Party, constituency, and representation: Votes on abortion in the British House of Commons *

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Abstract. To whom do British Members of Parliament respond when voting in the House of Commons? Using a series of votes on abortion, the revealed preferences of MPs are estimated. The results indicate that constituency characteristics matter, but they also underline the central importance of party. Even when discipline is not imposed, the Members of the three largest parties are distinct from one another. Moreover, there is a noteworthy interaction between constituency and party: the more marginal the seat, the more extreme the position. Members appear to react to electoral threat by reinforcing partisan bona fides with their local party rather than conforming to the median, recognizing the importance of partisanship for electoral success and the role of local party resources.

1. Introduction

The British political system is typically regarded as party-dominated: Voting in Parliament adheres closely along party lines, and outcomes of general elections are largely decided by national swings in party support. Over the last two decades evidence has emerged of a small "personal" vote in elections, however this has been attributed almost exclusively to extra-legislative forms of constituency service (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; but on the poll tax cf. Pattie, Fieldhouse, and Johnston, 1994). Yet, while party unity in the House of Commons is certainly strong, it is by no means inviolate; Members have strayed on issues such as the European Union and the poll tax, and on others the parties choose not to whip their Members. Where constituents can distinguish among the voting records of Members of the same party, they might use this additional information in electing their representative. If so, then an MP might be more likely to take their views into account when deciding which division lobby to step through.

It is worth considering whether this connection between party disunity and constituency implies a false dichotomy. In response to the Downsian framework in which parties converge on the median in a unidimensional policy space (Downs, 1957), formal models of party competition where candidates must first win the party nomination before competing in a general election yield results in which candidates tend to diverge (Coleman, 1971; Aranson and Ordeshook, 1972). Divergence may occur because candidates have policy preferences of their own and affiliate with a party in common cause (Wittman, 1977, 1983, 1990), or because candidates rely on activists to provide resources for the general election (Aldrich, 1983; Aldrich and McGinnis, 1989). These models have found empirical support in experiments (Cherry and Kroll, 2003) and in studies of the ostensibly weaker party system in the United States (Huntington, 1950; Fiorina, 1974; Gerber and Morton, 1998; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, 2001).

Local party members in Great Britain, and in particular the activists, have distinct and well-defined preferences over Member characteristics and behavior (Bochel and Denver, 1983; Tsebelis, 1990), and these preferences may be at variance at times with those of voters and parliamentary elites (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardson, 1994; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995). If so, then Members concerned about reelection must first be concerned about reselection to stand in the election, and thus remain attentive to their local party representatives. Similarly, resources for campaigns are held by party leadership centrally and party activists locally, limiting the ability of candidates to express a cross-partisan or nonpartisan identity. Constituency influence, therefore, is exhibited in a highly partisan manner, consistent with the formal models cited above.

Here the intersection of party and constituency is investigated using a series of free (or unwhipped) votes on abortion from the 1990 Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill to measure the roles of party and constituency in the voting of MPs. Free votes typically concern issues for which there is no party position or interest, usually moral or "conscience" issues. Unlike whipped votes, which constitute the vast majority of votes in Parliament, they yield two chief virtues for the analyst. First, free votes provide sufficient variance to untangle that portion of party unity due to ideology from the unity (apparently) imposed by party discipline. The votes help us determine the extent of unity at the limit, when there is no official party position, and they also provide constituents the opportunity to base their voting decisions on Member choices. Second, unlike nearly all defections on whipped votes, which seldom lead to the defeat of important legislation, party disunity on free votes is often consequential. For these reasons, the analysis here follows

much of the recent work on voting in the British Parliament by focusing on divisions ostensibly devoid of direct influence by party whips.

In contrast to previous work, the votes considered here have the further merit of allowing a more finely tuned estimate of the revealed preferences of MPs. Whereas conventionally one is confined to a single division, for which revealed preferences are merely binary, here a series of votes were taken which permit us to place Members in relatively narrow categories. These categories improve markedly the precision of estimates of the determinants of these preferences and permit a direct test of the Downsian and party-reliant frameworks.

2. The Abortion Amendments of 1990

The Steele Bill of 1967 established the maximum week limit at which abortions may be performed in England and Wales at 28 weeks after conception. However, a medical consensus was emerging by 1990 led by the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists that a 24-week limit was appropriate given the improvements in technology that permitted premature babies to survive (Morgan and Lee, 1991: 40). On one side of the divide were defenders of the law, who wanted to maintain the 28-week limit and pointed out that in any event abortions later than 24 weeks were very rare, and on the other side abortion opponents, who preferred an 18-week limit marking the point at which the organs are developed and the fetus is sensitive to touch.

For several years the Government had considered new regulations on embryo research and infertility treatment, issuing a White Paper, a statement of policy, in 1987. A decision was made that, while this was normally the province of Private Members Bills, the matter was of sufficient medical importance to justify the drafting of a Government bill, though one which was unwhipped as had been other abortion legislation since 1967 and one which offered votes on alternate versions of controversial provisions. Recent years had seen several failed attempts by opponents to pass restrictive bills, and with rising complaints that Private Members Bills provided insufficient opportunity for debate, in 1989 Prime Minister Thatcher agreed to allow a debate on abortion during its consideration in return for a commitment from pro-life MPs to then let the issue rest until after the next general election (Millns and Sheldon, 1998: 15). The vehicle used was a Lords Bill recently passed with a 24-week limit, allowing the Government to stand behind the medical consensus and current practice (Montgomery, 1991: 524–525; Isaac, 1994: 177).

Table 1. Votes on amendments to set the week limit for abortion

	18 Weeks	28 Weeks	20 Weeks	26 Weeks	22 Weeks
Aye	154	140	179	158	245
Conservative	*129*	*15*	*148*	*25*	*205*
Labour	*21*	*118*	*26*	*124*	*30*
No	374	370	358	360	301
Conservative	*181*	*287*	*168*	*278*	*115*
Labour	*172*	*64*	*169*	*64*	*168*

Notes. Excluded from the tallies are Members from Northern Ireland constituencies (see Appendix); numbers do not sum since votes by Alliance and nationalist party MPs are not listed separately.

A unique "pendulum" procedure was developed to provide MPs the opportunity to consider a range of options on abortion, giving rise to what one Government backbencher called "the night of the long votes" (Morgan and Lee, 1991: 49). Sir Geoffrey Howe, on behalf of the Government, offered an amendment to the Bill to set the limit at 24 weeks, which was then used as the base text for the debate. Members were given the opportunity to vote on a series of amendments alternating between decreasing and increasing the limit at two-week intervals, beginning with a vote on 18 weeks and followed by a vote on 28 weeks. The first amendment that passed would become the new text of the amendment and end consideration of the week limit, and in the event that none passed the text would remain at 24 weeks. The sequence and results of the votes are shown in Table 1.

Abortion opponents had entered the debate apparently in the belief that they stood a good chance of reducing the limit below 24 weeks (Morgan and Lee, 1991: 38). One leading pro-life MP was reported as having counted enough votes to win the vote on 22 weeks, but while that one was the closest of the lot, it too fell short of a Commons majority (Wintour, 1990). The Cabinet itself was split, with six preferring 24 weeks and seven 22 weeks. In fact, as Table 1 shows, a majority of Conservatives opted for 22 weeks, but solid Labour support for 24 weeks tilted the Commons vote.

Given their experience at the 1987 general election, Members had good reason to expect that their vote on abortion in 1990 might matter in the next election. Butler and Kavanagh (1988) report that while activity by pressure groups was lower overall than in past years, anti-abortion groups were particularly vociferous in the campaign, enough so to cause concern among Labour and Alliance candidates. Moreover, these groups distributed information via local clergy on the voting records of their MPs. In earlier elections, monit-

oring and activism had not been limited to abortion foes. Soon after Labour adopted its mandatory reselection process in 1980, the left-wing Campaign Group published a document entitled "How to Select or Reselect Your MP" which listed the record of Labour MPs on a dozen votes over the previous six years for reference by local selectors, including a division on the 1979 Corrie Amendment to reduce the time limit from 28 weeks to 20 weeks (Mullin and Atkins, 1981). As a result, if we are to observe constituency-specific effects in the voting patterns of MPs, the abortion amendments to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill appear to be an appropriate place to look.

3. Estimating preferences over abortion

Research on voting in legislatures when confined to a single issue or bill typically can inquire only as to the direction of Member preferences over the proposal relative to the status quo. While this allows us to model the causes of support or opposition, estimates of the strength of such positions inevitably will be less accurate than if we had more precise information about the location of their ideal points. Another alternative is to construct a scale from a number of votes similar in substance or politics. Here, too, error is introduced to the extent that the determinants vary across votes in the scale or when issues do not conform to a single policy dimension. In order to investigate the determinants of preferences over abortion, here we need not rely on the usual next-best measures. Using the series of "pendulum" divisions we can isolate the revealed ideal points to relatively narrow ranges which will then become the basis for modeling Member preferences.

Each division may be considered a choice against a reversion level, which here is the new clause offered by the Government setting the limit at 24 weeks.[1] Members who choose to support a given amendment prefer the utility they obtain over what they would get with the clause. With the standard assumption that an MP's utility function over abortion is single-peaked and monotonically decreasing, we can interpret a vote as the Member's choice for the week limit closer to her own ideal point. This information allows us to identify the indifference point on a vote as the midpoint between the amendment and the reversion level. That is, in the first division of the pendulum if a Member votes for the 18 week limit we know that she prefers a limit of less than 21 weeks whereas one who votes against the amendment has an ideal point of greater than 21 weeks.

Krehbiel and Rivers (1988) show that when there are votes on more than one alternative on a dimension against a single reversion point, the preferences revealed in these votes can be ordered with known cutpoints. To return to our earlier example, if after voting against the 18 week limit an MP then

Table 2. Categorizing the revealed preferences (θ) of MPs over the week limit for abortion from divisions

Sequence	Amendment	Week limit					
		$\theta < 21$	$21 < \theta$ < 22	$22 < \theta$ < 23	$23 < \theta$ < 25	$25 < \theta$ < 26	$26 < \theta$
1	18 weeks	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
3	20 weeks	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
5	22 weeks	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
4	26 weeks	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
2	28 weeks	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

votes in the second division against 28 weeks as well, we can conclude that her ideal point is located between 21 weeks (that is, (18+24)/2) and 26 weeks (or (28+24)/2). Together these votes allow us to identify the ranges within which MPs' ideal points fall as long as their preferences over the amendments are fully transitive. The assumption that their utility functions are single-peaked implies that they are.[2] Thus, the divisions together define the revealed preferences as shown in Table 2 (for details on coding, see the Appendix). In this way, we are able to observe with much greater precision the preferences of MPs over abortion.

Two additional conditions are necessary for these expressed preferences to characterize the ideal points of Members. First, they must be fully aware of the choices available to them as well as the reversion level should all proposals fail. For all the apparent complexity and novelty of the pendulum procedure, MPs were well-informed going into the lobby. Although these were free votes and Members could not rely on the cues of party whips, they could and did turn to information distributed by pressure groups and the parties prior to the debate navigating the night's divisions and outlining how to vote to reach one's preferred outcome (Cunningham, 1991: 226–227). Consequently, it seems a safe assumption that MPs knew what they were doing.[3] Second, Members must vote sincerely in all of the divisions. Here, the pendulum procedure mitigated against sophisticated voting since the first amendment approved would become the new text for the clause and end the voting on week limits. Members then had an incentive not to opt for an amendment they did not prefer since its adoption would have prevented them from obtaining their preferred choice in a subsequent division.

With these estimates of Members' ideal points in hand, we can now turn to modeling the determinants of those preferences. The first question

is the extent to which party membership matters. These are free votes, so overt party discipline is not a question since the whips did not persuade or punish MPs over their choices. Instead, if party memberships have distinctive positions – even on issues for which they do not whip Members – then that should be reflected in their preferences over abortion. Indeed, there is some question how cohesive they are; as Table 1 shows, Labour was split on the later limits and the Conservatives split on the earlier limits (Cowley and Stuart, 1997: 146). More formally, we generate the following *hypothesis*:

Hypothesis 1. Conservative, Labour and Alliance Members will have distinct positions on abortion, with Conservative MPs preferring the most restrictive law and Labour MPs the most liberal.

Confirmation of this hypothesis supports the contention that parties have distinct policy preferences irrespective of party discipline.

A second political component in a Member's vote choice, and a central one for this inquiry, is the role that constituency plays. If we expect that the views of constituents on abortion influences the revealed preferences of Members, then a likely indicator is the religiosity of a constituency, specifically the proportion of Catholics that live there:

Hypothesis 2. Members representing constituencies with a large Catholic electorate will prefer earlier week limits on abortion than those who do not.

At the same time, while the importance of the Catholic composition of constituencies for voting on abortion is well-documented (Hibbing and Marsh, 1987; Marsh and Read, 1988), support of this hypothesis does not in itself mean that MPs bow to local wishes. Another plausible explanation – and one that I will return to at the end of this paper – is that a Member simply reflects the constituency that elected her. While this does imply a relationship between constituents and voting, the causality would be decidedly indirect and tells us little about whatever influence constituents have over the votes of Members.

If Members do respond to the preferences of constituents, then we should expect that those representing more marginal seats will be more responsive than those with safer seats. In the event that my first hypothesis that party membership matters is supported, then marginality will have divergent effects on Conservative and Labour MPs. *How* they respond, however, depends on whom they are trying to please. In a Downsian framework where a representative pursues the median voter, Members will moderate their views as their electoral margin shrinks (Downs, 1957). There is some indirect and anec-

dotal evidence that this has been the pattern in Britain (Epstein, 1960; Bochel and Denver, 1983; Tsebelis, 1990), although on the question of abortion the findings have been mixed (Marsh and Chambers, 1981; Hibbing and Marsh, 1987; Marsh and Read, 1988). Conversely, when party voting dominates in general elections and candidates rely on local party support, the votes of Members will become more extreme the smaller their margin in order to appeal to party activists (Aldrich and McGinnis, 1989). While some studies of the U.S. Congress have revealed support for candidate divergence (Sullivan and Uslaner, 1978; Calcagno and Jackson, 1998; Ansolabehere, Snyder, and Stewart, 2001), others have found little evidence of party voting related to marginality (Kuklinski, 1977; Cohen and Brunk, 1983).

Here we can test these propositions directly. Thus, as alternatives to the null hypothesis that Members do not respond to constituents through voting in Commons no matter their marginality, two mutually exclusive expectations are available:

Hypothesis 3. A Downsian Conservative will vote for later abortion limits the smaller her electoral margin whereas a Downsian Labour Member will vote for earlier limits the smaller her margin.

Hypothesis 4. A party-reliant Conservative will vote for earlier abortion limits the smaller her electoral margin whereas a party-reliant Labour Member will vote for later limits the smaller her margin.

Contingent on a discernable difference in the revealed preferences of the two largest parties over abortion, evidence that the preferences of Members do vary with electoral margin provide the clearest confirmation that they vote with their constituents in mind.

4. Data and results

While we might think of a Member's underlying preferences over abortion as continuous on the interval from conception to birth, an indicator constructed from the pendulum divisions using the method above can describe only ordinal categories. Under these conditions, ordered probit might seem the appropriate modeling choice, as it did for Krehbiel and Rivers. However, estimating the thresholds between categories loses important information: The thresholds here are known. Using the cutpoints described above as fixed threshold values in an otherwise conventional ordered probit likelihood function, it also is no longer necessary to normalize σ to 1.0 in order to identify the equation, enabling us to produce a direct estimate of the variance. A

grouped or interval dependent variable can thus be estimated that accounts for censoring limits between categories (Stewart, 1983). A cosmetic boon is that unlike ordered probit, this technique produces coefficients that are easily interpretable in the units of the dependent variable, in this case the week limit for abortion. Thus, an interval regression resembles a cross between ordered probit and tobit.

The method also has the advantage of recovering a large number of cases that would otherwise be dropped from an ordered probit. Due perhaps to the late hour and long succession of divisions, not every MP voted on all amendments. In some cases, assuming complete and transitive preferences over the options allows us to recover their preferences anyway; for instance, voting for 18 weeks would place one in the lowest category even without observing votes on the other amendments. This could be done for 21 cases, but that still leaves another 91 MPs who voted on at least one of the amendments. We have some information about their preferences even if they did not vote in enough divisions to place them in a single known category. An interval regression can accommodate these cases by adjusting the thresholds on a case-by-case basis. An MP who did not vote on 22 weeks but voted against all other amendments would prefer a limit between 22 and 25 weeks. If she had voted on that amendment as well, we could place here either between 22 and 23 weeks with an "aye" or between 23 and 25 weeks with a "no"; since she could not be coded on a strictly ordinal variable, on the other hand, she would have been dropped from the ordered probit estimates. Thus, while this would introduce some error to our measure, it is presumably less damaging than dropping these 91 cases from the analysis altogether.[4] Further details are provided in the Appendix.

Explanatory variables were used to capture the value of partisanship (party membership and frontbench status), personal values (Catholicism, gender and educational background), and constituency characteristics (region and marginality) for the revealed preferences of MPs. These indicators were coded from *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* and *Roth's Parliamentary Profiles*, and details are provided in the Appendix.

The least surprising result, the one with greatest support in the existing literature and readily apparent from Table 1, is that of the Party Model: Party membership certainly matters for preferences over abortion (Hypothesis 1). MPs from the Conservative and Labour Parties and the Alliance have distinct positions in roughly equal distance to one another, positions which mirror the broader ideological stands of the three parties.[5] A Wald test comparing the coefficient for Conservatives with the negative of that for Labour was unable to reject the null at any remotely reasonable level of significance across all specifications, confirming that impression they are of roughly equal

magnitude. Even in the absence of party discipline, Members tend to act in a cohesive manner, consistent with Wittman's (1990) models of candidates who have policy preferences of their own. Looking ahead to the other models, it is also worth noting that these results become only stronger as additional factors are taken into account. Bivariate analysis, such as that by Cowley and Stuart (1997), underestimates the importance of party for free votes.

Equally clear is that the religion of the MP affects her revealed preferences. Indeed, for Catholics the effect is considerably stronger than that of party – a Catholic Labour Member will vote for as restrictive an abortion law as a non-Catholic Conservative. Other indicators of sources of personal views on abortion tested here have a negligible impact. The gender of MPs, like in the public at large, has no effect (Morgan and Lee, 1991: 21). It has been demonstrated that educational background has a distinct influence on certain free votes such as capital punishment and the age of consent for gay men (Marsh and Read, 1988), but this matters less for abortion; an Oxbridge education seems to have a small liberalizing influence, which weakens when other factors are taken into account.

Getting at the role of constituency characteristics is more difficult, largely due to data limitations. While earlier studies, making use of information on the religious compositions of constituencies, were able to show a strong and negative effect of the percentage of Catholics on a Member's support for liberal abortion laws, these data are unavailable for the constituency boundaries used to contest the 1987 general election.[6] Consequently, to get at the same idea – admittedly with less precision – dummies were included in the Constituency Model for two regions known to have large and socially conservative Catholic populations, Strathclyde in Scotland and Merseyside in the North of England.[7]

Despite the poor precision, the results confirm a link between constituency views and Member votes (Hypothesis 2). MPs representing Strathclyde and Merseyside prefer more restrictive abortion laws than do their other colleagues, ceteris paribus. The 1987 British General Election Study justifies this characterization of the constituencies as well as the relative strength of the model results for the each of them. Of Merseyside respondents 28.0% identified themselves as Catholic and in Strathclyde 20.2% did so, whereas only 8.8% of respondents in the rest of the country said they were Catholic; like MPs, when respondents identified themselves as Catholic they were significantly more likely support greater restrictions on access to abortion through the NHS than other respondents ($p < .01$ using a difference of means test).

If the voting decisions of MPs depend on characteristics of their constituencies, then for the electorally-minded these decisions may also depend on

the marginality of their seat. Marsh and Read (1988) include a dummy for large constituency majorities in their models of free votes, following the findings of Marsh and Chambers (1981) that Labour Members from marginal seats were more likely to support the Steele Bill in 1967. However, their analysis does not distinguish the party and obtains a nonsignificant result. One explanation would be that the two effects for Labour and Conservative MPs in unsafe seats canceled each other out, and Hibbing and Marsh (1987) hypothesize just that: Conservatives will behave more conservatively and Labour MPs become socially more liberal in marginal seats. They find, though, that while Conservatives do indeed respond to marginality by voting more conservatively over four free votes, using a simple ordinal scale for the degree of electoral security they find no effect for Labour.

This is surprising not least because it was Labour activists and not their Conservative counterparts who made an issue of abortion in selection prior to earlier elections. This apparent anomaly may be due to two problems with their estimation. By using an arbitrary categorization of marginality the models may underestimate the importance of electoral insecurity for voting. Moreover, since Hibbing and Marsh estimate separate equations for Labour and Conservative MPs, there is no direct comparison of partisan effect in abortion votes. The Margin Model in Table 3 attempts to remedy these problems by estimating the effect of marginality continuously – the size of a Member's majority in thousands of voters – as an interaction with party membership.[8]

Marginality has a very strong effect on vote choice for both Conservative and Labour MPs, and in opposite directions. The more marginal the seat, the higher the week limit a Labour Member prefers and the lower a Conservative prefers. As with party membership, so too are the marginality effects roughly equivalent at any conventional level of significance using a Wald test. Moreover, the effect is not negligible, with a difference of 2.7 weeks between the most and least safe seat for Conservatives and Labour MPs alike. This supports hypothesis 4, that party-reliant Members will support more extreme positions on abortion when representing marginal 3 seats, and allows us to reject the Downsian hypothesis (3). Figure 1 simulates the effects on preferences as marginality ranges from zero to 30,000 votes, with the Members converging near 24 weeks in the safest seats.

This assumes, of course, that party activists are more extreme in their views on abortion than rank-and-file voters are (Aldrich, 1983). There is good evidence that Labour activists are ideologically more extreme than non-activists, though for Conservatives the evidence is more mixed (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardson, 1994; Iversen, 1994). Still, there is little data with which to test directly on abortion. The 1987 British

Table 3. Estimates of the preferences of MPs over the week limit for abortion

	Party model	Conscience model	Constituency model	Margin model	Catholic model
Constant	24.19***	24.10***	24.60***	24.56***	24. 16***
	(0.73)	(0.67)	(0.67)	(0.66)	(1. 24)
Conservative	–2.61***	–2.74***	–3.10***	–4.09***	–3. 09**
	(0.77)	(0.70)	(0.70)	(0.77)	(1. 33)
Conservative frontbench	–0.08	–	–	–	–
	(0.52)				
Labour	2.51 ***	3.03***	3.12***	4.04***	5. 65***
	(0.80)	(0.74)	(0.73)	(0.84)	(1. 52)
Labour frontbench	0.51	–	–	–	–
	(0.83)				
Catholic	–	–5.89***	–5.78***	–5.72***	–5. 63***
		(0.78)	(0.78)	(0.78)	(1. 35)
Female	–	.99	0.83	0.76	1. 24
		(0.68)	(0.67)	(0.66)	(1. 11)
Oxbridge education	–	0.91***	0.73**	0.62*	0. 79*
		(0.34)	(0.34)	(0.33)	(0. 47)
Strathclyde constituency	–	–	–3.13***	–2.61 ***	–
			(0.73)	(0.73)	
Merseyside constituency	–	–	–4.06***	–3.74***	–
			(1.41)	(1.39)	
Catholic %	–	–	–	–	–5. 55**
					(2. 46)
Conservative* majority	–	–	–	0.10***	0. 10**
				(0.03)	(0. 04)
Labour* majority	–	–	–	–0.09**	–0. 15**
				(0.04)	(0. 06)
σ	3.47	3.15	3.07	3.00	2. 63
χ^2	192.72	274.16	300.63	315.47	137. 31
N	563	563	563	563	219

Notes. Standard errors in parentheses. *p < . 10; **p < .05; ***p < .01 on a two-tailed test.
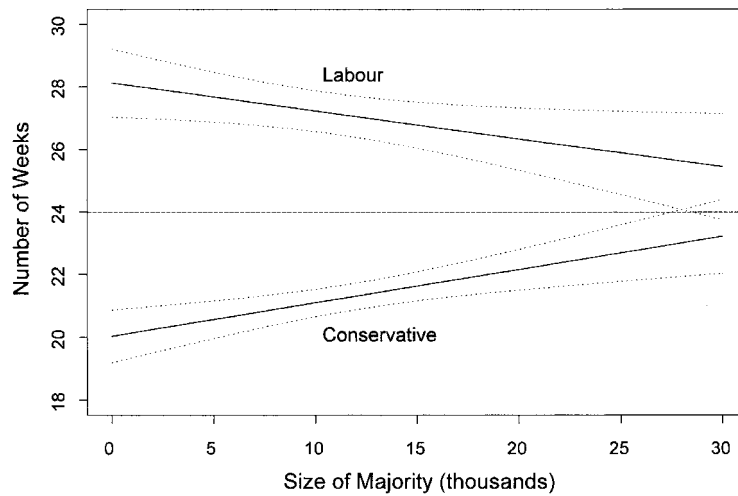
Figure 1. Effect of marginality on preferences of MPs.

General Election Study does show that, when respondents are asked whether the availability of abortion from the National Health Service has gone too far (where 1 = "much too far" and 5 = "not nearly far enough"), those saying they were members of the Conservative Party were socially slightly more conservative than other self-identified Conservative voters (2.64 vs. 2.70). Similarly, Labour Party members were clearly more liberal than other self-identified Labour voters (2.91 vs. 2.65). Since this does not tap directly the activists involved in candidate selection – a smaller subset of party members – given other work on the subject it seems reasonable to assume that the survey underestimates the degree of divergence among activists. Marsh and Chambers (1981) make precisely this claim for the abortion votes they examine.

Perhaps surprising is that the effect of marginality is just as strong for Conservatives as for Labour Members, despite the fact that the Labour Party and not the Conservatives requires regular re-selection of Members before each general election. However, this is misleading since Conservative constituency parties can and do deselect MPs (Butler and Kavanagh, 1992). Recent struggles within the party over the European Union also show that deselection does not always follow the wishes of the Conservative Central Office; constituency parties have shown themselves sufficiently independent that a debate has sprung up over whether party leaders could "disaffiliate" a constituency party that fails to deselect a rebellious Member (Whiteley and Seyd, 1999). Thus, for the Conservative Party as much as Labour, MPs must think of their constituency party as partially independent of their parliamentary party.

Finally, consider again the Constituency Model. Another option for estimating the role of constituency characteristics in lieu of data directly on the religiosity of constituents would be to use survey data on the proportion of Catholic respondents in each constituency from the British General Election Study of 1987. While it has the disadvantage of reducing the number of MPs in our sample and introduces measurement error due to the small sample size per constituency, it may lend greater flexibility in estimating ideal points than the crude dummies used for region. With this in mind, an additional Catholic Model was estimated for the MPs whose constituencies were sampled in the election study.

There are two findings of note. First, the proportion of Catholics does have a strong and negative impact on preferences over abortion, as others have found and consistent with the Constituency Model. In fact, this finding is every bit as strong even when Strathclyde and Merseyside constituencies are excluded – the results are not driven by these regions (results not shown). Second, the effects of Labour membership and marginality are considerably stronger once the Catholic composition of constituencies is taken into account. This makes sense given that Labour constituencies tend to have more Catholics, depressing the estimated ideal points for Labour MPs absent controls for the religiosity of their constituencies. Here, Labour constituencies were 13.3% Catholic on average as opposed to 8.2% for other constituencies; even excluding the more Catholic-heavy Strathclyde and Merseyside, the margin is 11.7% to 8.1%. That is, while Labour Members tend to have quite liberal views on abortion as a whole, they are also highly sensitive to both their constituents (as seen with the Catholic measure here) and their selectors (as seen with marginality). This may also help to explain the surprising result that the electoral margin affects Conservative MPs as much as Labour, even though for the former views on abortion are more heterogeneous and for the latter the constituency party plays a more direct role in reselection, as discussed below. Instead, taking into account the Catholicism of the constituency Labour Members are more sensitive to the size of their majority in voting on abortion.

The results shown here, and in particular the Margin and Constituency Models, suggest the small but potentially important role local factors play in parliamentary elections. The institutional role of constituency parties places them in a pivotal position in two respects. First, they are the locus of parliamentary candidate selection. For new candidates, this involves interviewing with local party leaders for nomination to a short list, followed by a vote on the list by local party members. Activists seek candidates who will win votes for their party in the election, but they also seek candidates who reflect their

own policy preferences (Bochel and Denver, 1983; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995).

Incumbents are saved the arduous interview process, but they also face the specter of deselection if the local party disapproves of their conduct. Norris and Lovenduski (1995) note that, with respect to Labour, deselection has been used sparingly, nothing more than a "paper tiger." Instead, it might be characterized by Sherlock Holmes as the dog that didn't bark: They go on to describe the hard work by MPs to stay in the good graces of their local party, "a laborious rigmarole" which according to one MP caused colleagues to be "away [from Westminster] for three or four months watching their backs" (68). A Labour MP, describing "How to See Off Challengers," advised prospective backbenchers, "The local party must be subjected to relentless wooing between elections. Last minute attempts to win over neglected, resentful constituents will be brushed off. Good works are not enough. The news must be immodestly and continuously conveyed to the Votingham party" (Flynn, 1997: 105). If it is a paper tiger, then it is one that incumbents clearly felt had some bite, and the low rate of deselection speaks to their success in appeasing activists. Historically the Conservatives have seen fewer disagreements between the local and national parties, but they too have sufficient mechanisms to make incumbents wary of offending local activists (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995: 51–52; Butler and Kavanagh, 1992: 217–218).

The second role a constituency party plays in the Member's reelection is as her local campaign organization (Aldrich and McGinnis, 1989). Candidates face a strict limit in the amount they may spend in the election. They are allowed a single free mailing during the campaign, are banned from the airwaves, and may spend no more than a few thousand pounds.[9] What candidates lack in funds they can try to compensate for in organization via their local activists. Party members canvass the electorate for information on voting intentions prior to the election, promote their candidate during the campaign, and get out the vote on election day. These efforts have measurable effects, and for a marginal seat can be consequential for reelection. One study of Labour Party members in the 1987 general election found a positive and highly significant effect for activism on vote share (Whiteley and Seyd, 1994). In a separate study of Conservative Party activism, these authors also found direct effects for the size of the campaign budget and the amount of canvassing on vote share.[10]

One consequence of the importance of local factors is that reelection-seeking incumbents may respond to policy preferences that are more extreme than the constituency median or even the parliamentary party median (Hirschman, 1970).[11] Peter Jones (1995) suggests that regarding "conscience" issues such as abortion, "The constituents who are likely to be most in contact with

their MP and who are best placed to 'lean' on him are his party's local act-ivists, but they are notoriously unlikely to provide a microcosm of the whole constituency" (158; cf. Marsh and Chambers, 1981: 210). Norton and Wood (1993) similarly observe, "In Britain, the leadership of the parliamentary party carries the greatest weight with most backbench MPs most of the time. Nevertheless, the MP must be attentive to the policy wishes of that subset of constituents who 'count'" (28). Recent battles within the Conservative Party over the European Union indicate both the divergence of constituency opinion from national party policy in some locales with Euro-skeptic MPs, as well as the importance of local support for political survival in the face of hostile party leaders. Citing corroborating historical evidence, an introductory text on British political parties notes, "MPs can be grossly rebellious and a constant thorn in their leader's side and survive – providing they have the backing of their local party and electors" (Garner and Kelly, 1998: 7–8).

5. Conclusion

A lingering question regarding the effects of region in the Constituency Model and the proportion of Catholic respondents in the Catholic Model is the direction of causality. Can we in fact attribute the observed relation-ship to constituents influencing the MP, or does the MP simply reflect her constituency? With no residency requirement for Members, there are two ex-planations for constituency effects. On the one hand, an MP may be directly responsive and follow the constituents' predominant view on an issue. On the other hand, the local party may select its candidate in part due to her concordance with the views of local residents on issues of concern to them. Either explanation confirms the importance of constituency preferences. Fur-thermore, as the Margin Model shows, Members certainly do respond to the local party by becoming more extreme in their voting as their electoral margin shrinks. The best explanation for their behavior, therefore, is that MPs make some decisions with one eye watching their electorate and selectorate.

Another interpretation of the Margin Model consistent with Downsian candidate convergence might be that voters penalize more extreme Members. Those who choose more extreme positions will find themselves in tighter races than moderate Members. By this logic, the causal order would be re-versed: Extreme voting in Parliament leads to electoral penalties levied by constituents. While the results on marginality appear consistent with this story, it falls short on two counts. First, the election data come from the general election *prior* to the abortion votes; thus, an MP would not only have to have taken extreme positions in the previous Parliament, but she must not have learned her lesson after seeing the close election results for her seat. If

a Member's positions do have this strong an effect, then she either must not understand that electors vote retrospectively – a dim view of the MP – or other non-electoral goals must take precedence. While this latter consideration is conceivable, a second objection makes it moot. Fundamentally, a Downsian interpretation of the Margin Model depends on highly candidate-centered elections in which an MP's positions, along with those of her challengers, determine electoral outcomes. This both underestimates the importance of party affiliation in candidate success and overestimates the importance of particular voting decisions in the British House of Commons. If electors (and selectors) use information that distinguishes their Member from others of her party in electing (and selecting) their representative, as I suggest, then the choices MPs make matter, but at the margins.

Together these findings show that a Member of Parliament is not as helpless to national electoral swings as bobbing flotsam; she has the opportunity – though limited – to distinguish herself on votes in the Commons and through constituency service. In some cases, such as when there is a large Catholic electorate, a prudent MP will vote more conservatively on moral issues like abortion. However, she also knows that ultimately the greatest influence on her fate by far is the popularity of her party. To say that MPs are party-oriented only states the obvious, and tells half the story. The Member is a delegate, but a delegate of a particular sort, attending to the wants and needs of local party activists usually rather than the electorate as a whole and perhaps occasionally rather than the national party. One way to do so is through constituency service, despite its slim electoral advantage; another is by adhering to the views of party activists and cohesive voting blocs in the constituency.

Notes

1. Most work examining voting on these abortion divisions has focused on the division on the new clause (see Pattie, Fieldhouse, and Johnston, 1994; Cowley and Stuart, 1997). I chose not to for two reasons. First, unlike the divisions in the pendulum, the vote approving this clause was not purely on week limits, since it would also extend a limit for the first time to Scotland. On this basis, it is likely that there were multidimensional considerations in voting on the clause. Second, the information on the ideal points of Members obtained from this vote is redundant since the 24 week limit in the clause is evaluated relative to the existing 28 week limit for England and Wales, but the second division in the pendulum would replace the 24 week limit with one of 28 weeks. Thus, in order to obtain as clean a measure as possible and avoid introducing other dimensions such as regionalism, the clause rather than the bill is used as the reversion level.
2. Indeed, for all the complaints of abortion opponents about the complexity of the pendulum procedure (see Isaac, 1994: 178), of the 561 MPs who voted on two or more of the amendments only two voted in a manner suggesting intransitive preferences, in both cases voting in a single division contrary to expectations from utility theory. This does

not suggest a problem sufficient to reject the assumption that nearly all Members held and acted on fully transitive preferences.

3. Again, the best evidence to support this claim is the very low incidence of intransitive preferences across five votes and 561 MPs. In addition to the two cases noted in note 2, two other Members were recorded in Hansard as voting twice on the same division. Since in both cases voting on one side of the division implied a transitive choice and voting on the other side implied an intransitive choice, I assumed the record of the latter vote was an error and coded both MPs as making the transitive choice on that division.

4. Of the 628 sitting members for Great Britain, excluding MPs for Northern Ireland, 63 were dropped for not voting on any of the divisions, and two for voting intransitive preferences.

5. MPs from Plaid Cymru and Scottish Nationalists are included in the baseline category along with Alliance Members, but their numbers are so small in this sample (five MPs, three from Plaid and two from SNP) as not to affect this conclusion. The model was also run with a separate dummy for the nationalists, but it was insignificant and did not alter the other results in any meaningful way.

6. See Hibbing and Marsh (1987) and Marsh and Read (1988). Another alternative, used by Bartels (1991) to analyze votes on defense spending in the U.S. House of Representatives, takes district-level survey data from the American National Election Study on public preferences over defense as a measure of constituency opinion. He recognizes that due to the low number of observations in each congressional district in the sample (from six to forty-six), these estimates have substantial error which would impede proper inference of the role of constituency opinion, as well as contaminate the inferential power of the other terms in the model. To reduce the error, he estimates an auxiliary regression of the mean constituency opinion using as regressors several known determinants of support for defense spending. The new fitted value is then used in a model of House votes on defense. This method is attractive, and relevant survey data are available through the annual British Social Attitudes Survey and the British General Election Study. However, there are insufficient relevant constituency-level data available independent of these surveys to estimate an auxiliary regression in this manner, and use of the uncorrected survey data introduced far too much error to the models to be useful (results not shown; N per constituency ranges from five to twenty-two). However, the Catholic Model reported below does make use of these data for an estimate of the Catholic population in constituencies.

7. See Pattie, Fieldhouse, and Johnston (1994). Another alternative might be to use questions from the British Election Study on abortion to get at opinion more directly. While attractive, this would suffer from the same error noted in note 6. In addition, the questions available in the 1987 and 1992 studies do not concern week limits or views on abortion generally but rather opinion on the provision of abortion by the National Health Service. In so doing, the questions introduce a second policy dimension and thus a second source of error, opinion on the NHS, undermining the measure further.

8. One might expect that response to the size of majority is conditional on the population of the constituency. These models were run with majority standardized by constituency size, but this specification found only minor differences in results. In order to make interpretation of the Margin Model more transparent, therefore, the unstandardized majority in thousands of voters was used.

9. In the 1992 election all candidates were permitted a base budget of \$5,654 plus 6.4 cents per elector in rural constituencies or 5.1 cents per elector in urban constituencies.

10. See Whiteley, Seyd, and Richardon (1994). While both findings might suffer from reverse causality, whereby volunteers become more active the greater their support in the

constituency, it is worth noting that the models controlled for vote share in the previous election.

11. See Iversen (1994). If it is the case, as I argue here, that Members are responsive to local party activists, then this may help explain the puzzle of constituency service. Several studies show that the time and effort incumbents spend on constituency service, especially performing casework and holding surgeries, have increased over the past three decades and often takes up a substantial portion of their professional time (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984; Norton and Wood, 1993). Largely drawing on the more candidate-centered American case, it has been argued that constituency service translates into a personal vote for MPs; if so, then we should observe a growing personal vote for incumbents. Yet, the best evidence also tells us that the size of the personal vote is very small for Labour and Conservative Members, and that it is not growing (Katz and King, 1999; Gaines, 1998). As one scholar sums up the received wisdom, "whether or not the individual candidate now counts for more than a hundred votes, the candidates are acting as if their personal qualities made a difference" (Wald, 1984). If both observations are correct, then why do incumbents expend their valuable resources for such fleeting gain, except in the most marginal of seats?

One answer is that constituency service, like voting in the House of Commons, aims to please less the electors than the selectors, a way to build goodwill among activists and to demonstrate concern for the constituency. In the words of one Labour MP, "Casework helps buy some independence from the leftward drift of the party machine." Another Member concurs, "if the constituency party feels that the MP is neglectful, it can be very damaging. A good reputation can buy forgiveness for anything" (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984: 86). In this way, an MP can insulate herself from deselection as well construct a base of support for marginal seats whose electoral value exceeds the raw number of personal votes won.

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Appendix

The dependent variable was coded from records published in Hansard of the five pendulum divisions numbered 169 through 173 conducted on 24 April 1990, for amendments to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill 1990. The population was limited to Members representing constituencies in England, Scotland and Wales. The bill would not have applied to Northern Ireland, and the distinctiveness of the party system there makes comparisons with the results for British party membership problematic.

For Members who participated in all five divisions, the votes were converted into preference categories using the upper and lower bounds listed in Table 2 (see above). As discussed in the text, preferences were assumed to conform to a strictly convex utility function, and thus full transitivity among the choices is posited throughout. Only two Members' choices explicitly violated that assumption, on one division each, of the 2,639 votes cast during the pendulum procedure by British MPs. For MPs supporting a limit of less than 21 weeks the lower bound was $-\infty$ and for those supporting a limit greater than 26 weeks the upper bound was ∞.

If, however, she missed one or more of the votes, upper and lower bounds were coded with as much specificity as the convexity assumption permits. For instance, if an MP voted on only the first division and opted for 18 weeks, then she was placed in the lowest preference category (upper bound = 21 and lower bound = $-\infty$. On the other hand, voting on only the third division and opting for 20 weeks would provide information on the upper bound, 22 weeks, but none on the lower bound, which would then be set at $-\infty$. Voting on 22 weeks and 26 weeks and rejecting both would make the other votes superfluous under this assumption, and the upper and lower bounds would be set at 23 and 25 weeks, respectively. In this way, the revealed preferences of 563 of the 565 British MPs casting at least one vote that night could be estimated.

Data for party membership, frontbench status, gender (female), Oxbridge education, constituency and marginality (in thousands) were coded as dichotomous variables from *Dod's Parliamentary Companion* (Bedford, 1990). Percent Catholic was derived from the percentage of respondents to the 1987 British General Election Study who identified themselves as Catholic (V59A) by constituency (OPCSNO). Dichotomous variables for the religiosity of MPs came from descriptions of Members' backgrounds and affiliations from Roth's *Parliamentary Profiles* (Roth 1988, 1990, 1991). Those coded as Catholic (1) were listed in profiles as "Catholic" or "RC"; MPs were coded 0 otherwise or if described as "lapsed."