The Constituency Service Basis of the Personal Vote for U.S. Representatives and British Members of Parliament

BRUCE E. CAIN
California Institute of Technology

JOHN A. FEREJOHN
Stanford University

MORRIS P. FIORINA
Harvard University

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 purely American, or is it susceptible to comparative treatment? This article 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 in combination with interviews of congressional administrative assistants (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 which is much weaker than that in the United States but of somewhat greater importance than is commonly believed. As in the United States, constituency service appears to be an important component of the personal vote.

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), Tufte (1973), and Mayhew (1974a) first called attention to the temporal increase apparent over the course of the 1960s, and numerous succeeding scholars (Burnham, 1975; Cover, 1977; Ferejohn, 1977; Fiorina, 1977; Hinckley, 1980; Parker, 1980a) have theorized about the bases and the consequences of the trends identified by Erikson, Tufte, and Mayhew.[1] This outpouring of scholarly effort has produced a reasonable understanding of the multifaceted nature of the incumbency advantage in contemporary elections, although 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 incumbency is its exclusively American perspective. In particular, attempts focus on American political institutions and the American political context. Little effort has been made to compare candidate effects in House elections with those that 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 that enhance or depress candidate effects in legislative elections. This article aims principally at the former, empirical, lacuna. Although the significance of any comparative work depends on some basic theoretical ideas that render comparison meaningful and interesting, a detailed comparative theory of voting in legislative elections lies outside our present scope.

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[1]This extensive literature is cited, discussed, synthesized, and otherwise dealt with in two recent books on congressional elections by Hinckley (1981) and Jacobson (1982).

[2]Pierce and Converse (1981) is a notable exception, albeit one that focuses on candidate visibility rather than the vote. Also to be noted are Tufte's (1973) cross-national comparison of swing ratios, and Stokes's (1967) 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.

The Concept of a Personal Vote

By "personal vote" we mean that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and 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 on 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 American scholars realized that the personal vote had reached significant proportions did they really give it much attention.

Still, even if small, the personal vote has potentially great political significance. In contrast with votes based on party or class identifications, religious affiliations, the national economy, or national executive performance, the individual legislator has by definition some impact on the personal vote, and because it is under his control, he may give it disproportionate attention. 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] A personal vote reflects a principal feature of the single-member district plurality electoral system: the distinction between the interests and fortunes of an individual representative and those of any collectivity, especially party, to which he or she may belong. It is logically possible for any given representative to win while all fellow partisans are defeated. This 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 (e.g., the American) and virtually nonexistent in others (e.g., the textbook British account). The incentive still exists, however, and fragments of the existing literature gave us reason to believe that it operates even in a system like Great Britain's, although with effects much weaker than those observed in the United States.

The preliminary statistical analysis presented in Table 1 illustrates this discussion. 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. Although this difference is expected, one would imagine that the difference has increased from what it would have been in the late 1940s, for example. 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 article, 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.

[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 after 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 nearly linear, nor even monotonic. 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. Consistent with the argument of Converse (1966), these are individuals with lower educational levels and little knowledge of public affairs.

Table 1. Summary Vote Equations, Great Britain and United States

		Great Britain (n = 1527)	United States (n = 711)	
Party identification	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%	
R^2		.76	.47	

*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

Still, we daresay that most scholars will be less taken by the difference in the importance of incumbency status in the two countries than by the fact that statistically significant effects appear in Great Britain at all. The estimates show that other things being equal, Labour incumbents ran significantly better than Labour candidates who were contesting open seats, and the latter in turn ran significantly better than Labour candidates seeking to unseat incumbents of any other party (open seats—those for which no incumbent ran—are the omitted reference category for the incumbency status variables). Although 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

Table 2. Estimated Probability of In-Party Vote by Party Identity Executive Performance and District Incumbency Status

	Incumbency		
Great Britain	Non-Labour	Open	Labour
Strong conservative–fair	.00	.00	.01
Weak conservative–fair	.01	.01	.03
No party identification–fair	.15	.21	.32
Liberal–fair	.07	.11	.18
Weak Labour–good	.75	.82	.89
Strong Labour–very good	.92	.95	.98
	Incumbency		
United States	Republican	Open	Democratic
Strong Republican–very poor	.04	.11	.32
Weak Republican–very poor	.06	.14	.39
Independent–poor	.24	.40	.70
Weak Democratic–good	.36	.54	.81
Strong Democratic–good	.53	.70	.90

ratings, and the incumbency status of the constituency. Each party identification category is assigned the modal executive rating of that category.

As Table 2 shows, the impact of Conservative party identification was so strong in 1979 that candidate status made little or no difference among Conservative identifiers (the raw data show that *all* of the 81 strong Conservatives in Labour districts voted against the incumbent). This contrasts sharply with the American case, where a one-third minority of strong Republicans reported support of 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 nontrivial effect of incumbency status. In the United States, of course, the general effects of incumbency (looking across the rows) are relatively much stronger, perhaps two-thirds or so as great as 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 American voting, our emphasis in this article 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, such as staff, office space, long-distance telephone privileges and the frank, and travel (Cover, 1977; Cover & Brumberg, 1982; Mayhew, 1974b; Parker, 1980b), estimates of the value of which range up to a million dollars per term. This factor 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, constituency 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 (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1980). 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 (Hinckley, 1980; Mann, 1978). Here again, the hypothesis would not appear as plausible for Britain. Unlike American candidates who await the proper time to run, many aspiring MPs look for a suitable location—a winnable, if not safe, district. An important qualification for the nomination in such a district is a reputation as a good candidate, and an effective way to earn such a reputation is to wage a strong 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 congressmen (MCs), given that ambitious challengers in Britain cannot hope to impress future selection committees by merely going through the motions.

All in all, the foregoing considerations suggest 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 the 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 nonpartisan, nonprogrammatic 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 we present new data on constituency service in Britain, some from the mass survey already introduced, and still more from an elite survey coordinated with the mass survey sampling frame. Analogous American data also will be presented. In the fourth section we report statistical analyses that show the importance of constituency service as an explanation of the personal vote. A concluding section relates our findings to discussions

[6]Butler and Kavanagh (1980, pp. 58,72) report that in 1979 Labour had only 70 full-time paid agents, and in 1978 the Conservatives had 346. In addition, 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.

of embryonic developments in the British electoral system.

Constituency Service in Great Britain and the United States

The textbook portrait of British politics leaves little room for a personal vote. Although MPs appear desirous of retaining their office (the retirement rate in 1979 was approximately 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 (e.g., committee based as in the United States) to procure "pork" for their districts or to provide favors to individual constituents. As mentioned, they have very little staff and office resources, and their campaign spending is both limited and largely out of their control. Their parliamentary careers hinge not only on their continued local renomination and reelection, but also, and more important, on the impressions they make on national party leaders. To cap it all off, their constituents can register a preference for the executive only through their vote decisions for Parliament. Consequently, 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 constitute 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 older textbooks.

A number of British scholars (Butt, 1967; Chester & Bowring, 1962; Crick, 1970) have observed that in the postwar period the average amount of time devoted by an MP to government legislation has decreased and that devoted to representing constituents against the bureaucracy has increased. Barker and Rush (1970, pp. 183-184) report that Labour and younger members are especially prone to emphasize the "welfare-officer" role. 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 (Kavanaugh, 1969, pp. 49-50; King, 1974). Relevant data are scarce, however. In an older publication, Dowse (1963) studied an important aspect of constituency relations—surgeries—via a mail survey of 100 MPs. Of 69 responses, only one-fifth of the MPs held no surgery whatsoever, and those with fewer than nine years of 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" (p. 336). When queried directly, only one-third of the MPs viewed their activity as electorally profitable.

In contrast to Dowse's findings, our interviews 16 years later indicate that contemporary MPs are considerably more prone to hold surgeries (Table 3).[8] 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 well over one-half of our respondents did so. In two decades surgery has apparently become a standard aspect of an MP's life.

Surgeries produce contact with constituents, generally those having some request, grievance, or other claim vis-à-vis the government. Our interviews explored at length the topic of casework; several salient features of the responses are of interest before we proceed 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 (e.g., Fiorina, 1977) have hypothesized that electoral incentives lead legislators to stimu-

[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 was the congressional administrative assistant who preliminary research indicated would be the best source of information on office organization and activities. In Great Britain we completed interviews with MPs or party agents or both in 101 of the 133 constituencies included in the sample. When reporting the data, of course, we include only one interview for each of the 101 constituencies in the sampling frame, or in some cases only for the 69 constituencies in which we interviewed the incumbent MP.

[9]The MP responses, along with analogous MC responses, will be discussed at length in a book now in preparation.

Table 3. Comparative Frequency of Surgeries, 1963 v. 1979

	Dowse (1963) %	CFF (1979) %
None	17	4
Ad hoc basis	20	3
Less than monthly	–	4
Monthly	23	25
Every three weeks	6	6
Every two weeks	22	32
Three per month	–	11
Weekly or more often	12	15
N =	65	100

late 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 showed that at least some level of solicitation is the rule (85%) in the United States. The figure is lower (64%) in Britain, although a clear majority indicates some degree of initiative. In contrast, MPs are more likely (50%) to seek publicity for successful casework. Whereas 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 United States the most common types of casework are social security and veterans' benefits (almost universally mentioned). In Britain citizen requests and complaints stem most frequently from housing (mentioned by 85% of our interviewees), pensions (72%), taxes (37%), and immigration (22%). Thus, the single most common source of casework in Britain is a program that is legally a responsibility of local government. An overwhelming majority of MPs (83%) report that they do handle such local casework, although a considerable proportion (33%) do so with reluctance. In contrast, a majority of MCs report they do not handle state and local cases, although 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 extensive, permanent district operations now common in the United States. Moreover, the much smaller size of British constituencies (about 90,000 people on average, as opposed to 525,000 in the United States) would lead us to expect a smaller case load. However, the estimated case loads reported in Table 4 are higher than we had anticipated. Given that some MPs still answer their mail in longhand, their reported workload is quite impressive.

There is, then, a great deal of constituency-oriented activity apparent in Great Britain. And although 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. Partially as a result of this contact, MPs enjoy high visibility in their constituencies. Referring back to the mass surveys, incumbent MPs enjoyed a spontaneous name recall of 66% in 1979, nearly 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? Little in the literature bears directly on 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, although very different from that which Dowse reported. Perhaps there has been a major temporal change, or perhaps Dowse's respondents hesitated to commit a seemingly crass admission to paper. Apropos of the latter possibility, consider that Barker and Rush (1970, p. 177) note that MPs queried in 1967 universally believed that

[10]Approximately 48% of the respondents could recall the name of any challenger for the parliamentary seat, which is much lower than the percentage who could recall the incumbent's, but also more than twice the recall rate for challengers of MCs.

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[a]	10	19
N	102	101

[a]MV = Refused to answer, didn't know.

their personal reputations and activities had some impact on the vote.

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 be motivated to any significant extent by mundane electoral considerations. The edited transcripts of the King and Sloman 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, although one from an extremely safe seat. The program was titled, "M.P.s and their Surgeries" (King & 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?
>
> *Tebbitt:* Do you know I've never thought of it? I can't say that for me the favorite 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 & Sloman, 1973, pp. 26-27), we read the following colloquy between 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 share the views of most of those MPs we interviewed. Perhaps we were duped, or perhaps our interviewees did not understand the question as we intended it. But then again, perhaps constituency work is a more important concern of backbenchers, who are academically less interesting than frontbenchers. 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 that research would do well to keep separate: 1) Do MPs believe that 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, 1966-1967), and a recent study of 18 marginals by Curtice and Steed (1980), there is little research that sheds light on this last question. In the next section we present some findings based on the elite interviews and mass surveys discussed above.

Constituency Service and the Vote: Great Britain and the United States

Both mass surveys pursued at some length the subject of constituency service. Constituents were asked whether they had ever contacted the incumbent and if so, why, whether they had gotten a response, and whether they considered the response satisfactory. In the United States about one in seven respondents (a higher proportion of actual voters, of course) had initiated some communication with their MC; of these, 7% reported that they had requested help, 4% that they sought information, and 4% that they expressed their

opinions. In Great Britain 1 in 12 respondents had contacted their MP, with 5% requesting help, 2% information, and as would be expected, fewer than 2% expressing an opinion.[11] Nearly all constituents in both countries reported that they were "very satisfied" with the response, and fewer than 25% reported either no response or dissatisfaction.

In addition to personal experiences, a fifth of the American and a sixth of the British samples claimed they knew of someone else who had contacted their MC or MP (we refer to this as secondhand contact in the discussion that follows). Further, 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 MPs 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 intended to capture some aspects of Fenno's (1978) emphasis on the reputation for accessibility and trustworthiness that 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 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 or person as part of his or her campaign. All of these suggestions are no more than common sense, and all are reflected in the data.

The British and American equations are quite similar. MPs may get more political mileage from personal contacts than MC's,[13] and MCs perhaps more out of secondhand contacts (i.e., contacts with friends, relatives, and co-workers about whom the respondent has heard). After taking reported contacts into account, spontaneous name recall appears to have little effect in either country.[14] Party affiliations are more important, *ceteris paribus,* in Britain, with minor party identifiers significantly less likely to evidence positive expectations than even those who identify with

[11]Munroe (1977) similarly finds that only a small proportion of constituent approaches to MPs involve general issues as opposed to personal concerns. In addition, Barker and Rush (1970, p. 175) comment that "we noticed that every one of a very varied group of constituencies produced more letters raising personal cases and problems than offered opinions on local or national issues."

[12]Across the response categories—very helpful, somewhat helpful, not very helpful, don't know, and depends—the American distribution was 27%, 34%, 10%, 25%, 4%, whereas 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 (MCs) 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 (MC) 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 spontaneous 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.

Table 5. Expectation of Access Equations: United States and Great Britain

	United States (N = 811)	Great Britain (N = 821)
Contact		
Personal	.36**	.56**
Media	.39**	.23**
Secondhand	.24*	− .02
Casework		
Very satisfied	1.07**	.92**
Somewhat satisfied	.17**	− .60*
Not satisfied	−1.22**	−1.39**
Secondhand casework		
Satisfied	.66**	
Somewhat satisfied	.02	.57**
Not satisfied	− .67*	
District service	.38**	.55**
Party identification		
Independent	.02	–
Minor	–	− .44*
None	–	.24*
Same	.19*	.41**
Recall incumbent	.16	.05
Recall challenger	− .05	− .02
Year elected	− .01*	.01
Constant	1.25**	.14
$\hat{R}^2$	.36	.29

*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

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 are the most sanguine about the likelihood that he or she would help in a pinch. Finally, in the United States senior incumbents are expected to be more helpful than junior ones; no comparable relationship is apparent in Britain.

However, the largest coefficients in Table 5 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 comprises those who report no casework experience).[16] Those who recall something already done for the constituency are likewise very positive. Not surprisingly, these figures show clearly that incumbent representatives can behave in a manner calculated to enhance their constituents' images

[15]In Tables 5 and 6 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 identifier, 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 identifier, is omitted from each equation reported in Tables 5 and 6.

[16]We did not get a measure of satisfaction with secondhand 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 secondhand experience are very strong, given that the estimate in the table is watered down by inclusion of a presumed minority who recall unsatisfactory experiences.

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 6 represents a first attempt at answering the preceding questions. The equations reported in this table 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.[17]

Taking the more familiar American results first, the estimates are consistent with recent accounts of House elections in the academic literature, 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 being equal, a very favorable image as a good constituency representative is more important to the candidate 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 demonstrate 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 identifier" is the omitted reference cate-

[17]In the analyses reported in Table 6, the executive performance ratings are collapsed into three categories: approve (very good, good), fair/don't know, and disapprove (very poor, poor). Because the effect of executive approval on the vote will depend on the party of incumbent—relating positively to votes for Labour MPs and negatively to votes for Conservatives—we have formed interaction terms between performance ratings and the party of the incumbent MP, which yields six dummy variables, one of which—conservative incumbent, disapprove Callaghan—is omitted from the analysis. Analogous procedures were followed in the American case, although the results are completely insensitive to how or even whether Carter ratings enter the equation.

Table 6. Incumbent Vote Equations, United States and Great Britain

	United States (n = 644)	Great Britain (n = 1,111)
Incumbent name recall	.44**	.46**
Challenger name recall	– .77**	– .35**
Challenger contact	– .57**	–
Expectation of helpfulness		
Very	1.76**	.35*
Somewhat	.82**	.07
Don't know	.43*	– .22
Depends	–	– .02
Party identification		
Independent	.57**	–
None	–	.99**
Other	–	.99**
Same	1.19**	2.43**
Executive job rating		
Out-party incumbent		
Approve	.23	.01
Fair/DK	– .47	.34*
Disapprove	– .29	.50*
In-party incumbent		
Fair/DK	– .76	– .20
Disapprove	– .13	– .60**
Constant	– .71**	–1.65**
$\hat{R}^2$	.51	.64
Correctly predicted	80%	86%

Table 7. Estimated Probabilities of Incumbent Vote by Expectation of Helpfulness

Incumbent's party	Voter's identification	Not helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
Great Britain				
Lab	Lab	.89	.91	.94
	None/Other	.34	.37	.48
	Cons	.06	.07	.11
Cons	Lab	.12	.13	.20
	None/Other	.56	.58	.69
	Cons	.95	.96	.98
United States				
Dem	Dem	.58	.90	.99
	Ind	.39	.71	.93
	Rep	.20	.49	.82
Rep	Dem	.32	.63	.90
	Ind	.33	.65	.91
	Rep	.58	.84	.97

gory). How difficult it is for other influences to have an impact in the face of such strong partisan effects is shown in Table 7 (below). The other major influence on British voting decisions offers a clear contrast to the American results. Ratings of Callaghan's performance have significant effects on the vote for MPs. The omitted reference category is "in-party incumbent, approves Callaghan performance" (the expected effects of Callaghan ratings on the vote are obviously conditional on the party of the incumbent MP). Thus, the estimates show that constituents who disapprove of Callaghan's performance are significantly more likely to vote for a Conservative MP than those who approve; constituents of a Labour MP who disapprove of Callaghan are significantly less likely to vote for the MP than are those who approve of Callaghan.

Of most interest, however, are the variables that capture aspects of the personal vote in Britain. As in the U.S. equations, incumbent visibility has a positive and highly significant impact on electoral support (and challenger visibility has a comparable negative impact). Well-known incumbents do better than unknowns, other things being 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 or her than those not holding such expectations. There is no denying, however, that the effects of constituency service are but a shadow of what they are in the United States. Table 7 gives some idea of the comparative magnitude of the effects; the variable of interest is the voter's expectation of helpfulness. We examine six configurations obtained by crossing three party-identification categories with two incumbency categories. The figures in the table are calculated from Table 6 under the assumption that the voter has the modal value for variables other than expectations 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, fair if a nonidentifier, and the average of poor and fair if a Conservative identifier. Given these conditions the voters' estimated probabilities of voting for the incumbent MP are given in the top part of the table.

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" emerges. The smallest effect is a .03 increase in the probability that a Conservative identifier would support a Conservative incumbent, whereas the largest is a .14 increase in the probability that a nonidentifier would support a Labour incumbent.[18] These numbers contrast with the American figures in the bottom half of the table.[19] There we

[18]That is, .03 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 spontaneously recall

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 probabilities 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 observers dismiss? Using Tables 6 and 7 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 some hypothetical races. 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," and "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 the probability estimates given in Table 7, 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 a little less than 6.5% in the case of Conservative MPs and a little more than 6.5% in the case of Labour MPs. We emphasize that these are *not* estimates of the actual personal vote in 1979, even in an "average" constituency, but rather illustrations of the potential difference between the vote-attracting abilities of MPs with reputations as excellent constituency men and those with reputations as very poor ones. Still, because it is at least partially an MP's decision to become known as an excellent constituency man or a very poor 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 that 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 8 shows that they most certainly do.

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 4.2%, whereas South Britain swung by 7.7% (Curtice & 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 8 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 indicative. The statistically significant estimates imply that variations in constituency work (0 to 4) account for swings of something between 1.5 and 2% for Conservatives and of something between 3 and 3.5% for Labour. Thus, depending on the party, variations in constituency attentiveness have an electoral effect potentially as large as one quarter to one-half of the observed regional swings. The figure for Labour is almost twice that for Conservatives, consistent with the estimates of Williams (1966-1967) for an earlier period.[22] The estimates are

the incumbent or challenger, approves of Carter's performance if a Democrat, and disapproves if an Independent or 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 8 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 (in press).

[22]Williams's (1966-1967) analysis did not utilize a measure of constituency effort. Rather, he sought more broadly to estimate the personal votes of "familiar" Labor versus "familiar" Conservative MPs. A

Table 8. Effect of Constituency Work on Swing[a]

	Conservative Seats		Labour Seats	
	(1)	(2)[b]	(3)	(4)[b]
Regional swing	.59**	.56**	.83**	.79**
Constituency work	.42*	.44*	− .74†	− .88*
Immigrant (%)	−4.24**	−4.03**	−1.17	–
Metropolitan cities	.19	–	2.23*	1.92*
Nonmetropolitan cities	− .89	–	.17	–
Constant	1.15	1.22	2.45	3.06
n	55	55	33	33
$\hat{R}^2$	.41	.39	.55	.52

*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
†$p < .10$.

[a]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.*

[b]Equations (2) and (4) omit nonsignificant demographic variables included in equations (1) and (3).

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 generally in the ballpark, although somewhat larger than those calculated by Curtice and Steed (1980, p. 409) from analysis of 18 "switched" districts.[23]

Discussion

The estimates reported in the preceding section do not show that constituency work is a major influence on the vote in Britain. Rather, our analyses confirm the standard findings that party allegiances and evaluations of party leaders account for the lion's share of the variance in electoral decisions, although 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? In our opinion, no.

In the first place, what is of importance to tenured professors seeking to explain variance, and what is of importance to elected officials seeking to win reelection may not correspond very closely. Individual MPs can do little or nothing to alter their constituents' evaluations of party leaders. But individuals can affect their images in the constituency, and the little they can affect may be of greater importance to them than the great deal that they cannot. Moreover, within the ranks of elected officials, there are further distinctions. The minister sitting in a safe seat may share the professor's disdain for a piddling personal vote, but the ambitious politician in a marginal seat may view those one thousand to two thousand votes as the difference between a successful political career and oblivion.[24]

Second, constituency service in Britain might be of more importance than its present impact on the popular vote would indicate, owing to indications that service activity is a growth industry. 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 establish a local residence. And, as discussed earlier, there has been an increase in the frequency of surgeries. Such indications of increasing constituency orien-

"familiar" MP was defined as one with eight 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.

[24]In another article (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, in press) we show that electoral marginality is significantly associated with an MP's inclination to engage in a variety of constituency-oriented activities. Not surprisingly, those whose fates are more dependent on a few votes more actively seek those votes.

tation have potentially important electoral implications. Whatever the significance of constituency work for electoral behavior today, it might be considerably greater than it was two decades ago, and perhaps considerably less than it might be two decades hence. To explain the importance of that possibly emerging trend, we need to develop a further line of argument.

This article presents a simple cross-sectional analysis based on the static theoretical proposition that single-member district electoral systems provide incentives for candidates to cultivate personal bases of support. This proposition is significant in and of itself, we believe, but it takes on even greater significance when embedded in a dynamic theory of the evolution of party systems. In the United States, for example, a number of scholars have argued that the increasing importance of the personal vote and the decreasing importance of party affiliations are not independent phenomena. Burnham (1971) was probably the first to argue that the decline of party provides fertile ground for the growing importance of personal candidate appeals, which in turn further contribute to the decline of party. The argument is a dynamic one which our data are not adequate to test, but a few moment's consideration will demonstrate its plausibility.

Consider a single-member district system perfectly structured by party. Then by definition there is no personal vote: election outcomes simply reflect the automatic support of partisans for candidates of their party. Now if the hold of party should weaken, perhaps because of poor performance by the party in office, or unpopular issue positions by one or more of the parties, then a *context* is created which did not exist before. With some voters willing to employ decision criteria other than partisanship, the personal characteristics and activities of the candidates might, but not necessarily, begin to take on significance. As Fenno writes (1978, p. 211):

> Incumbency is not an automatic entitlement to a fixed number of votes or percentage points toward re-election. . . . Incumbency should be seen as a resource to be employed; an opportunity to be exploited; and the power of incumbency is whatever each member makes of the resource and the opportunity.

But, assume that some incumbents seize the opportunity and work to build personal bases of support. Then we would expect some feedback effect from their activities: observing hardworking incumbents making special efforts to serve their constituents, still more voters will decide that partisanship should matter less and the individual candidates more, thus further weakening the hold of party. In short, once the dynamic is set in motion it is self-reinforcing; declining parties contribute to increasing personal votes which in turn detract further from the importance of party.

How does the dynamic begin in the first place? Perhaps through some exogenous event(s) as with the aforementioned suggestions of bad performance or unpopular issue stands, or even as a result of more-or-less nonpolitical factors such as a changing media environment, social or technological change, or whatnot. On the other hand an endogenous cause is conceivable. No party system has the kind of complete control posited at the beginning of this argument. There is always some slack in the system. And if incumbents begin to take advantage of such slack—for whatever reason—their resulting electoral benefit may encourage others and thus help weaken the hold of party even in the absence of exogenous disturbances.

What is the upshot of the preceding argument? Are we suggesting that the British party system is undergoing the same sort of decomposition as the American? Not at all. What we are suggesting is that the existence, size, and variation in the personal vote for legislative incumbents is of interest not only for the citizen voting decisions it affects, but also as an important indicator of the strength and trend of a nation's party system.[25] And that is a topic that has aroused considerable interest among British commentators. To complete the argument 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 interelection volatility in the two-party swing. Proably less significant, but even more interesting from the standpoint of the research described in this article, are the reports of departures in the 1979 results from established patterns of British electoral behavior. Consider some selected remarks of Curtice and Steed in their detailed statistical appendix to the most recent Nuffield election study (Butler & 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).

[25]Of course, happenings in the electoral arena are not the only indicator of the state of the party system. The importance of party in the decisionmaking arena (i.e., Parliament) is of equal if not greater importance, although the two arenas undoubtedly have some connection to each other. In this regard an interesting topic for future research is whether the observations of Norton (1980) and Schwartz (1980) on the 1970s weakening of parliamentary party cohesion bear any relation to the concerns of this article.

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).

Are the 1979 results aberrant? Apparently not. In a later analysis Curtice and Steed (1982, pp. 268-269) view the 1977 results as the continuation of trends which in retrospect began several elections earlier:

In 1955 the preconditions for the operation of the cube law were still largely met. . . . Between 1955 and 1970 not a great deal of change occurred, except that there was some evidence of a small secular increase in the standard deviation. . . . In the 1970s both major parties won more seats by large two-party majorities: the distribution of the two-party vote widened and flattened. Before 1974 it was unimodal with a peak near its centre; the distribution is now bimodal with peaks where both parties win safe seats by moderately safe majorities. As a consequence of these changes, the exaggerative power of Britain's electoral system has been systematically reduced in the last three elections.

Nonuniform national swings? Incumbency effects? Vanishing marginals? Decling swing ratios? The American student of Burnham, Erikson, Mayhew, and Tufte should be forgiven a sudden rush of déjà vu, although the magnitudes of the changes discussed by Curtice and Steed are but a pale reflection of those observed in American congressional elections. The changes are noteworthy enough, however, that scholars should not blithely dismiss MPs' activities and their associated personal votes. Whatever its current importance, the personal vote may indicate the condition of important features of the larger electoral system and presage future alterations in that system.

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