

Summary

The objective behind this dissertation is to increase academic understanding of the operation of Irish representative democracy, since there has been no similar systematic and contemporary study of Dáil Éireann or its members. At a broader level, it contributes to the political science discipline by applying theories and models generated elsewhere to a political system unique in its institutional and cultural composition. It also differs from existing research in applying a broader conception of representation, viewing it not merely as one dimension of a representative's role, but rather as a defining feature underpinning all elements of an MP's functions and activities.

I use Irish TDs as my unit of analysis and draw upon theories of representation, role theory and the rational actor perspective. Based on data from face-to face interviews conducted with TDs as well as a survey, census data and material from the parliamentary record, I investigate the relationship between institutional rules and constraints, and the attitudes and behaviour of representatives.

In particular, I assess the extent to which theories and models of representation might help in understanding TDs' role orientations and, more generally, the operation of Irish democracy. I test the applicability of the responsible party and policy congruence models to the Irish case, and investigate the representational style and focus of TDs. After examining the relevance of these models and

concepts, I classify TDs according to a three-fold typology developed deductively, and assess the extent to which a TD's preferred role type predicts his or her behaviour.

The main findings are that Irish TDs are similar to colleagues internationally in being socio-economically unrepresentative of those that they represent. They are unusual in the degree to which their policy stances are unstructured according to an underlying liberal-conservative dimension. Nevertheless, they are similar to MPs in other countries in that party affiliation is a much stronger predictor of policy stances than socio-economic traits. TDs of different parties are much more polarised on most issues than their supporters in the population, but contrary to findings for other systems, TDs of all parties are more socially liberal and left-wing than their supporters.

TDs were found in the main to be trustees in relation to their voters but delegates in their relationship with their party, demonstrating an even higher level of party discipline in voting than in other liberal democracies. Constituency and national representation was much more important to TDs than interest groups, party members or voters and the most numerous role type among Irish TDs was national promoter followed by constituency promoters and interest promoters. However, classification in the typology was not found to significantly influence behaviour. Irish TDs are in the main more pragmatic in their approach to their job than MPs in other countries but overall can be described as more formalist than populist democrats.