

Abstract

Martin Brothén, 2002, *In Touch with the Outside World. Members of Parliament and Internationalisation*. (Swedish title: *I kontakt med omvärlden. Riksdagsledamöterna och internationaliseringen*). Swedish text. English summary. Göteborg Studies in Politics 75. SNS Förlag, Box 5629, 114 86 Stockholm. Stockholm 2002, 217 pages. ISBN: 91-7150-867-8.

Modern democracy is facing important challenges caused by internationalisation. Among those affected by this development are national parliaments and parliamentarians. This book deals with the way in which national parliaments work in an internationalised environment; in terms of relations with international society, and in terms of relations with citizens and voters.

In concrete terms, two questions are addressed. The first question is whether there are diffusion mechanisms that enable international contacts to become more common among members of national parliaments. The second question is whether national parliamentarians differ as representatives, depending on whether they have international contacts or not.

The first question is answered by treating the international contacts of parliamentarians as a dependent variable, based on general diffusion theory. The second question is answered by treating the international contacts of parliamentarians as an independent variable, based on theories on representative democracy.

The analyses are based on 18 questionnaire surveys among national parliamentarians. Swedish parliamentarians have been interviewed in 1988, 1994, 1996 and 1998. In addition, data from parallel surveys in the parliaments of all the Nordic countries, and eleven EU member nations, are used.

Three different mechanisms are identified for the diffusion of international contacts to a wider, and less elite oriented, range of parliamentarians. Time, cultural community and institutional arrangements can be expected to contribute to an increase in, and a more equal distribution of, international contacts among parliamentarians.

However, the results of the empirical analysis show that neither time, nor cultural community or institutional arrangements, have a strong effect on the diffusion of international contacts. They all make a contribution, in accordance with what could be expected regarding the diffusion of international contacts among parliamentarians, but the effect is relatively limited. Thus, there is no evidence to support any strong belief in the importance of these diffusion mechanisms. They are important, but not as important as expected. This applies to the expected increase of the proportion of parliamentarians with international contacts, as well as the expected levelling of international contacts between different groups of parliamentarians. Especially in the latter case it is apparent that the diffusion mechanisms do not quite have the expected strength.

Political scientists often argue that internationalisation brings a risk of an widened gap between voters and elected. The extent to which the representational characteristics of national parliamentarians really differ between those who have international contacts and those who do not, is analysed in two ways. First, in terms of the opinion gap between voters and parliamentarians; and second, in terms of the gap in contact between voters and parliamentarians. The finding is that it does not necessarily have a seriously negative effect for representative democracy if an increased number of parliamentarians develop international contacts. Parliamentarians with foreign contacts are not necessarily less representative in terms of opinion. Nor are they, in comparison with other MPs, less frequently in contact with their respective constituencies.

Key words: parliament, parliamentarians, representative democracy, internationalisation, globalisation, opinion representativeness, international contacts, diffusion, time, cultural community, institutional arrangements.

Martin Brothén, Department of Political Science, Göteborg University.