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THE CONSTITUENCY SERVICE BASIS OF THE PERSONAL VOTE  
FOR U.S. REPRESENTATIVES AND BRITISH MPS

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#### ABSTRACT

Under the guise of the "incumbency advantage" American research of the past decade has devoted heavy emphasis to what may be termed the "personal vote" in Congressional elections. Is this phenomenon a purely American one, or is it something susceptible to comparative treatment? This paper contrasts the personal vote in the 1980 U.S. House elections with that in the 1979 British General Election. The analysis utilizes data from surveys conducted by the Center for Political Studies and British Gallup, respectively, in combination with interviews of House AAs and British MPs and party agents whose constituencies fall in the sampling frames of the mass surveys. The analysis finds an incumbency advantage or personal vote in Britain, much weaker than that in the U.S., but of somewhat greater importance than is commonly believed. As in the U.S. constituency service appears to be an important component of the personal vote.

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade an especially active research area has developed around the study of the advantages of incumbency in U.S. House elections. Erikson (1972) and Mayhew (1974) first called attention to the temporal increase apparent over the course of the 1960s, and succeeding scholars too numerous to cite have sought to refine the measurement of, explain the bases of, and determine the consequences of, the trends identified by Erikson and Mayhew [1]. This outpouring of scholarly effort has produced a reasonable understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the incumbency advantage in contemporary elections, though the lack of appropriate longitudinal data hinders efforts to determine precisely what and how much has changed over time (Fiorina, 1982).

As with much of the Congressional literature, a notable feature of the research on House incumbency is its exclusively American perspective. In particular, attempts to explain the development and bases of the incumbency advantage focus on American political institutions and the American social and cultural context. Little effort has been made to compare candidate effects in House elections with those which might be present in the legislative

elections of other countries [2]. And virtually no effort has been given to abstracting from the American case in an effort to develop more widely applicable theories of the conditions which enhance or depress candidate effects in legislative elections. This paper aims principally at the former, empirical, lacuna. While the meaningfulness of any sort of comparative work depends on some basic theoretical ideas which render comparison meaningful and interesting, a detailed comparative theory of voting in legislative elections lies outside the scope of this paper.

THE CONCEPT OF A PERSONAL VOTE

By "personal vote" we mean that portion of a candidate's electoral support which arises from his or her personal characteristics, qualifications, activities and/or record. In legislative elections especially, political science research emphasizes that part of the vote which is not personal -- support based on shared partisan affiliations, fixed voter characteristics such as class, religion and ethnicity, reactions to national conditions such as the state of the economy, and performance evaluations centered around the head of the governing party. This imbalance in emphasis is reasonable enough; most empirical work suggests that factors such as the preceding account for the lion's share of the variation in election outcomes. Only after the realization in the United States that the personal vote had reached significant proportions did scholars really give it much attention.

Still, even if small, the personal vote has potentially great political significance. For unlike party or class identifications,

religious affiliations, the national economy, or national executive performance, the individual legislator by definition has some impact on the personal vote. Although small, the fact that it is under his control may lead him to give it disproportionate attention. And this in turn has implications for party cohesion in the legislature, party support for the executive, and ultimately, the ability to enforce national electoral accountability in the system [3]. For a personal vote reflects a principal feature of the single-member district electoral system: the distinction between the interests and fortunes of an individual representative and the interests and fortunes of any collectivity, especially party, to which he or she may belong. It is logically possible for a particular representative to survive while all fellow partisans go down to defeat. That simple fact creates an incentive for each representative to build a personal base of support within the geographic district, support not subject to the vagaries of national swings arising from popular reactions to national events, personalities, and conditions. To be sure, myriad features of a political system may work to circumscribe the operation of the individual representative's incentive -- the resources available to him, the nomination system, the electoral system (e.g. independent executive or not), the needs, ideologies, and party loyalties of constituents -- to name but a few of the more obvious ones. Thus, the gap between individual and collective interests may be large in some systems (eg. the American) and virtually non-existent in others (eg. the textbook British portrait). The incentive still exists, however, and fragments of the existing literature gave us reason to believe that it operates even in Great Britain, though with effects much

weaker than those observed in the United States.

To put some flesh on this abstract discussion, consider the preliminary statistical analysis presented in Table 1. The data are from the 1980 NES/CPS American National Election Study, and a British Gallup survey conducted after the May 1979 election [4]. The estimates (probit) show the association of party identification, executive performance ratings, and candidate incumbency status (coded from standard sources and merged with the survey files) with the vote for or against the Parliamentary and Congressional candidates of the incumbent Labour and Democratic parties. Evidently, the American and British findings differ in several respects. First, partisanship exerts a much larger impact, ceteris paribus, in British Parliamentary voting than in American House voting. The literature would lead us to expect this difference, though it would also lead us to expect that the difference has increased from what it would have been in say, the late 1940s. A second even more noteworthy difference between the two equations concerns the importance of Callaghan ratings for the fates of Labour candidates, and the virtual irrelevance of Carter ratings for the fates of Democratic candidates [5]. Again, these results are consistent with the tenor of traditional discussions of British voting behavior, and the more recent studies of House elections. From the standpoint of this paper, principal interest attaches to a third difference between the two equations: the much greater importance of incumbency status in American House elections than in British Parliamentary elections. The differences here are fully as great, ceteris paribus, as those between the effects of party identification and executive ratings.

[Table 1 Here]

Still, we daresay that most scholars will be less taken by the difference in the importance of incumbency status in the two countries than in the fact that statistically significant effects show up in Great Britain at all. For the estimates clearly show that other things equal Labour incumbents ran significantly better than Labour candidates contesting open seats, and the latter in turn ran significantly better than Labour candidates seeking to unseat incumbents of any other party. While significant, these effects are not substantively large -- Table 2 contains a translation of the probit estimates into probabilities of supporting candidates of the incumbent party as a function of the respondent's party affiliation and executive performance ratings, and the incumbency status of the constituency. Each party ID category is assigned the modal executive rating of that category.

[Table 2 Here]

As seen, the impact of Conservative party identification was so strong in 1979 that candidate incumbency status made little or no difference (the raw data show that all of the 81 strong Conservatives in Labour districts voted against the incumbent). This contrasts starkly with the American case where even strong Republicans showed a notable tendency to support Democratic incumbents. For those not attached to the Conservative Party, however, the effects of incumbency status were more pronounced. Voters offering no party identification, for example, were twice as likely to vote for an incumbent Labour candidate as for a Labour candidate running against an incumbent of another party. The figures are similar for Liberals, and even weak

Labour identifiers show a non-trivial effect of incumbency status. In the U.S., of course, the general effects of incumbency (looking across the rows) are relatively much stronger, perhaps one-half to two thirds the effects of party identification (looking down the columns).

Tables 1 and 2 suggest that there is indeed a personal vote for us to compare, contrast, and explain. Given the amount of research devoted to this subject in the American case, our emphasis in the body of the paper will be on the British. By way of introduction, let us briefly consider several of the components of the personal vote identified in American research and how they may or may not apply to the British case. The first and most obvious explanation of the House incumbency advantage arises from the sheer quantity of electorally productive resources provided to all incumbents -- staff, offices, long distance, the frank, etc., estimates of the value of which range up to a million dollars per term. This is a factor which can hardly operate in Britain because MPs have very little in the way of personal support. The average MP shares a secretary and may work with a party agent in the constituency [6]. Another partial explanation of the House incumbency advantage focuses on the differential campaign funding of incumbents and challengers (Jacobson, 1980). In Britain however, campaigns are much cheaper, spending is severely limited, candidates do not raise money individually, and spending decisions are more centralized. Thus, the financial muscle of MPs would seem to be a hypothesis that we can safely dismiss. Third, some authors have suggested that less tangible factors partially explain the House incumbency advantage. One could argue that strong incumbents deter strong challengers, and that incumbent strength is at least to some

extent a self-fulfilling prophecy which results when weak challengers are the only ones willing to make the race. Here again, the hypothesis would not appear as plausible for Britain. Unlike American candidates who look for the proper time to run, aspiring MPs look for a suitable location -- a winnable if not safe, district. A principal way to qualify for the nomination in such a district is to earn a reputation as a good candidate, and the principal way to do that is to wage a good campaign in a hopeless district. King (1982) reports that in the 1970s Parliaments one-half of all MPs had lost at least once before winning their seats, and one-fourth had lost twice or more [7]. Thus, it appears that incumbent MPs are less likely to get an electoral free ride than are incumbent MCs, given that ambitious challengers in Britain can not hope to impress future selection committees by merely "going through the motions."

All in all, one is pushed to the conclusion that the personal vote in Britain is very personal indeed. Its existence would seem to reflect the particular characteristics and activities of particular candidates. Such a vote is contingent; it depends on whom MPs are and what they do. A likely possibility for an important component of this contingent personal vote corresponds to a fourth partial explanation of the House incumbency advantage -- constituency service, by which we mean the non-partisan, non-programmatic effort to help individual constituents in their dealings with the larger government, and to defend and advance the particularistic interests of the constituency in the councils of the larger government. In the next section of this paper we present new data on constituency service in Britain, some from the mass survey already introduced, as well as additional data

from an elite survey coordinated with the mass survey sampling frame. Analogous American data also will be presented. In the fourth section of the paper we report statistical analyses which show the importance of constituency service as an explanation of the personal vote. A concluding section relates our findings to discussions of embryonic developments in the British electoral process.

#### CONSTITUENCY SERVICE IN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

The textbook portrait of British politics leaves little room for a personal vote. Though MPs appear desirous of retaining their office (the retirement rate in 1979 was about 10%), and thus have an incentive to fashion a personal vote, the instruments available to them appear too paltry to permit them to do so. Most MPs are faceless troops in the party ranks who vote in accord with the party whip. They have little or no personal power (eg. committee based as in the U.S.) to use to procure pork for their districts or to provide services to individual constituents. As mentioned, they have very little in the way of staff and office resources, and their campaign spending is limited and largely out of their control. Their parliamentary careers are determined not by electoral longevity, but by the impressions they make on party leaders. And to cap it all off, their constituents can register a preference for the executive only through their vote decisions for Parliament. As a consequence of all this, voters naturally pay scant attention to individual MPs, and make their choices on the basis of such general factors as party affiliations, class position, and reactions to top party leaders, particularly those who will comprise the government.

The preceding textbook portrait is familiar to American scholars, many of whom use it to highlight a contrasting textbook portrait of the Congress. Like most textbook portraits, however, the British one is painted in bold relief. Strong tendencies become incontrovertible generalizations, and traces of inconsistent evidence seem to disappear. Knowledgeable observers of British politics have long been aware that MPs are not quite so helpless and electorally irrelevant (or at least don't believe they are) as some textbooks suggest. Moreover, the recent literature increasingly focuses on changes in British politics, changes of a kind different from the generalizations of the old textbooks.

A number of British scholars (Chester and Bowring, 1962; Butt, 1967; Crick, 1970) have observed that in the postwar period the amount of time devoted by the average MP to government legislation has decreased and the amount devoted to representing constituents against the bureaucracy has increased. The phrase "a good constituency man" has entered the popular literature on voting (Hartley-Brewer, 1976), and the Liberal-pioneered strategy of "grass-rooting" has received academic notice (Barker and Rush, 1967; King, 1974; King and Sloman, 1973). There is little relevant data, however. In an older contribution Dowse (1963) conducted a study of an important aspect of constituency relations -- surgeries -- via a mail survey of 100 MPs. Analysis of 69 responses revealed that only one-fifth of the MPs held no surgery whatsoever, and that those with less than nine year's service tended to hold them more frequently than more senior members. But Dowse found no relation between electoral margins and frequency of surgeries, and on that basis concluded that constituency work stems

from the "genuine desire to win public esteem and to be of service" (1963, p. 336). When queried directly, only one-third of the MPs viewed their activity as electorally profitable.

In contrast to Dowse, our interviews sixteen years later disclose that contemporary MPs are considerably more prone to hold surgeries [8]. Table 3 presents the relevant data. As seen, 37% of Dowse's 1963 respondents held no regular surgery; by 1979 only a corporal's guard did not hold surgery on a regular basis. At the other extreme of the distribution, one-third of Dowse's respondents held surgeries at least every two weeks, whereas our survey produced a figure well over one-half. In the space of two decades surgery has apparently become a standard aspect of an MP's life.

[Table 3 here]

Surgeries produce contact with constituents, generally those having some request, grievance or whatever vis-a-vis the government. Our interviews explored the topic of casework at length, and a few of the salient features of the responses will be of interest before proceeding to the statistical analyses [9]. As government has grown one would naturally expect that demands in the form of casework would grow commensurately. But some authors (Fiorina, 1977) have hypothesized that electoral incentives lead legislators to stimulate constituent demands. To be sure, there is a broad range of possibilities, from a simple invitation in a newsletter for constituents to write to a given address to passing out stamped, pre-addressed postcards in nursing homes. At any rate, the interviews revealed that at least some level of solicitation is the rule (85%) in the U.S. The figure is considerably lower (64%) in Britain, though a

clear majority indicates some degree of initiative. In contrast, MPs are more likely (50%) to seek publicity for successful casework. While MCs publicize casework in general terms and in the aggregate, they more often (67%) express the sentiment that publicizing the details of cases would be an invasion of their constituents' privacy.

In the U.S. the most common types of casework are social security and veterans' benefits (almost universally mentioned. In Britain the most frequent sources of citizen requests/complaints stem from housing (mentioned by 85% of our interviewees), pensions (mentioned by 72%), taxes (37%), and immigration (22%). Thus, the single most common source of casework in Britain is a program which is legally a responsibility of local government. An overwhelming majority of MPs (83%) report that they do handle such local casework, though a considerable proportion (33%) do so with reluctance. In contrast, a majority of MCs report that they do not handle state and local cases, though they would advise constituents on the appropriate officials to contact.

Obviously, MPs are not geared up to handle casework to the same extent as MCs -- they have nothing like the large district staffs, mobile vans, and other American innovations. Moreover, the much smaller size of British constituencies (about 90,000 people on average, as opposed to 500,000 in the U.S.) would lead us to expect a smaller case load. Considering these facts, the estimated case loads reported in Table 4 are higher than we had expected. Given that many MPs still answer their mail in longhand, their reported workload is quite impressive.

[Table 4 here]

So, there is a great deal of constituency oriented activity apparent in Great Britain. And while we have presented data only on casework, MPs are in their constituencies more often than they hold surgery: the modal MP returns to the constituency at least weekly (many of them, of course, live in London), and more than 80% go home at least twice a month. At least partially as a result of this contact, MPs enjoy high visibility in their constituencies. Referring back to the mass surveys, incumbent MPs enjoyed a name recall figure of 70% in 1979, more than twice the level achieved by MCs [10]. About an eighth of British respondents claimed to have met their MP personally.

Does the constituency attentiveness of an MP have any electoral payoff? There is little data which directly addresses the question. As mentioned, only 32% of Dowse's 1963 respondents thought that it did. In our survey, however, 83% (57 of 69) answered definitely yes, and another 16% thought that a limited effect was present. Only one MP flatly denied an electoral effect. This response distribution is virtually the same as that for MCs, though very different from that which Dowse reports. Perhaps there has been a major temporal change, or perhaps Dowse's respondents hesitated to commit a seemingly crass admission to paper. Interestingly, however, Barker and Rush (1970, p. 177) note that their interviewees universally believed that their personal reputations and activities had some impact on the vote. Like those interviewed by Barker and Rush, and unlike those surveyed by Dowse, the MPs in our sample believe in the electoral efficacy of their activities.



British academics, however, tend to accept the findings reported by Dowse. Like Congressional scholars of the 1960s, British scholars appear reluctant to believe that MPs might succumb to mundane electoral temptations. The edited transcripts of the King and Sloman (1973) BBC interviews reflect (and to some extent, underlie) the prevailing consensus; they are worth quoting at some length. The first segment comes from a conversation with Shirley Williams, then a member of the Labour shadow cabinet, and Norman Tebbit, a junior Tory MP, though one from an extremely safe district. The program was titled, "M.P.s and their Surgeries" (King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 13-14):

King: If it takes up so much time, if M.P.s have to write so many letters, if they sometimes find the work depressing, why do almost all members of Parliament hold surgeries? The cynic would say 'in order to win votes, of course.' But the cynic would be wrong. There is no evidence that this sort of careful individual constituency work makes any substantial difference at the time of a general election, and M.P.s know it. I asked Shirley Williams how far she thought her surgery work helped her win the allegiance of the voters.

Williams: I don't think that it makes much difference. All you can say is that perhaps you gradually build up a reputation as a conscientious or reasonably hard-working M.P., and that is of some advantage. But with the individual cases I suspect there's almost no influence at all.

King: How much advantage -- hundreds of votes, thousands?

Williams: At most, hundreds.

King: Norman Tebbit seemed surprised even to be asked. Had he won any votes that morning?

Tebbit: Do you know I've never thought of it? I can't say that for me the favourite part of my life as a Member of Parliament is being a social worker,... But I just regard it as part of my job and, as to whether it wins votes or not, you know, I'm not really particularly interested.

Similarly, in a segment titled "The Case of Flora Genetio" (King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 26-27), we read the following colloquy between Professor King and Roy Hattersley, then a Labour front-bencher:

King: But in the end doesn't all this constituency work, doesn't the writing of all these letters, the holding of surgeries and advisory sessions, boil down to an effort to win votes, to make sure of getting in next time? Roy Hattersley, and I think most M.P.s would deny this vigorously. How much help, I asked Roy Hattersley, do you think your constituency work is going to help towards your re-election when the time comes?

Hattersley: Very little indeed. My re-election when the time comes depends on the standing of the two parties. I hope I shall poll about nineteen or twenty thousand votes. If two or

three hundred of those are the result of my constituency work, I shall have done rather well.

King: Why, then, does he do the work?

Hattersley: I do the constituency work, not for a political bonus, because there isn't a political bonus in it. I do it because it's part of the job.

King: Part of an M.P.'s job. The non-partisan, non-speech-making, little-publicized part that goes on week in and week out, even when Parliament is in recess.

Evidently, the MPs quoted above do not offer the same opinions as 57 of the 69 we interviewed. Perhaps our interviewees were merely having fun with naive Americans, or perhaps they understood the question in a manner different from the way in which it was intended. But then again, perhaps constituency work is a more important concern of backbenchers, who are seldom interviewed, than of frontbenchers, whom professors favor. Perhaps too, prominent politicians are loathe to announce over the BBC that their actions stem from anything but the highest of motives.

At any rate, there are at least three questions which research would do well to keep separate. (1) Do MPs believe their constituency work has electoral payoffs? Based on our interviews we think the answer is now generally yes. (2) Is the constituency work of MPs motivated primarily by electoral considerations? The academic consensus is probably no, but in any event ascertaining "real" motivations is terribly difficult. (3) Whatever the motivation, does

constituency work have an electoral impact? Aside from Dowse, an older study of the electoral strength of "experienced" candidates in 65 marginal seats (Williams, 1966-67), and a recent study of 18 marginals by Curtice and Steed, (1980), there is little research that sheds light on this last question. The next section of the paper presents some findings based on the elite interviews and mass surveys introduced in the preceding pages.

#### CONSTITUENCY SERVICE AND THE VOTE, GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

Both mass surveys pursued the subject of constituency service at some length. Constituents were asked whether they had ever contacted the incumbent, if so, why, whether they had gotten a response, and whether they considered the response satisfactory. In the U.S. about one in seven respondents (a higher proportion of actual voters, of course) had initiated some communication with their MC. Seven percent reported that they had requested help, four percent that they sought information, and four percent that they expressed their opinions. In Great Britain one in 12 respondents had contacted their MP, with five percent requesting help, two percent information, and as would be expected, less than two percent expressing an opinion [11]. Nearly all constituents in both countries reported that they had received a response, with more than half maintaining that they were "very satisfied" with the response, and less than one-quarter reporting either no response or dissatisfaction.

In addition to personal experiences, a fifth of the American sample, and a sixth of the British claimed they knew of someone else who had contacted their MC or MP (we refer to this as second hand

contact in the discussion which follows). And one-fifth of the American sample and one-eighth of the British maintained that they could recall something special the incumbent had done for the district. The probes accompanying this item elicited a very mixed bag of responses by the Americans, with only about half referring specifically to local concerns and programs. In Britain, however, the modal answer, offered by two-fifths of the respondents, is that the MP champions local causes. Smaller, roughly equal proportions mention housing, local industries, aid to individuals in trouble, and the MP's general interest in local affairs.

Each survey included a generalized evaluative item designed to tap the incumbent's relationship to his constituency. First included in the 1978 NES/CPS election study, the item was dubbed "expectation of access". It was designed to capture some aspects of Fenno's (1978) emphasis on the reputation for accessibility and trustworthiness a representative seeks to develop. We think that the wording of the question makes it a fair general measure of the extent to which a representative is perceived as "a good constituency man." It reads,

If you had a problem that Representative (your MP) (name) could do something about, do you think he/she would be very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not very helpful to you?

In both countries constituents expressed fairly positive expectations [12]. Some indication that these expectations have real content and are neither purely random nor pure rationalization appears in Table 5. The figures in the table are probit estimates for statistical models in which expectations of access are the left hand side variable. The

models presume that incumbents enhance their images by achieving visibility, and by actually compiling a good record, or at least one that is perceived as good. In addition constituents may have more positive expectations about an incumbent who shares their party affiliation. Conversely, a visible challenger might dim the luster of the incumbent given that the former may attack the incumbent's record, person, and so forth as part of his or her campaign. All of these suggestions are no more than common sense, and all are reflected in the data.

[Table 5 here]

The British and American equations are quite similar. MPs may get more political mileage out of personal contacts than MCs [13], and MCs perhaps more out of second hand contacts (ie. contacts with friends, relatives, and co-workers the respondent has heard about). After taking contacts into account, name recall appears to have little or no effect in either country [14]. Party affiliations are somewhat more important, *ceteris paribus*, in Britain, with minor party identifiers significantly less likely to evidence positive expectations even than those who identify with national parties different from the incumbent's (the latter constitute the omitted reference category in the set of dummy variables [15]). Identifiers with the incumbent's party of course are the most sanguine about the likelihood that he or she would help in a pinch. Finally, in the U.S. more senior incumbents are expected to be more helpful than less senior ones; no comparable relationship is apparent in Britain.

The largest coefficients in the table, however, are those which reflect the effects of the incumbent's previous efforts.

Satisfied constituents are highly positive about his or her future potential, and dissatisfied constituents (rare) highly negative (the omitted reference category for these dummy variables are comprised of those who report no casework experience) [16]. Those who recall something already done for the constituency are likewise very positive. These figures show clearly and not surprisingly that incumbent representatives can behave in a manner calculated to enhance their constituents' images of them, and that conclusion holds for MPs as much as for MCs. As yet, however, we do not know the degree to which positive images translate into supportive votes.

Table 7 represents a first crack at answering the preceding question in the British case, while Table 6 presents comparable data for the U.S. The equations reported in these tables treat the vote decision as dependent on the visibility of the incumbent and challenger, the reputation of the incumbent for being "a good constituency man," the party affiliation of the incumbent vis-a-vis the constituent, and evaluations of the executive.

[Table 6 here]

Taking the more familiar American results first, the estimates outline a picture consistent with recent accounts of House elections as given in academic writings, the popular press, and the laments of political leaders. By achieving visibility and developing a reputation for constituency service the MC can exert a major impact on his or her electoral fate. All else equal, a very favorable image as a good constituency representative is more important in determining the vote than having the same party affiliation as the voter. As in Table 1 the effects of Carter ratings on the House vote in 1980 were

nil, even though the present analysis is restricted to incumbents, who have a record vis-a-vis Carter.

And what about Britain? The estimates in Table 7 reveal much that anyone would have expected, and perhaps a bit that some would not. As in Table 1 the effects of party identification are nothing short of massive (recall that "opposite party ID" is the omitted reference category). How difficult it is for other influences to have an impact in the face of such strong partisan effects will be shown in Table 8 below. The other major influence on British voting decisions offers a clear contrast to the American results. Ratings of Callaghan's performance have a large and significant effect on the vote for MPs, especially for Labour MPs. Constituents of Tory MPs who rate Callaghan highly are less likely to support the Tory, ceteris paribus, but the effect is only about half that for constituents of Labour MPs [17].

[Table 7 here]

Of most interest, however, are the variables which capture aspects of the personal vote in Britain. As in the U.S. equations, incumbent visibility has a positive impact on electoral support (and challenger visibility has the expected negative impact). Well-known incumbents do better than unknowns, other things equal. Of even greater interest is the estimate attached to a reputation for constituency service. Those constituents who hold highly positive expectations of their MP are significantly more likely to vote for him/her than those not holding such expectations. The coefficients in each equation are only significant at the .10 level, but we can satisfy devotees of the .05 level by pooling the data (making

Callaghan rating effects contingent on the party of the MP), which results in a coefficient of .34, significant at the magic level. There is no denying, however, that the effects of constituency service are but a shadow of what they are in the U.S. Table 8 gives some idea of the comparative magnitude of the effects. In this table the variable of interest is the voter's expectation of helpfulness. We examine six configurations obtained by crossing Labour, Conservative, and non-identifiers with Labour and Conservative MPs. The figures in the table are calculated from Tables 6 and 7 under the assumption that the voter has the modal value for variables other than expectation of helpfulness. In the British calculations this means that the voter is assumed to recall the incumbent, not recall the challenger, and rate Callaghan good if a Labour identifier, and fair if a Conservative identifier or a non-identifier. Given these conditions the voters' estimated probabilities of voting for the incumbent MP are given in the top part of the table.

[Table 8 here]

The party identification and Callaghan rating effects are so strong that the vote is almost a foregone conclusion in many cases, but at the margins the effect of being "a good constituency man" surfaces. The smallest effect is a .02 increase in the probability that a Conservative identifier would support a Conservative incumbent, while the largest is a .16 increase in the probability that a non-identifier would support an incumbent of either party [18]. MPs of the major parties are equally capable of earning the votes of identifiers of the other party -- about a .06 increase in probability of support as a function of a very favorable reputation, ceteris

paribus. These numbers contrast with the American figures in the bottom half of the table [19]. There we see that an incumbent's perceived reputation can have enormous effects. Consider, for example, the range of probability estimates for identifiers of one party who have a MC of the other: these estimates more than triple as a function of perceived reputation. All in all, an MC's reputation for helpfulness appears to have a potential impact as great as that of party identification.

How large is the personal vote in Britain? Is it the negligible few hundred that some MPs dismiss? Using Tables 7 and 8 to arrive at a precise estimate is not easy, inasmuch as the estimates vary considerably with voter characteristics and attitudes, but for illustrative purposes, imagine a hypothetical race in a constituency with 50,000 electors. Looking across our sample we find a constituency quite negative about the expected helpfulness of their MP: 8 electors distributed 0, 1, 7 across the categories very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful. Another constituency is distributed in exactly the reverse fashion: 7, 1, 0 (a few constituencies have everyone in the first category, incidentally). Applying ranges of proportions such as those in Table 8, and weighting by the actual distributions of party identification in Labour and Conservative incumbent constituencies, respectively, we arrive at estimated differences in expected vote of almost 6% in the case of Conservative MPs and almost 9% in the case of Labour MPs. We hasten to emphasize that these are not estimates of the actual personal vote in 1979, even in an "average" constituency, but rather illustrations of the difference between the vote attracting abilities of MP's with

reputations as excellent constituency men and those with reputations as lousy ones. Still, because it is at least partially an MP's decision to become known as an excellent constituency man or a lousy one, the figures represent maximum bounds on the personal vote in contemporary Britain.

We recognize, of course, that some readers may be skeptical of the kind of exercise just reported, inasmuch as it relies on a survey item which measures voter evaluations, and such items always entail a risk of contamination from other evaluative factors. Even given the results in Table 5, should we not worry that responses to the expectation of access item are in some part rationalizations, that people who plan to vote for a given incumbent naturally say that he would be very helpful? As a precaution against this possibility we report a second analysis based on the elite surveys discussed in the preceding section. Many of our interviewees voiced the opinion that diligent constituency work could dampen swings against their party or augment swings to their party. Given the data they reported, it is a fairly straightforward matter to examine the accuracy of their beliefs. We formulated a simple additive index based on the MP's description of his constituency work. The index gives a value of one for each of the following: does the MP encourage casework, does the MP publicize successful casework, does the MP handle local cases, and does the MP hold surgery more than twice monthly? The 101 districts for which we have interviews range from zero to four on this index [20]. Do these accounts of constituency work bear any relation to objective swings in the vote? Table 9 shows that they most certainly do.

[Table 9 here]

A noteworthy feature of the 1979 general election was that the traditional uniform swing was much less uniform than usual: North Britain swung to the Conservatives by about 4.2%, while South Britain swung by 7.7% (Curtice and Steed, 1980, p. 395). Because of regional variations, recent analyses of British electoral behavior have used regional swing figures rather than a single national average. We follow this practice in the analyses reported in Table 9 by regressing the swing in our sample districts on the swing in their larger region, several demographic variables previously identified as important (Crewe, 1979), and their score on the constituency work index [21]. The results are quite suggestive. Constituency work has a statistically significant augmenting impact of between 1.5 and 2% on the swing to the Conservatives, and a significant dampening impact of between 3 and 3.5% on the swing away from Labour (based on a constituency index score range of four). Again the figure for Labour is almost twice that for Conservatives, consistent with the results of the analysis based on the mass survey, and also with the estimates of Williams (1966-1967) for an earlier period [22]. The estimates are realistic bounds on the actual size of the personal vote, moreover, since it is well within the capability of the average MP to determine where he or she scores on the index of constituency work. We should also note that these estimates are in the general ballpark though somewhat larger than those calculated by Professors Curtice and Steed (1980, p. 409) from an analysis of 18 "switched" districts [23].

TABLE 1  
SUMMARY VOTE EQUATIONS, GREAT BRITAIN and UNITED STATES

		<u>Great Britain</u> (n = 1527)	<u>United States</u> (n = 711)	
Party ID	Strong Con	-1.86**	- .89**	Strong Rep
	Weak Con	-1.43**	- .71**	Weak Rep
	Other	- .15	- .46**	Ind Rep
	Liberal	- .46**	.40*	Ind Dem
	Weak Lab	1.34**	.40*	Weak Dem
	Strong Lab	2.12**	.83**	Strong Dem
JC Job Rating	Very Good	1.13**	.25	Strongly Approve
	Good	1.18**	.06	Approve
	Fair	.80**	.09	Disapprove
	Poor	.09	--	-----
	Don't Know	1.15**	- .13	Don't Know
Incumbency Status	Labour	.32*	.78**	Democrat
	Other	- .26*	- .46*	Republican
Constant		-1.59**	- .36	
Correctly Predicted		89%	75%	
$\hat{R}^2$		.76	.47	

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

TABLE 2

ESTIMATED PROBABILITY OF IN-PARTY VOTE BY PARTY ID,  
EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE and DISTRICT INCUMBENCY STATUS

<u>Great Britain</u>	<u>INCUMBENCY</u>		
	Non-Labour	Open	Labour
S. Con - Fair	.00	.00	.01
W. Con - Fair	.01	.01	.03
No Party ID - Fair	.15	.21	.32
Liberal - Fair	.07	.11	.18
W. Labour - Good	.75	.82	.89
S. Labour - Very Good	.92	.95	.98
<u>United States</u>	Republican	Open	Democratic
S. Rep, Very Poor	.04	.11	.32
W. Rep, Very Poor	.06	.14	.39
Independent, Poor	.24	.40	.70
W. Dem, Good	.36	.54	.81
S. Dem, Good	.53	.70	.90

TABLE 3

COMPARATIVE FREQUENCY OF SURGERIES, 1963 V. 1979

	<u>DOUSE (1963)</u>	<u>CFF (1979)</u>
None	17%	4
Ad Hoc Basis	20	3
Less than Monthly	--	4
Monthly	23	25
Every 3 Weeks	6	6
Every 2 Weeks	22	32
3 Per Month	--	11
Weekly or More Often	12	15
n	65	100



TABLE 6  
1980 HOUSE VOTE (INCUMBENT CONTESTED RACES)

	Democratic (n = 382)	Republican (n = 262)
Recall Incumbent	.39*	.52†
Recall Challenger	-.81**	-.64*
Challenger Contact	-.52**	-.75**
Expectation of Helpfulness	Very	2.08**
	Somewhat	1.04**
	Don't Know	.88*
Party ID	Independent	.42
	Same as Incumbent	1.39**
JC Job Rating	Strongly Approve	.32
	Approve	.09
	Disapprove	.46†
	Don't Know	-.80
Constant	-.78**	-.82*
Correctly Predicted	78%	83%
$\hat{R}^2$	.49	.56

\* p < .05  
\*\* p < .01  
† p < .10

TABLE 7  
GREAT BRITAIN INCUMBENT VOTE EQUATIONS

	Labour	Conservative
Incumbent Recall	.59**	.33*
Challenger Recall	-.30*	-.39**
Expectation of Helpfulness	Very	.31†
	Somewhat	.24
	Depends	-.13
	Don't Know	-.05
Party ID	Other	.98*
	None	1.06**
	Same	2.56**
JC Job Rating	Excellent	-.59*
	Good	-.35†
	Fair	.00
	Poor	.40
	Don't Know	-.57†
Constant	-2.90**	-1.29**
n	515	799
$\hat{R}^2$	.65	.67
Correctly Predicted	86%	87%

\* p < .01  
\*\* p < .05  
† p < .10

TABLE 5

## EXPECTATION OF ACCESS EQUATIONS, UNITED STATES and GREAT BRITAIN

TABLE 4

## NUMBER OF CASES HANDLED PER WEEK by MCs and MPs

	CONGRESSMEN	MPs
< 20	9%	23%
21-40	28	23
41-60	18	14
61-80	6	10
81-100	14	8
100+	16	3
MV*	10	19
N	102	101

\* MV = Refused to answer, Didn't Know.

		United States (n = 811)	Great Britain (n = 1041)
Contact	Personal	.36**	.52**
	Media	.39**	.22**
	Secondhand	.24*	-.03
Casework	Very Satisfied	1.07**	.94**
	Somewhat Satisfied	.17**	.57*
	Not Satisfied	-1.22**	-1.56**
Secondhand Casework	Satisfied	.66**	} .62**
	Somewhat Satisfied	.02	
	Not Satisfied	.67*	
	District Service	.38**	.63**
Party ID	Independent	.02	---
	Minor Party ID	---	-.46*
	No Party ID	---	.22*
	Same Party ID	.19*	.44**
Recall Incumbent		.16†	.04
Recall Challenger		-.05	.06
Year Elected		-.01*	.01
Constant		1.25**	.16
	$\hat{R}^2$	.36	.32

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

† p < .10

TABLE 8  
ESTIMATED PROBABILITIES OF INCUMBENT VOTE BY  
EXPECTATION OF HELPFULNESS

Incumbent	Identification	Not Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Very Helpful
Lab	Lab	.88	.91	.95
Lab	None	.26	.32	.42
Lab	Cons	.06	.08	.13
Cons	Lab	.10	.14	.16
Cons	None	.54	.60	.70
Cons	Cons	.95	.97	.97
-----				
Dem	Dem	.71	.89	.98
Dem	Ind	.56	.80	.96
Dem	Rep	.22	.46	.78
Rep	Dem	.28	.67	.93
Rep	Ind	.52	.86	.98
Rep	Rep	.72	.95	.99

TABLE 9  
EFFECT OF CONSTITUENCY WORK ON SWING<sup>a</sup>

	<u>Conservative Seats</u>		<u>Labour Seats</u>	
	(1)	(2) <sup>b</sup>	(3)	(4) <sup>b</sup>
Regional Swing	.59**	.56**	.83**	.79**
Constituency Work Index	.42*	.44*	- .74†	- .88*
% Immigrant	-4.24**	-4.03**	-1.17	----
Metropolitan Cities	.19	----	2.23*	1.92*
Non-Metropolitan Cities	- .89	----	.17	----
Constant	1.15	1.22	2.45	3.06
n	55	55	33	33
$\hat{R}^2$	.41	.39	.55	.52

\* p < .05

\*\* p < .01

† p < .10

NOTES

<sup>a</sup>Swing is defined as the average of the gain in Conservative share of the vote and loss in Labour share. The figures are drawn from the Times Guide to the House of Commons.

<sup>b</sup>Equations (2) and (4) omit non-significant demographic variables included in equations (1) and (3).

## DISCUSSION

The estimates reported in the preceding section do not suggest that constituency work is a major influence on the vote in Britain. Party allegiances and evaluations of party leaders account for the lion's share of electoral decisions, though it seems clear that party loyalty accounts for less than it once did (Crewe, 1974). Is it the case, then, that constituency service in Britain is of only mild academic interest, not deserving of anything like the attention it has received in the American literature? Possibly so, possibly not.

Most obviously, what is of importance to tenured professors seeking to explain variance, and what is of importance to elected officials seeking to win re-election may not correspond very closely. In the short term individual MPs can do little or nothing to change the party composition of their constituencies, nor to alter their constituents' evaluations of party leaders. But individuals can affect their images in the constituency, and the little bit they can affect may be of equal importance to them as the great deal that they cannot. Moreover, within the ranks of elected officials, there are further divisions. The minister sitting in a safe seat may share the academics' disdain for a piddling personal vote, but to the ambitious politician in a marginal seat those one to two thousand votes may mean the difference between a successful political career and oblivion.

A second reason why constituency service in Britain might be of more importance than its present impact on the popular vote would indicate is the simple fact that service activity may be growing in importance. Our elite interviews contain numerous suggestions that "this sort of thing" has become a larger part of the MP's job in

recent years -- sometimes to the dismay of older MPs. Constituency parties increasingly require their MPs to live in the district. And, as discussed earlier, there has been an increase in the frequency of surgeries. Such indications of increasing constituency orientation have potentially important electoral implications. Whatever the significance of constituency work for electoral behavior today, it may be considerably greater than it was two decades ago, and perhaps considerably less than it might be two decades hence. For the earlier period we have the Butler-Stokes representation study, though the data are still restricted. For the contemporary period, we have the surveys discussed in this paper. And we can monitor the future and conduct studies accordingly. This contrasts with the American case in which electoral change went unnoticed until it was too late to measure some of the variables which might plausibly have produced the change.

The subject of electoral change in Britain has received considerable attention in recent years, and we need refer to nothing so grand as the current Social Democratic challenge to the established Conservative and Labour parties. Less dramatically, Crewe (1974) describes such trends as the declining share of the vote captured by the two major parties, declining turnout, and increasing inter-election volatility in the two-party swing. Probably less significant, but even more interesting from the standpoint of the research described in this paper are the reports of small departures in the 1979 results from established patterns of British electoral behavior. Consider some selected remarks of Professors Curtice and Steed in their detailed statistical appendix to the most recent Nuffield election study (Butler and Kavanagh, 1980):

The 1974-1979 swing was not uniform: it varied more from seat to seat than in any other election since 1950 (1980, p. 394).

It is clear that Labour kept down the swing in its marginal constituencies, particularly in those with less than a 2% two-party majority . . . A major reason for the low swing, particularly the very low swing in the most marginal seats, is the effect of a change in incumbent MP since 1974. Because of the greater attention he can command in the media and the constituency services he can render, an incumbent MP is more likely to be able to establish a personal vote, consisting of those who support him as an individual rather than as a party representative. Where an MP does build such a personal vote in his favour, that vote will be lost if he is defeated. If he does lose, by the time of the next election the new incumbent MP may have acquired his own personal vote. The combined effect of these two personal votes would be a lower swing against the second incumbent at the following election . . . These 18 clear cases amount to strong evidence of the personal vote that an MP can build up. The low swing in them is consistent and appears to be independent of location or type of constituency. For the period from 1974 to 1979, it would appear that the double effect amounted to around 1500 votes in an average sized constituency . . . . It is, of course, in marginal seats that MPs have the greatest incentive to work for such personal votes (1980, pp. 408-409).

. . . . the more important and unexpected change is the

reduction in the number of marginal constituencies. The figures in Table 13 show that, on average, about 12 seats would change hands for each 1% swing. However, the equivalent tables produced after the 1964 and 1966 elections showed that about 18 seats would change hands for each 1% swing. This dramatic reduction in the number of seats liable to change hands has undermined the 'cube law,' which if it holds, does result in practice in about 18 seats changing hands for each 1% swing (1980, pp. 428-429).

Non-uniform national swings? Incumbency effects? Vanishing marginals? Declining swing ratios? The American student of Erikson, Mayhew and Tufte should be forgiven a sudden rush of *déjà vu*, though the magnitudes of the changes discussed by Curtice and Steed are but a shadow of those observed in American Congressional elections, and the 1979 results may be aberrant. On the chance that they are not, however, scholars should not blithely dismiss MPs' activities and their associated personal votes. And American scholars would do well to keep an eye on future electoral events in Britain.

## FOOTNOTES

1. This literature is cited, discussed, synthesized and otherwise dealt with in two recent books on Congressional elections, Hinckley (1981) and Jacobson (1982).
2. Pierce and Converse (1980) is a notable exception, albeit one which focuses on candidate visibility rather than the vote. Also to be noted are Tufte's (1973) cross-national comparison of swing ratios, and Stokes' (1968) contrast of "swing" in the United States and Great Britain. Such aggregate comparisons reflect relative differences in district-level forces, if not necessarily individual candidate effects.
3. For an extended development of this argument, see Fiorina (1980).
4. The 1980 NES/CPS post-election survey included 1408 respondents. The British Gallup survey included 2031 respondents interviewed during the week following the 1979 election in a sampling frame covering England, Scotland and Wales. In consultation with British Gallup staff we selected a subset of the 1978 CPS/NES items and modified them (when necessary) for administration to a British sample.
5. Note, however, that the effects of Callaghan ratings are not even monotonic, let alone linear. Relative to the omitted reference category, very poor, those who rate Callaghan fair, good, or very good, are significantly more likely to vote Labour. Strangely, the small group of voters who offer no opinion of Callaghan are as positively disposed toward Labour as those who rate Callaghan very

favorably.

6. Butler and Kavanagh (1980, p. 58, p.72) report that in 1979 Labour had only 70 full time paid agents, and in 1978 the Conservatives had 346. In addition to these there are part-time, volunteer workers, typically party activists.
7. King finds that in the post World War II period there has been a steady upward trend in the proportions of MPs with previous election defeats in their background.
8. In each country we attempted to procure an elite interview for each constituency in the sampling frame of the mass survey. In the United States we completed interviews for 102 of the 108 districts in the sample. Our target in the U.S. was the Congressional Administrative Assistant (AA) whom exploratory research indicated would be the best source of information on office organization and activities. In Great Britain we completed interviews with MPs and/or party agents in 101 of the 133 constituencies included in the sample. When reporting the data, of course, we include one interview for each of the 101 constituencies in the sampling frame, or in some cases only for the 69 constituencies for which we procured an interview with the incumbent MP.
9. The MP responses will be discussed at length along with analogous MC responses in a book now in preparation.
10. Just over 40% of the respondents could recall the name of any challenger for the Parliamentary seat, a figure much lower than the

incumbent's, but also one more than twice as high as that for challengers of MCs.

11. Munroe (1977) similarly finds that only a small proportion of constituent approaches to MPs involve general issue as opposed to personal concerns.

12. Across the response categories, very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, don't know, depends, the American distribution was 27%, 34%, 10%, 25%, 4%, while the British distribution was 28%, 28%, 11%, 24%, 10%. The analyses in Table 5 do not include the "don't know" and "depends" responses. The vote analyses in Tables 6 and 7, however, represent these categories along with the three ordinal categories as dummy variables.

13. The contact variables are created from the following survey item: "There are many ways in which MPs can have contact with the people from their constituency. On this page are some of these ways (respondent receives card). Think of (name) who has been the MP from this constituency. Have you come into contact or learned anything about him/her through any of these ways?" Based on Parker's (1981) analysis the responses were used to create two dummy variables: personal contact (met the incumbent, heard him/her at a meeting, talked to staff, agent, secretary or other employee), and media contact (mail, newspaper/magazine, radio, TV).

14. The U.S. equations in Tables 5 and 6 were also estimated using name recognition in place of name recall. Generally the former has a larger and more highly significant coefficient, but other coefficients

in the equations are no more than .02 different, and the overall fit of the equations is no better. Thus, in order to maximize comparability we report only the American equations using name recall. We also included campaign spending in the American equations but failed to find significant effects. Spending presumably purchases contacts and visibility, but direct measures of the latter already appear in the equations.

15. In Tables 5-7 party affiliations are coded as follows. In the American sample all respondents fall into mutually exclusive classes: same party as incumbent (51%), independent (14%), opposite party from incumbent (35%). In the British sample 38% share the party affiliation of the incumbent, and 17% admit to no party identification. The opposite party category includes adherents of any party whose MP is not of that party -- 45%. In order to pick up any additional differences between national and minor party identifiers, an additional dummy variable, minor party ID, is included. This variable takes on a value of one for those 2.5% of the respondents who report an identification with other than the Conservative, Labour, or Liberal parties. To avoid statistical degeneracy in the analyses, one category, opposite party ID, is omitted from each equation reported in Tables 5-7.

16. We did not get a measure of satisfaction with second hand casework experience in Britain. Thus, the dummy variable takes on a value of one for all those who report knowledge of friend, relative, or co-worker experience. The large and highly significant coefficient suggests that the effects of satisfactory second hand experience are

very strong, given that the estimate in the table is watered down by inclusion of a presumed minority who recall unsatisfactory experiences.

17. Again, we see the large, significant coefficients on the "don't know" categories of the Callaghan rating variables. These coefficients are based on a small number of cases (n=18 in the Labour equation, n=29 in the Conservative equation). As Converse (1966) suggests, these are individuals who are poorly educated and pay little attention to public affairs.

18. That is, .02 is the difference in estimated probability of a Conservative identifier supporting a Conservative incumbent whom he believes would not be helpful if a problem arose and that of supporting a Conservative MP who would be very helpful. The other differences mentioned in the text are analogous.

19. The American figures are calculated under the assumption that the voter does not recall the incumbent or challenger, and approves of Carter's performance if a Democrat, disapproves if an Independent, and strongly disapproves if a Republican. Again, these assumptions reflect modal responses in the sample.

20. The actual distribution of the 101 districts across the 0 - 4 scale was 16, 21, 28, 31, 5. The analysis in Table 9 utilizes 85 of the 101 cases, excluding retirees, seats won in by-elections during 1974-1979, and seats held by Liberals and Nationalists.

21. The details of this analysis are discussed at length in Cain

(1982).

22. Williams' (1966-1967) analysis did not utilize a measure of constituency effort. Rather, he sought more broadly to estimate the personal votes of "familiar" Labour versus "familiar" Conservative MPs. A "familiar" MP was defined as one with 8 or more years' service.

23. Bear in mind, however, that Curtice and Steed attempt to estimate the actual personal vote in their sample of marginals. In contrast, our figures again represent the potential electoral difference between a very low level of constituency effort and a very high level, averaged across both marginal and nonmarginal districts.



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