

# Comparing (new) representative claims across five countries:

## Challenges and possibilities

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*« New political representative claims : a global view (France, Germany, Brazil, India, China) »*

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**Stéphanie Tawa Lama-Rewal**

This short paper is a working document that aims at presenting, in a concise manner, the various case studies on which the CLAIMS project relies, and a preliminary reflection on the comparison that we plan to engage in: Why is a comparison necessary? What exactly do we plan to compare? How can we go about it? What can we expect from it?

The paper includes a series of 6 tables (partly presented in the annexure) that offer a very schematic presentation of those case studies that we propose to engage in. These tables are based on a preliminary presentation (“checklists”) of the cases studies by the teams that will implement them; not all presentations had the same degree of detail, which explains the disparities from one case/country to another. Despite these approximations, this exercise might be useful to clarify the most pressing questions, and to identify possible ways to proceed. The paper is thus really a series of remarks and questions that arise from building the tables.

### **I. Why do we want to go for a comparison?**

The CLAIMS project aims at producing evidenced-based theory on the new forms and meanings of political representation that are becoming visible in many parts of the world, by building on the concept of “representative claim”(Saward 2006). The project is premised on the observation of a double research gap regarding studies of political representation: (i) on the theoretical front, a Eurocentric bias in the conceptualization of representation, and a difficulty to take seriously representation beyond elections; and (ii) on the empirical front, a tendency to go for single-country studies, or in case of a comparison, to limit the comparison to a single area (often Western Europe or OECD countries).

The comparative dimension of the CLAIMS project, and the choice of countries, precisely aims at addressing these research gaps. By comparing France, Germany, Brazil, India and China, the project considers four areas (*aires culturelles*) (Western Europe, South America, South Asia, East Asia), the global North and the global South; four democracies and an authoritarian regime.

We are doubtlessly spreading our net quite widely; but we consider that this is necessary if we are to take seriously the idea that the emergence of new representative claims is a global phenomenon. “Global” here means not only that the phenomenon becomes visible in many parts of the world at a

given moment, but also that it feeds on the circulation of ideas and practices from one area to the other. Indeed one of the objectives of the project is to document examples of such circulation.

In social sciences, comparison may aim at different objectives (and accordingly, proceed along different methods). The goal of our “broad qualitative comparison”(Collier 1993, 116) is not to measure the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable, but to open up the analysis, to allow for the identification of a series of regularities, contrasts and nuances. The case studies that we propose to conduct are meant to be “hypothesis generating” (Lijphart 1971). More precisely, we can envision two steps, or two objectives, of the comparison. In a first phase of the work, the comparison will support a parallel demonstration of a central hypothesis (to paraphrase Skocpol and Somers 1980), namely the global emergence of new representative claims. In a second phase, the regularities, contrasts and nuances observed through our 25 case studies will constitute the building blocks of the typology that will be the main outcome of this research. Indeed we conceive the comparison as a method aiming at generating ideal types.

## II. What do we want to compare?

We have decided to focus, in each of the five countries under study, on two types of objects, at two different levels of political life: (i) public discourse/debates - at the national level; and (ii) representational practices in participatory dispositives – at the local level.

Table I (*Comparing national configurations*) offers a synthetic view of the debates and dispositives that will be studied in each country<sup>1</sup>. Thus if we consider our project to be a small-N analysis, N = 25 (3 debates and 2 dispositives in 5 countries).

This table clearly shows that there is a high level of homogeneity regarding three objects:

- National debates on the representativeness of parliaments (Table II);
- National debates on political parties (Table III)
- Participatory budgeting (Table V)

However on the remaining two objects there is a higher degree of heterogeneity between the proposed case studies, i.e.:

- National debates on democratic innovations (Table IV)
- Local (institutionalized) innovations (VI)

This organization of case studies remains subject to change at this stage; however it has the advantage of suggesting a few remarks.

Table II and III suggest a remarkably consistent critique of misrepresentation by two central institutions of political representation. Table I, on national debates on the representativeness of parliaments, is about descriptive (mis)representation by legislative assemblies. What is at stake here

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<sup>1</sup> At this early stage some teams have proposed to work on 3 participatory dispositives, others on two only – therefore the last line of this table (*Other experiments*) is very tentative.

is almost always the presence - or lack of it - of women, but also of other social groups (“visible minorities” in France, caste and religious groups in India, entrepreneurs in China...)

Table III, on national debates on political parties, suggests again a pervasive critique of misrepresentation, but this time the focus is perhaps more on its substantive dimension. Interestingly there seems to be references, in each national debate, to other countries.

Table IV presents five national debates on what we might call “democratic innovations” – i.e. new procedures, new rules, and a party that claims to be of an altogether new type. All these debates seem to be “reclaiming” representation, i.e. redefining representation and proposing new ways of implementing it.

The last two tables focus on local participatory dispositives, i.e. on local experiments with representation without elections.

Table V presents a series of experiments with participatory budgeting, from the pioneering one of Porto Alegre to the pilot experiment in Delhi. Even though the degree of institutionalization is quite variable across the five countries/six cities under study, we have here again a highly homogeneous object of study.

Finally Table VI is about local innovations that are more or less institutionalized, and that also have in common the fact that they produce political representation without elections.

On the whole, then, the proposed case studies will support a tight comparison on 3 objects that seem to reveal a remarkable homogeneity across countries: the critique of misrepresentation by (i) legislative assemblies and (ii) political parties; and representation without elections through local experiments with participatory budgeting. On these three themes we need to identify key concepts (and to agree on their definitions) and questions that can operate in a transversal way.

On the other two themes - national debates on democratic innovations, and local (institutionalized) innovations - the heterogeneity of the proposed case studies is likely to allow for only a loose comparison. More precisely, here we run the risk of ending up with a juxtaposition of articles if we do not define more precisely the interest of these cases studies in the global program/questioning.

### **III. How can we compare?**

The comparison should work in two directions, towards the global, the common, but also towards the singular, the unique. Firstly, the comparison must produce findings at the level of the whole program, findings that allow us, ultimately, “to rise in generality” and to confidently qualify the emergence of new representative claims as a global phenomenon. Secondly, the comparison must shed new light on each case under study; it must enrich the analysis of each case study, but also, in the end, of each national configuration.

One way to achieve this is to work with a reduced, schematized narrative of each case under study. However in order to avoid the risk of tautology we need to proceed very carefully with the reduction, to avoid eliminating - at the initial stage of research – aspects of the situation that do not seem to fit with our major hypotheses. A way to proceed would be to collectively define a series of open

questions that each scholar would apply to her case study, for instance: “what is new in this representative claim? (Is it new, or is it merely renewed?)”; or “how do claim makers justify their claim?”<sup>2</sup>

Again, the need to agree on the definition of key concepts is paramount.

From a practical perspective, it might be useful to form a series of subgroups around our five objects of study, whose first task would be to propose to the larger team a series of questions and definitions. We would then have to discuss and harmonize these questions and definitions before we put them to work on our respective case studies.

#### **IV. What can we expect from the comparison?**

Beyond the objectives listed in section I (i.e. opening up the analysis, conducting a parallel demonstration of our central hypothesis and generating new hypotheses in the form of ideal types), we can foresee three benefits of the comparison. Firstly, as already mentioned, the comparison will highlight country-specificities that might prove unexpected; it will thereby contribute to understanding the political culture that is specific to each country.

Secondly, the comparison will test the relevance of a few categorizations/dichotomies that are often used in studies of political representation, such as North Vs South, democracies Vs authoritarian regimes, national politics Vs local politics.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the comparison, because it applies to a fairly large and diverse series of case studies, will shed light on what is at stake, politically, in (new) representative claims. Indeed the (very preliminary) identification of “claim makers” and “constituencies” in our tables already points at the relationship of such claims with the all-important issues of visibility, inclusion, empowerment, and accountability.

#### **References**

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<sup>2</sup> The short presentation of proposed case studies did include questions on the “justifications” and the “frames” that claim makers evoke (more or less implicitly) to support their claim; but because we had no yet had a proper debate on these notions, these were variously interpreted and therefore gave way to highly discrepant statements.

## Annexure: proposed case studies

<b>National debates</b>	<b>France</b>	<b>Germany</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>China</b>
<i>Critique of (descriptive) misrepresentation</i>	Representation of women and « visible minorities »	Gender quotas	Electoral reform and gender quotas	Gender (vs caste/religious) quotas	Representativeness of the People's Congresses
<i>Critique of (substantive) misrepresentation</i>	FN's "populist" critique of misrepresentation	Misrepresentation by political parties	Antipartyism and political parties' misrepresentation	The critique of parties and parliament by the anti-corruption movement	Representational character of the Chinese Communist Party
<i>Reclaiming representation through democratic innovations</i>	Participatory democracy	Voting rights for non-naturalized residents	Presidential impeachment	The discourse of the "Party of the ordinary man"	Debate on deliberative democracy
<b>Local participatory dispositives</b>					
<i>Representation without elections (1)</i>	Participatory budgeting in Paris	Participatory budgeting and Local Agenda 21 in Münster	Participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre	Participatory budgeting in Delhi	Participatory budgeting in Wenling and Chengdu
<i>Representation without elections (2)</i>	Citizen Committee in Saint-Denis	Advisory Council for Integration and Migration in Berlin	National Health Council	Resident Welfare Associations in Delhi	Representational activities by private entrepreneurs
<i>Other experiments</i>		Referendum on school reform in Hamburg	National Women Council		