expected of the participants of particular relationships’ (Easton, 1965, p. 292). Such values validate the exercise of power because they are widely accepted as ‘right and proper’ by the citizens of a state. Thus, the symbolic and ideological values underpinning representative democracy generate support for the practice of representative government, and yet the principles and the practice need not correlate in reality for legitimacy to be created (see Judge, 2004). Nevertheless, the combination of structures that satisfy citizen demands and/or reflect socially approved values can reduce political discontent and perform a stress-reducing function in a political system.

Parliamentary scholars have reinforced Easton’s logic in relation to representative institutions. A series of international studies, using quantitative and qualitative research methods, have concluded that legislatures, as the centre pieces of their representative systems, are capable of attracting diffuse support and that such support can ‘affect the propensity of populations to accept the existing political order (Loewenberg & Patterson, 1979, pp. 290–291) and facilitate the acceptance of other political objects within a system’ (Muller, 1970, p. 1166; Loewenberg, 1971, p. 183; Cotta, 1974, p. 216).

Clearly, the argument that representative systems contribute to the generation of diffuse support and legitimacy in a liberal democracy is hardly original. However, the concern here is directed towards the potential consequences that diffuse support may have in terms of the management of crises.

## 5. Diffuse support and the avoidance of crises

A common thread throughout social science literatures on legitimacy is the recognition that it cultivates compliance, obedience and the acceptance of bureaucratic authority among the citizens of a nation (Weber, 1961; Easton, 1965; Beetham, 1991). Compliance performs a role in the daily maintenance of a political system by engendering a predisposition among the population to accept and obey political institutions and outputs, even though they may run contrary to personal wants. This notion of ‘system maintenance’ brings us to an argument that diffuse support can be a

variable that influences the survival of a political system, as the attainment of citizen compliance helps to avoid ‘the constant threat of living on a precipice of disorder’. Compliance in this sense exists ‘regardless of what members may feel about the wisdom of the actions of authorities, obedience may flow from some rudimentary convictions about the appropriateness of the political order of things. One simply ought to obey the authorities and abide by the basic political rules; no alternative is conceivable since it is the right thing to do. They are legitimate’ (Easton, 1965, pp. 279–280).

The relevance of this ‘system maintenance function’ to crisis management should be relatively clear. A high degree of diffuse support permeating within a state will promote political stability and reduce the likelihood of certain types of crisis (civil unrest; revolution; coup d’état; and political violence). Thus, diffuse support and legitimacy, promoted through representative components, can help provide a stable framework within which crises can be moderated or even avoided. Evidence in support of this claim can be found quite easily by examining the counterfactual: what happens when a system does not enjoy diffuse support or when regime legitimacy has eroded significantly? David Beetham (1991, p. 28) points to the collapse of the USSR’s control of Eastern Europe to highlight how the absence of legitimacy tends to be compensated for via a system of incentives, sanctions and force, which is ultimately unsustainable. Similarly, a simple comparison between Western Europe and many sub-Saharan, central American or Caucus states highlights how the absence of diffuse support can be detected through the frequency of large-scale breaches of order, political violence and revolution.

## 6. Diffuse support and state resilience

The occurrence of a crisis episode can lead to withdrawals of support for specific authorities and actors. However, it can be argued that diffuse support can provide a political system with the ability to ‘cope through’ or ‘bounce back’ from crises that damage or destroy its sub-components. According to Easton (1965, p. 249), systems can overcome ‘stress and disturbance’ because diffuse support can be thought of as a ‘a reservoir of good will upon which a system may draw credit in times when things are going badly from the point of view of providing satisfactions for the members of a system’. David Beetham also speculates that:

Enhanced order, stability, effectiveness – these are the typical advantages that accrue to a legitimate system of power as a result of the obligations upon subordinates that derive from its legitimacy. ‘Order’

depends upon people obeying rather than disobeying. 'Stability' is not mere longevity, but a system's ability to withstand shock and failure because a solid level of support from its subordinates can be guaranteed. 'Effectiveness' includes the ability of the powerful to achieve their goals (Beetham, 1991, p. 33, emphasis added).

The argument stemming from these works is that regime legitimacy and diffuse support can help the state as a whole to overcome the 'stress and disturbance' and 'shock and failure' caused by smaller-scale crises that damage individual authorities. The importance of diffuse support in this context should not be underestimated because it is a source of positive sentiment largely unconnected to policy and political outputs. This distinction is important because many crises will themselves be caused or accentuated by the failure of bureaucratic and political outputs and the authorities responsible for them. Diffuse support can ensure that the system as a whole remains resilient in the face of delegitimizing criticisms directed at its specific sub-components. Illustrative case examples in this regard are plentiful. Consider the 2001 Foot and Mouth epidemic in the United Kingdom, for example, which has become known (rightly or wrongly) as a parabolic case study of bureaucratic failure. In the wake of that crisis, the diffuse support that the parliamentary system of the United Kingdom enjoyed meant that the system remained unaffected by the crescendo of de-legitimizing criticisms that caused the abolition of the Ministry of Agriculture and the political demise of its Minister of State.

## 7. Diffuse support and structure–agency 'overflows'

An argument can be posited that structures that generate diffuse support can create effects that 'overflow', cascading downwards to the benefit of crisis leaders and authorities.

The broad claim that larger governance structures influence specific forms of state behaviour is familiar territory for crisis and parliamentary scholars. It is argued in the United Kingdom, for example, that the principles of parliamentary democracy shape political behaviour by affecting how politicians and bureaucrats perceive themselves and their environment (Marsh, Richards, & Smith, 2001, p. 28; Richards & Smith, 2002, p. 48; Judge, 2004, p. 687). In this regard, constitutional rules, such as the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, even though they are 'mythical' in nature in certain respects, remain 'imbued in the psyche of politicians and bureaucrats alike' because elites remain 'surrounded, encompassed and ultimately delimited by

the legitimating frame of the parliamentary system itself' (Judge, 1993, pp. 125–126). Similar arguments can be found in certain crisis literatures that stress how larger paradigms of governance cannot be ignored when explaining regulatory regime pre-crisis (Hood, Rothstein, & Baldwin, 2001, p. 5), acute decision making during crises ('tHart, 1994, ix) and post-event learning in the aftermath stages (Stern, 1997, p. 75). Both strands of analysis indicate that the behaviour of state crisis leaders can be affected by the surrounding framework and ideology of a representative system. Two specific propositions are suggested here about this relationship, which suggest that diffuse support can overflow from structure to agency in a positive sense.

First, constitutional rules that facilitate diffuse support, to some extent, can help regulate or moderate extreme forms of elite behaviour during crises. This is because the benefits of diffuse support do not materialize solely through the compliance of the masses. Those with power must also be seen to operate (to some extent) within the empirical boundaries and ideological principles of the 'rules of the game' that facilitate diffuse support in the first place. The *quid pro quo* for acquiescence from the masses, therefore, is an obligation from those within the state to adhere (again to some extent) to the legitimizing morality underpinning a political system. Indeed, such 'exchange' relationships, whether actual or symbolic in nature, lie at the heart of the concept of legitimacy (Parsons, 1961; Suchman, 1995). This is an important point, relevant to periods of crisis as bureaucratic or political leaders often assume extraordinary powers in order to restore the status quo.

Second, the compliance of citizens to specific authorities and their policy outputs, generated because of their place within a legitimate state structure, can improve the effectiveness of state-led crisis responses. Policy effectiveness is not achieved merely through the application of resources and technology – the legitimacy of decision takers is also important. Indeed:

Where the powerful have to concentrate most of their efforts on maintaining order, they are less able to achieve other goals; their power is to that extent less effective. The classroom teacher provides a typical example. If pupils do not share a belief in the value of education, on which the justification for the teacher's power is based, or have no respect for the individual teacher, he or she will have to devote correspondingly greater energies to maintaining order than teaching. To that extent the purposes for which power is held will not be achieved, and this may lead in turn to a further erosion of legitimacy (Beetham, 1991, p. 28).

Beetham's example is instructive as it draws attention once again to the correlation between policy effectiveness

and legitimacy during crises. Evidence from studies of crises and legitimacy shows how incumbent authorities charged with finding crisis management solutions can become caught in a self-reinforcing dynamic or 'vicious circle' where shortfalls in legitimacy lead to reductions in policy effectiveness and reductions in effectiveness worsen levels of legitimacy (Beetham, 1991, p. 29; Rosenthal, 'tHart, & Kouzmin, 1991, p. 14; Hansén & Stern, 2001; Rothstein, 2003, p. 333). For Beetham, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe provided another worthwhile example of how policy measures could fail without the backing of structural legitimacy and diffuse support. Explanations of the failed attempts at economic reform within these states, according to Beetham, have to remain cognizant of the fact that those 'governments had insufficient legitimacy to demand the short-term sacrifices, or risk instituting the price rises, necessary to the development of a market-orientated system . . . the failure of economic reform in turn further eroded the system's legitimacy' (Beetham, 1991, p. 29). Similarly, Rothstein (2003, pp. 333–334) has argued that economic crises in many Latin American countries stem from a 'vicious cycle' of weak legitimacy for public administrators compounding poor policy implementation. Diffuse support, however, provides a normative base, built upon tacitly accepted democratic principles, that ensures that at least a majority of decisions receive at least a minimum level of compliance (Easton, 1965, p. 301). Thus, what Hanberger (2003) defines as 'legitimacy capital' does improve the quality of crisis decision making and response implementation by ensuring that crisis leaders avoid the 'vicious circle' caused by shortfalls in legitimacy and effectiveness.

## 8. 'Meso'-level functions: representative assemblies, 'associated outputs' and crises

Institutional or 'meso'-level functions performed by collectivities of representatives within their assemblies can also play a part in the resolution of crises. These functions can again be connected to the management of crises through the concept of legitimacy. However, the shift in analytical focus downwards, from representative systems to assemblies, means that the discussion below is built around notions of 'output' legitimacy, 'specific support' and 'associated outputs'.

The concept of output legitimacy is based on the idea that legitimacy has a rational utilitarian dimension. From this viewpoint, legitimacy is predicated on a relationship between an audience's needs, wants and demands on the one hand and the behaviour of those authorities capable of meeting such needs on the other (see Hanberger, 2003). Similarly, 'specific support' is also

based on evaluations of 'the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style' of those authorities that produce discernible political outputs (Easton, 1975, p. 437).

Obviously, the outputs of crisis management authorities will have a bearing on the legitimacy dynamics that characterize a crisis. If an authority is blamed for causing or exacerbating a serious event, for example, support and confidence in that authority may wilt, its output legitimacy and its own store of specific support may decline, and reforms can take place. Conversely, positive dynamics can also occur. Crises may expose authorities or individuals performing heroically, for example, and these authorities may benefit from groundswells in support and output legitimacy. Two types of output – 'authoritative' and 'associated' – are particularly relevant in relation to specific support (Easton, 1965, p. 353). Authoritative outputs refer to binding decisions and actions such as laws, decrees, regulations, orders and judicial decisions – these can be considered to be the conventional tools of state crisis management. Associated outputs can be understood as transactions or exchanges between a political system and its environment that can influence the acceptance or rejection of authoritative outputs. Examples include policy statements and debates, media communications, the articulation of ideological rationales and persuasive forms of political rhetoric. In all examples, the importance of the associated output relates to a capacity to mobilize or erode support for authoritative action and, according to Easton, 'they make the difference between acceptance and rejection' (Easton, 1965, p. 358).

Any argument that claims that representative assemblies formulate and implement authoritative outputs during a crisis is likely to run into problems. The assumption inherent in that claim would be that representative assemblies are policymaking institutions. This contention, while relevant to normative prescription and even certain atypical assemblies, such as the US Congress, has been exposed empirically as a rather naïve description of the practice of most representative assemblies, particularly those that operate within parliamentary systems (Mezey, 1979, pp. 21–44). Therefore, in order to discover the relevance of representative assemblies to the management of crises, we must search for associated output functions that are relevant to legitimacy and support, but not explicitly connected to the formulation of policy. Classic pieces of parliamentary literature can aid this process.

Following Easton, parliamentary scholars in the United States moved beyond a mono-functional preoccupation with policymaking towards assessments that focused on a range of outputs particularly applicable to the concept of support. In the preamble to these publications, these authors all assert that a preoccupation with law-making and authoritative outputs

as the primary unit of legislature analysis 'hid from inquiry such latent functions as consensus-building, interest aggregation, catharsis for anxieties and resentments, the crystallisation and resolution of conflicts, and the legitimisation of decisions made elsewhere in the political system' (Eulau & Hinckley, 1966, p. 85, see also Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, & LeRoy, 1962; Jewell & Patterson, 1973). These functions are associated outputs and appear to be far more applicable to modern modes of crisis management than the 'traditional' law-making role.

## 9. Conflict management: parliamentary catharsis and deliberation

The popular characterization of crises as periods of conflict (Rosenthal et al., 1991, p. 213; Boin et al., 2005, p. 58) allows for the argument that associated outputs could play a conflict management role during a crisis episode. Conflict management functions can be considered to be associated outputs because they can affect public or elite perceptions at various stages of a crisis management process. For example, parliaments often act as cathartic 'safety valves', which can allow those affected by crises to purge anxieties and 'let off steam'. This function, perhaps more than any other, appears to be salient to the management of crisis because the process of airing grievances can allow public tensions and negative perceptions to dissipate in a regulated and controlled fashion. Political authorities cannot accede to the demands of all interests, sometimes not even partially, but the ability of a representative assembly to publicly air such demands can have a number of positive effects. Classic forms of parliamentary research, for example, have recorded how legislatures reduced tensions among the general public that may have developed into 'attacks on public order' (Smith, 1938, p. 187) and also documented how the failure to allow excluded groups a voice within legislatures has encouraged forms of demonstration, direct action and political violence (Jewell & Patterson, 1973, p. 10). For Jewell and Patterson (1973), the absence of catharsis for black minorities in the United States was one cause of the civil rights demonstrations of the 1960s. Robinson (2002, p. 61) also argues that the UK fuel protests of 2000 – where farming and haulage groups blockaded fuel refineries, paralysing sections of the economy – were caused by a perception among farmers and hauliers that they had lost their voice within the UK political process. Moreover, the tension levels of those affected by unpalatable or authoritarian response strategies can develop into acute-stage policy resistance, which could be alleviated if citizens are allowed the opportunity to express their emotions in an appropriate setting. The representation

of crisis victims during periods of post-crisis inquiry also provides another cathartic outlet. The ability of representative channels to allow victims to express opinion and feel listened to can have implications for the type of politics that characterizes what Rosenthal (2003, p. 134) calls the post-event 'crisis after the crisis' (see also Boin et al., 2005, p. 91).

Deliberation may also enable representative assemblies to play a conflict management role. Quite simply, represented and representative attitudes could be changed by deliberation in ways that moderate the political conflicts gravitating around a crisis response. This supposition comes from the theoretical literature on deliberation that states that the assessment of differing positions and the formulation and articulation of alternatives can shape preferences and reconcile divergent views (Elster, 1998, p. 6; Rosenberg, 2007, p. 2). However, the partisan nature of representative assemblies must be taken into account when making propositions of this kind. If preferences are being modified through deliberative processes, they are perhaps more likely to be changed in a way that mirrors the partisan nature of party political life within a legislature. In these situations, political conflicts could be entrenched and polarized, rather than reduced, through parliamentary deliberation. Indeed, deliberative theorists have already indicated that deliberative processes within representative assemblies often struggle, because of their political nature, to create the ideal conditions through which deliberative outcomes can be achieved (Dryzek, 2000). Nevertheless, cathartic and deliberative functions are associated outputs with the potential to affect political and public perceptions. While unconnected to authoritative outputs or the 'core' elements of a crisis response, they can be potentially important to the legitimacy of crisis management authorities and their policies.

## 10. Parliamentary accountability and crisis framing

Parliamentary accountability mechanisms, such as committee inquiries, no-confidence motions, questions and debates, are another form of associated output relevant to the management of crises. Defining accountability mechanisms as associated output functions once again recalibrates the analytical emphasis, moving it away from policymaking. Shifting the focus in this regard is important because in many crises, the significance of such mechanisms will be overlooked if researchers seek to connect parliamentary accountability to specific examples of 'lesson learning' and reform policymaking. This is not just because the links between parliamentary procedures and authoritative outputs tend to be tenuous. The highly political nature of most post-crisis

periods can also pervert lesson-learning processes. When seeking to examine the role of parliamentary accountability, therefore, it is beneficial to first acknowledge that 'the more we know about a crisis, the less likely we are to learn from it. This is the case, because in the politics of blaming, information is tailored to be ammunition ... data are selected and moulded to construct winning arguments in a battle for political-bureaucratic survival' (tHart & Boin, 2001, p. 184).

This shift in focus reveals scrutiny mechanisms to be relevant to the management of crises as mediums of political communication rather than agents of reform or lesson learning. In this regard, accountability mechanisms can be a potent conduit for 'crisis framing' and the construction of 'crisis narratives'. The basic concept of a 'frame' refers 'to an interpretative schemata that simplifies the world out there by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of actions within one's present and past environment. In Goffman's words, frames allow individuals 'to locate perceive, identify and label events within their life space or the world at large' (Snow & Benford, 1998, p. 127; Goffman, 1974, p. 21). The primary concern within crisis literature, however, is related to framing as an instrumental process, enacted by various actors and groups embroiled in a crisis, and typically involving the 'the selective exploitation of data, arguments, and historical analogies' and the formation of 'discourse coalitions' in order to promote a particular interpretation and a corresponding remedy to a crisis; to settle the question of who is to blame; or to escalate policy failures into political crises (Boin et al., 2005, p. 82; Olmeda, 2008, p. 64).

This small but growing body of important political crisis research reinforces a claim that representative assemblies can produce associated outputs of relevance to crisis framing, which can affect legitimacy dynamics. For example, incidental references to accountability processes can be found in works relating to the development of certain types of crisis where framing processes affect the legitimacy of actors and institutions (Alink et al., 2001, p. 291; Brändström & Kuipers, 2003, p. 282; Brändström, Kuipers, & Daléus, 2008, p. 142), and in other works that refer to parliaments as venues for 'dramatic representations' of policy and political failures, which, in turn, lend themselves to acute-stage framing through the mass media (tHart, 1993, p. 38). Similar studies have noted how 'symbolic outputs' are often communicated as acute operational crisis responses are engaged. Accountability mechanisms are referred to by these scholars as mechanisms capable of providing reassurance about the competency of authorities when crisis management efforts are controversial (Jackson, 1976 pp. 226–227) or as rituals 'endowed with special symbolic meaning ... [which] shape and

conform to public perceptions of grave disturbances' (Boin et al., 2005, pp. 84–85). A perfect illustration of this function can be seen in the UK government's use of a House of Commons resolution to symbolically endorse its decision to militarily support the invasion of Iraq. Most attention, however, has been paid to framing in the post-event stages of a crisis response. Within these studies, incidental references to parliaments are plentiful, suggesting that they are likely to play a role in a collective framing process that will affect the fates of authorities in the wake of a crisis episode (Boin, McConnell, & tHart, 2008, p. 9; Olmeda, 2008, p. 65; Preston, 2008, p. 52). Indeed, Preston's (2008, p. 51) study of the blaming process in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina's mismanagement explicitly argues that the republican-controlled Congress managed to insulate senior members of the republican controlled White House from the 'lion's share of the blame'.

## 11. 'Micro'-level functions: individual representatives, associated outputs and crises

Individual representatives can also produce associated outputs of relevance to the management of crises. These 'micro-level' outputs can be produced through the constituency roles that individual parliamentarians perform, which can improve lines of communication in a crisis response. In turn, such improvements can bolster the specific support that operational 'front-line' policies and responders experience during a crisis episode. In this regard, the 'vicious circle' of weak legitimacy-poor policy implementation can be reversed into a more positive 'virtuous circle'.

Individual representatives can be important to the practical dimensions of crisis communication precisely because they act as 'transmission belts' (Norton, 2005, p. 183) or 'two-way channels of communication' (Rush, 2005, p. 251), who connect their constituents to political and bureaucratic systems. Specific constituency roles, which can improve lines of communication, and as a consequence the overall legitimacy–effectiveness relationship, can be suggested.

First, parliamentarians can mobilize, or undermine, local levels of specific support for crisis management efforts. Samuel Beer's research on local mobilization in the United States, for example, indicates that mid-term policy consent in the United States does not spring simply from the electoral process. Instead, it can be understood as the product of a continually renewed exchange of communication between local constituencies and individual representatives. Beer provides evidence of how congressional representatives explained, justified, interpreted and even adjudicated on federal policies in a local context. These local actions improved



levels of policy effectiveness by engendering consent and support for centrally created outputs (Beer, 1990, pp. 78–80). Similar evaluations of UK parliamentarians also note how individual representatives facilitate policy acceptance by providing citizens with explanations of policy (Norton, 2005, p. 191).

Second, individual representatives can also improve lines of communication between affected citizens and crisis managers by relaying local issues, concerns and grievances into response machinery. During the uncertainty of a crisis, this ‘errand running’ function is likely to become invigorated, as parliamentarians constitute a visible, familiar and accessible route to crisis managers during periods of high uncertainty. Simultaneously, the constituency-oriented parliamentarian can also be used to evaluate the effects of ongoing crisis policy and provide feedback about the effects of crisis policy in their constituencies. According to one US legislative scholar, representatives are the most sensitive receptors of feedback and ‘can most easily detect the environmental effects of public policy. Most of the “hollering” will be directed at them’ (Grumm, 1972, p. 268). Similarly, it has been argued that ‘the British MP plays an important role in feeding back information regarding the effects of ongoing policy, possibly displaying more sensitivity to some dimensions of these effects than would normally be true of the civil servants responsible for their implementation’ (Wood, 1991, p. 114). Crisis literature supports this proposition in the sense that many response stages must be governed by feedback as contingency plans will usually remain untested in a ‘live’ situation. Crisis leaders therefore must be sensitive to any sources of feedback ‘signalling both the functionality and legitimacy of the standing arrangement’ (Boin et al., 2005, p. 54). Individual representatives acting as local-central conduits can certainly aid this process.

A final operational benefit from constituency functions relates to the reduction of unhelpful forms of communication. Parliamentary members can reduce levels of communication between constituency and government (Bulpitt, 1983; Wood, 1991). Bulpitt (1983), for example, notes how systems of representation in the United Kingdom in the latter half of the 20th century can be described as a ‘dual polity’ in which politics in the centre and politics in the periphery operated in isolation of one another. In this dual polity, the MP often acted as ‘a buffer’ between the centre and the local areas and that ‘his [sic] job was to filter local grievances, virtually to cleanse them, in such a way as to make them manageable for a decision making machinery at the centre’ (Wood, 1991, p. 106). In this sense, representatives can improve crisis responses by acting as the ‘end-point’ for the frustrations of those who have suffered and or cannot be helped by crisis managers. The value of these functions is that by absorbing local

emotions, or by filtering local demands before they communicate them onwards, parliamentary members could help ‘free up’ crisis managers who are required to focus on more pressing operational concerns.

## 12. Conclusion

The importance of representative institutions to crisis management stems from the role they perform in relation to legitimation. The indispensable need for legitimacy in order to control, moderate and manage crises means that representative institutions are important to contemporary modes of crisis management. This means that for crisis scholars, pre-existing perspectives on representation and parliaments provide analytical and theoretical prisms, through which novel insights can be generated. Such perspectives can be used to explore the legitimacy–crisis management relationship in macro, meso and micro terms simultaneously, ranging through examinations of state resilience to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of ‘front-line’ operational communication. As crisis management becomes more politicized and polycentric, political science approaches will be used with more regularity by crisis analysts. Naturally, choices about the utility of such approaches will reflect contemporary fashions within political science. However, being unfashionable is not the same as being unimportant. Studies of representative institutions may not be particularly popular with today’s political scientists, but long-forgotten and prematurely discarded analytical traditions can be a useful complement to the crop of policy-oriented perspectives currently favoured by crisis scholars.

Crisis researchers should become aware of the capacity of representative institutions to perform functions relevant to crisis management. Specific research questions and designs can be suggested in this regard. It was argued above that representative structures that generate diffuse support can be considered to be a resilience capability because they provide a stable context within which crises can be contained, moderated and, perhaps, even avoided. Case-study research should be used to test the exploratory logic of this claim further, principally through comparisons of crises that have occurred in political systems that enjoy varying degrees of support. In particular, steps should be taken to establish whether variations exist in the resilience of specific authorities across systems with differing support levels. For example, comparisons can be made between crises where specific authorities have been held responsible for causing or escalating a crisis episode and subsequently attracted negative (delegitimizing) public sentiment. The hypothesis remains that the debilitating effects of the crisis would be felt far more keenly by those authorities nested within a

system lacking diffuse support. The largest issue presented by such a design is the difficulty involved in establishing the existence and degree of diffuse support within a particular political system. However, pre-existing research can provide crisis analysts with the necessary insights to select appropriate cases. Political scientists have already presented evidence that either verifies the existence of diffuse support in certain political systems or documents the facilitating conditions that create support (Klingemann, 1999; Dalton, 2004). Such works are valuable because they provide a departure point for case-study selections and comparative research into the diffuse support–resilience relationship.

The structure–agency claims made above, which suggest that the behaviour of crisis managers can be influenced by the larger representative system within which they reside, can be examined with less difficulty. Experienced crisis leaders can easily confirm or refute a suggestion that their actions during a crisis episode were influenced by the existence of representative processes or values. The fundamental question in this regard is whether or not decision-making authority and autonomy on the ‘front-line’ are strengthened by the existence of legitimating representative functions. For example, is acute-stage decision making influenced by the existence of an electoral mandate, a parliamentary majority or scrutiny mechanisms that allow crisis leaders to explain their actions publicly? If crisis managers believe that their authority in a crisis was derived (in part) from their place within a democratic and accountable system, then a structure–agency connection can be proven to exist. Moreover, crisis managers can also confirm whether or not considerations of accountability mechanisms (parliamentary committees, questions, debates), and the political risks attached to such mechanisms, were an influence over specific policy deliberations and choices. If crisis leaders acknowledge that perceptions of parliamentary accountability were a consideration in decision making, then a second explicit connection can be drawn between a representative system and the programmatic dimensions of a crisis episode. The perceptions of crisis leaders, however, must be complemented by examinations of those citizens affected by crises. Was their compliance (or resistance) to policy influenced by the existence of representative functions that allowed them an opportunity to voice their concerns? Did they view state crisis managers as authoritative because of their position within a larger democratic framework or was their authority based solely on a capacity to resolve the crisis? Answers to questions such as these can help to draw an empirical line between the representative system, crisis management actions and the effectiveness of a crisis response.

The focus on associated outputs has also highlighted how representative institutions can become practically

involved in the politics and operations of crisis management. Representative assemblies and individuals are unlikely to be involved in the creation of authoritative outputs: few citizens or political leaders turn automatically to their parliament when a crisis arrives. Nevertheless, the fact that most representative assemblies do not formulate policy or exercise decision-making power should not be allowed to obscure their importance in other areas. In particular, the capacity of representative institutions to foster or erode support for authoritative outputs and specific crisis management authorities should not be underestimated.

The importance of associated outputs in this sense can again be determined through the perceptions of those involved in a crisis, but researchers must first establish how these outputs are produced. Suggestions can be made here about specific areas of institutional design and aspects of representation that should be focused upon in future research. In terms of conflict management, the cathartic function is most likely to be performed via localized face-to-face meetings between parliamentarians and affected citizens within their constituencies or alternatively through mediated processes of post-crisis accountability, which allow citizen participation. Deliberation should certainly be examined through analyses of specific plenary debates and their impact on the attitudes of elites, but parliamentary debate should also be assessed as one sphere of a larger process of public deliberation in order to determine whether a parliament can affect the views of citizens outside the political system. Analyses of framing and counter-framing exploits should seek out the more adversarial, partisan processes: parliamentary question times, televised committee proceedings and opposition-led debates, for example, are likely settings within which framing attempts can be observed. Constituency roles are likely to be engaged in all crises as local politicians usually constitute the most visible and accessible route into a political system: if citizens are affected, parliamentarians will be contacted. However, the frequency and relevance of these roles are likely to be affected by a number of factors, such as the geographical spread of a crisis and the nature of its politics. For example, many constituency roles, such as the mobilization of local support, require politicians to put partisan politics to one side and work with an executive-led crisis response. In certain crises, particularly those with a reduced threat level, many parliamentarians may reject cross-party solidarity in order to make political gains. In these situations, the more consensual constituency roles are unlikely to be performed. Indeed, party political relationships between an executive and a legislature must be considered to be a significant source of variation affecting a legislature’s response to a crisis. For this reason, the relationship between the degree of threat posed by a crisis and the

corresponding degree of party political partisanship should not be ignored when assessing the role of associated output functions, as this relationship will determine, to a large extent, whether or not representative functions support or undermine an executive-led crisis response.

The functions that make representative institutions important to understanding politics and governance are also those that are most relevant to contemporary forms of crisis management. Thus, the representative functions discussed in this article not only indicate the areas where representative institutions will affect the management of future crises; they also provide a pathway towards addressing larger questions about the continuing relevance of representation in the 21st century. Ultimately, therefore, the principal lesson from the above discussion can be reduced to one simple statement, which is of equal significance to both fields. Representative functions can affect the politics and the operations of crisis management. Whether interested in the relevancy of representation in the 21st century or the policy and politics of contemporary crisis management, the statement remains the same – representative institutions matter.

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