

The Role of the Good Constituency Member and the Practice of Representation in Great Britain

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There are in Britain two dimensions of representation: a national dimension which focuses on policy opinions, and a constituency dimension which focuses on redress of grievances. For centuries, the redress of grievances was the only important function performed by members of Parliament. In response to the recent expansion of central government and the rise of the welfare state, this function has been revitalized in the role of the "good constituency member" who represents constituents by making representations on behalf of their individual needs and collective interests. Using interview data on 338 MPs, the following article investigates this role, explores its relationships with behavior, and examines incentives which lead backbenchers to choose constituency service over alternative career paths.

In Great Britain and the United States, national representatives provide local constituency services. Recent American research has focused on electoral advantages incumbents gain from these activities (Mayhew, 1974; Fenno, 1978; Parker, 1980; Fiorina, 1982; Cover and Brumberg, 1982; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984). By contrast, theoretical concerns in Britain are more likely to address the topic of representation (Dowse, 1963; Sutcliffe, 1970; Munroe, 1977; Mackintosh, 1978; Cain and Ritchie, 1982; Norton, 1982). This is because constituency service is regarded as a more central aspect of representation in Britain than it is in the United States.¹

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¹ See Jewell (1983, pp. 303-4), who notes that, "Traditionally the term 'representation' has referred to the relationship between legislators and constituents on policy matters, but in recent years we have defined the topic more broadly." The "we" refers primarily to American political scientists, for constituency service has been at the forefront of British conceptions of representation since at least the thirteenth century. This is not a commentary on parochialism

Indeed, the most familiar backbench role in the House of Commons today is the role of the "good constituency member" who, it is said, represents by making representations to central government about constituents' personal cases and collective problems (Beloff and Peele, 1980, chap. 12; Richards, 1972, p. 153).

This article constructs an account of the role of the good constituency member and examines its consequences for behavior and its antecedents in career decisions. Thus, by applying a motivational approach to role analysis, the investigation first describes different types of constituency members and what they do in the constituencies. Next, it examines the role's consequences for behavior, for time allocated to constituency duties, and for cross-voting at Westminster. The success of this analysis has a theoretical corollary, since role measures have rarely been linked convincingly with behavior. In the same vein, further description, this time of activities at Westminster, also has a secondary importance because the role of the good constituency member is well known but not at all well understood and requires interpretation through the eyes of its players. The interpretation extends into an analysis of what the concept of representation means and does not mean to constituency members. And the article concludes by turning the role measure into a dependent variable and exploring sources of role choice in constituents' demands and backbenchers' incentives which lead some MPs, the good constituency members, to make this mode of representation the dominant theme of their duties and responsibilities.

CONSTITUENCY REPRESENTATION

It is difficult to see where constituency members might fit in a Parliament that is so nationally oriented and "elitist." The House of Commons is not a congress of local ambassadors. Representatives are not required to live in their constituencies, and they often enter politics at the national level rather than working up, as Americans are more likely to do, from the grass roots. Moreover, the so-called elitist theory of how democracy should work actually describes rather well the way democracy does work in Britain (Pulzer, 1972, pp. 9, 136-40). Antipopulistic themes are deeply embedded in the system's rules of the game (Searing, 1982). What point is there, then, in MPs becoming absorbed with constituency affairs? The point is redress of grievances, the constituency aspect of representation which concerns

on either side (the British could equally be said to overlook policy congruence) but rather reflects differences in the theory and practice of representation in the two political systems. Eulau and Karps (1978) have defined the key constituency dimensions as service responsiveness and allocation responsiveness and discussed the theoretical and conceptual issues involved. Cross-national empirical literature on this subject is reviewed by Mezey (1979, pp. 159-93) and Jewell (1983, pp. 319-21).

acting as an agent to protect and advance the interests of ordinary citizens. This institutional device is interwoven with British concepts of representative and responsible government and has long been regarded as a source of legitimacy and a check on the executive (Beloff and Peele, 1980, pp. 103-4; Birch, 1964, pp. 12-13; Jolliffe, 1937; Mackintosh, 1971). There are 635 members of Parliament, each in a sufficiently small constituency so that people with grievances can realistically think about going to see their MP. And although many of their grievances are trivial matters, many are not, and even the trivial ones may indicate areas where policy is wrong and needs to be put right (Bagehot, 1963, pp. 152-53; Johnson, 1977, pp. 50-51). Each week, ministers receive from MPs between 3,000 and 16,000 letters (Norton, 1982, p. 60). The volume is great and the pressure steady, especially upon government departments that deal regularly with the public.

It is sometimes forgotten that the redress of grievances was Parliament's original function and, for centuries, the only important function performed by MPs. Thus, the origins of the role of the constituency member are found at the end of the thirteenth century, in Parliaments that were more like courts of justice than like legislative assemblies. These were places for petitioning for favors and for righting wrongs, places where the "parleying" was mainly about legal matters. Some of the rolls of these early Parliaments are filled with nothing but *Placita et petitiones*, trials of causes and petitions for redress (Haskins, 1948, chap. 2; Jolliffe, 1937, p. 340; Pollard, 1926, pp. 34-38). For centuries, high policy was left outside, while the Commons concerned itself with representing matters arising from unsatisfactory administrative, fiscal, or social circumstances. Actually, the good constituency member is a very new version of this very old role which has been neglected for some time. It has been revived by the demands of the welfare state and refurbished by members who have set out to meet those demands. Labour MPs began to revive the role between the wars, but only during the postwar period has it become a familiar fixture (King, 1981, p. 280; Critchley, 1972, p. 242; Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984, p. 115). "What the public sees," according to a newly elected MP, "is a sort of local ombudsman, a social service man who is there to intervene on their behalf, and to battle with government departments and to rectify wrongs."

The fit between this ancient parliamentary role and the needs of the modern welfare state helps explain why nearly all MPs today, even those in the highest ministerial offices, do at least a little constituency service. But some members of Parliament meet fully the public's expectations and make constituency work the principal preoccupation of their careers. These are the constituency members, the focal point of our analysis.²

² This is a backbench role and available, therefore, to the two-thirds to three-fourths of MPs who are backbenchers at any given time. Most frontbenchers are either too ambitious or too busy to take it up and have therefore been excluded from the analysis.

METHODOLOGY

There are three dominant approaches to role analysis: the structural, which is associated with Talcott Parsons and structural-functional analysis; the interactionist, which is associated with the symbolic interactionist tradition of George Herbert Mead; and the motivational, which is the way the politicians themselves characterize their roles and which has much in common with goal-oriented or purposive models of legislative behavior.³ The motivational approach reconstructs roles by providing an integrated account of goals and activities.⁴ Since I wish to examine the role of the constituency member through the eyes of its players, I propose to follow the motivational approach which assumes this rationality: that actors' purposes have much to do with the roles they choose to play and how they choose to develop them.⁵

The actors are backbench members of Parliament ($N = 338$) interviewed in 1972 and 1973, the middle years of the Heath Government. The period was dominated by the issues of industrial relations, U-Turns, and the Common Market, controversies which contained the seeds of radicalization which developed in both major parties throughout the remainder of the decade. Respondents were interviewed by means of tape-recorded

³ For an example of each approach see: Wahlke, Eulau, Buchanan, and Ferguson (1962), Fenno (1978), Woshinsky (1973).

⁴ The noun "role" has long been used to refer to both social positions and individual dispositions. "Position" denotes a rank or occupation as in "the 'rowle' of the evangelist," an example from 1606 cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. "Disposition," by contrast, refers to recognizable outlooks and patterns of conduct as in contemporary references to backbench roles in the British House of Commons. In the present case, the position of backbencher provides the frame within which MPs have constructed several distinct patterns of dispositions including the role of the good constituency member. Many aspects of the role theories produced during the 1950s and 1960s were confusing because of their taste for neologisms, and because this new language contained unrealistic assumptions about determinants of political behavior. By the 1970s, the muddle made political scientists wary of role theories, though we have continued to use the role concept extensively, for it is a term from ordinary language that would be difficult to do without. By returning to ordinary language, by conceptualizing roles as they are commonly conceptualized by the people who play them, the motivational approach bypasses much of the scholasticism and brings us closer to the phenomenon we seek to describe and explain.

⁵ In describing roles from the viewpoint of the actors, the motivational approach explores what actors actually do, how they do it, and why they think it appropriate to do it one way rather than another. The stress is on meanings and motivations which encompass both cognitive goals and personality dispositions. Methods used in developing this approach have been varied, but the method that has worked best is the semistructured interview, a research strategy located between the structuralists' detailed questionnaires and the interactionists' soaking and poking. The number of respondents studied is often in between too: convincing analysis requires reasonable samples, yet at the same time the need for in-depth discussions constricts the N . See, inter alia: Heady (1974), King (1974), Woshinsky (1973), Richards (1972), Namier (1968), Barber (1965).

discussions about parliamentary careers, political institutions, and political values. They also filled in printed forms and returned a mail-back questionnaire. As part of a larger study of all members of Parliament (response rate 83 percent), these backbenchers discussed their roles at length in response to a combination of open- and closed-ended questions, while their political values were measured by a rank-order instrument (Searing, 1978).⁶ Codes for the roles, which include the role of constituency member, were developed in collaboration with Edward Crowe, who constructed measures of primary career goals and investigated their validity. Our aim was to construct a typology based upon "real types" which exist in the minds of the respondents rather than "ideal types" which are formal constructs from theories or concepts already existing in a body of academic literature (Crowe, 1982, chap. 4). This task was facilitated by working from complete transcriptions of the respondents' tape-recorded comments. Compared to the use of interviewers' notes about respondents' comments, transcription-based coding removes one of the filters between the respondents' views and the records of those views in coded data.

The role measures were constructed from responses to three principal questions formulated, with probes, to elicit extensive material that could be analyzed for both parliamentary roles and personality orientations concerning motivation. Preliminary versions of these questions were reviewed by British political scientists specializing in the study of Parliament. They were then pretested through interviews with former members of Parliament who would not be included in the study's sample. The first question asked backbenchers to characterize the broadest and most significant aspects of their work.⁷ This often-used question taps what has been called the "purposive role," since respondents typically describe not only what they do but also why they do it (Davidson, 1969). They are led to discuss the outline of their activities in terms of their goals. The second question, introduced as a follow-up to the first, moved the conversation beyond describing roles to evaluating their importance.⁸ This was developed in a

⁶ Since this is not a probability sample, conventional significance tests are not strictly appropriate. Nevertheless, they will be reported in order to give a general sense of the strength or weakness of the associations we observe. And, given the very large proportion of the population sampled, these tests will be extremely conservative indicators.

⁷ "Thinking about your broad role as a Member of Parliament, what are the most important duties and responsibilities involved?" This item elicited the most articulate characterizations of roles and was the most effective in identifying the categories in members' minds.

⁸ "Thinking for a moment very broadly about British society, how do your duties and responsibilities fit in with the work of society as a whole?—how important is your work as an MP to the functioning of society as a whole?" Because this question was so weakly defined, some respondents objected to it and spent time questioning the question. But even these objections sometimes provided valuable information. And most respondents did, as planned, elaborate themes from their previous discussion—often offering detailed examples to illustrate their points.

projective mode in order to encourage respondents to elaborate the role themes they personally regarded as most important. The third question sought to explore more fully the motivational basis of roles.⁹ Backed by a series of follow-ups and probes, it was designed to develop a discussion of satisfactions which would generate material for several different measures. One of the most successful results was a rich harvest of comments that highlighted motivations through discussions of those aspects of backbench roles that respondents liked best and, sometimes, least.

After examining half the transcripts, we independently identified four principal roles that backbenchers take up, work through, and leave at different stages of their careers: ministerial aspirants, parliament men, policy advocates, and constituency members.¹⁰ Our concurrence is not surprising, because although backbench roles come in many varieties, the framework is fixed by the position of the backbencher and by the major functions of the House of Commons. Among such functions, recruiting ministers is the most important. And ministerial aspirants, 25 percent of backbenchers, are those whose major goal is to be recruited. By contrast, the main concern of parliament men (9 percent) is to help maintain the institution by protecting its status and privileges and by sustaining services connected with its internal administration. A third function, supporting and criticizing the executive, is pursued vigorously by policy advocates (40 percent), whose careers revolve around legislation, policy, and influence. But the oldest and best-known function of the Commons is redress of grievances. And this is the chief interest of our constituency members, 25 percent of all backbenchers, who devote themselves to their constituencies and bring to Westminster grievances that may be remedied by the executive.¹¹

⁹ "Thinking over your political activity, what do you personally find most satisfying about it? What would you miss most if you left politics?" Some respondents talked, for instance, about gratifications from modest successes in modifying policy. Good constituency members often discussed at length the sorts of satisfactions they derived from helping their constituents.

¹⁰ A number of themes were identified as central to each role and were further specified in instructions used to code the data on four-point scales, one for each question (Crowe, 1982). Scores on these scales were summed into additive indices, one for each of the roles. The empirical typology was then generated by comparing each respondent's composite scores and assigning him to that role for which his score was highest. Due to missing data and ties, role assignments could not be made in 11.5 percent of the cases which were subsequently dropped from the analysis. These scoring procedures have the advantage of producing a typology which is nearly exhaustive while at the same time retaining data (the composite scores) that permit distinctions among respondents according to the strength of the disposition.

¹¹ The measurement procedure segments the role phenomenon and then constructs a whole from these segments. Immersed in parts rather than wholes, coders might lose perspective and produce scores which in the end add up to a peculiar set of classifications. This does not appear to have been a difficulty. The check is whether another coder, using a yardstick rather than a ruler, regards as constituency members those respondents coded as constituency members by the additive procedures. Thus, the principal investigator, who had not done the

A factor analysis of the items from which these roles were generated was used to examine (a) whether the four role dimensions created by additive indices actually structure the original data, and (b) whether the sets of items used to construct each composite score do, in fact, dominate their own separate factors. Five factors emerged with eigen values above 1.00, the first four of which explained 57 percent of the variance. With the exception of measures for parliament men, the factor structure matches rather well the number and character of role dimensions that were generated through the use of additive indices. And sets of items used to construct composite scores did tend to dominate distinct factors. In particular, the third factor was defined, unambiguously, by constituency-member themes.¹² The role types are intertwined in that backbenchers dabble in dispositions beyond their primary role. But this activity is not sufficiently systematic to produce a strong association among roles or to undermine the presumption that four reasonably distinct backbench roles have been isolated.

OVERLAPS AND SUBTYPES

Throughout their careers, most backbenchers change roles several times. They may play more than one at the same time, but usually one predominates over the others and provides the major focus of motivation and activity. Thus, for members of each role type, a comparison of the score for their principal role with their score on the remaining three roles shows how these roles are intertwined. Constituency members, for example, have low scores on parliament men and ministerial aspirant themes but do somewhat

original coding, examined each backbencher's responses to all the role questions and made a "global" coding judgment about appropriate role assignments. With the cases of ties and missing data already excluded from consideration, 91 percent of the global classifications matched the remaining assignments generated by the additive procedure. Since the measuring instruments were different in each case, this test has more to say about the validity of the additive procedure than about its reliability. And the strongly positive results have much to do with the fact that backbenchers are prompted by their position to dabble in several roles at the same time but are, at any given time, likely to see themselves as devoted to one of the four roles much more than to the others.

¹² Factor 1 was dominated by ministerial aspirant items and clearly represented this dimension. In the same way, factor 2 was dominated without competition by the policy-advocate items. The analysis used an oblique rotation which produced low interfactor correlations:

Factor	2	3	4	5
1	.05	.12	-.00	.03
2		.05	.07	-.09
3			.01	-.01
4				-.03

better in policy advocacy. They blend their activities with occasional attention to the advocate role because they pursue advocacy, as amateurs rather than as specialists, on constituency-related matters.¹³

Recent though its revival may be, the role of the good constituency member has become Parliament's best-defined backbench role. Constituency members are quite specific about their chief priority, which is to look after their constituents. And the role's clarity is also reflected in the fact that it has a name recognized by all: "I've got a reputation for being a good constituency member." There are, however, two distinct subtypes which differ in outlook and conduct, "welfare officers" and "local promoters." Each constituency member's responses to the three role questions were therefore coded again, creating the subtypes presented in table 1. The criterion that differentiates these subtypes is well known: representations on behalf of *individual* constituents or on behalf of the constituency's *collective* concerns (King, 1974, p. 26). Nearly all constituency members are inclined one way or the other: welfare officers to the individual side, local promoters to the collective. When respondents gave nearly equal weights to each, they were assigned to the intermediate category, "both."¹⁴

Constituency members today are typically depicted as welfare officers, and table 1 indicates that three out of four of them fit the description.

TABLE I
 CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS: SUBTYPES,
 AND SUBTYPES BY POLITICAL PARTY

SUBTYPES	ALL CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS		POLITICAL PARTY*			
	N	%	CON.		LAB.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Welfare Officers	(64)	75	(25)	68	(37)	82
Both	(8)	09	(3)	08	(4)	09
Local Promoters	(13)	15	(9)	24	(4)	09
	(85)	99	(37)	100	(45)	100

* $p \leq .05$.

¹³ Norton (1982, p. 66) notes that constituency members have little time for specialization. Cases they take up require them to learn quickly a little bit about many different technical fields rather than a lot about a few fields.

¹⁴ All codes used a four-point scale from "very strong," a pure statement of the role across all responses, to "weak," where the subtype theme was dominant overall but mixed with others or expressed with half-hearted interest. These scales can be interpreted as crude indicators of the reliability of one case compared with another.

Devoted to casework with individuals, these are the MPs for whom "the most important duty of all is to give your unreserved and unremitting attention to your constituents." The same themes are developed by respondents in the category "both," but these backbenchers also give a prominent place to collective constituency matters. Many constituency members might object that they do both, and that the nine percent for this category is misleading. Yet, most of them direct their energies much more to one side than the other. The other side is that of local promoters, a significant minority among constituency members (15 percent), who speak very little about the personal problems of individual constituents and instead develop a constituency-wide or even regional perspective. But the particularly striking fact about local promoters is that so many dislike and denigrate the welfare officer role. Welfare officers and promoters are both constituency members, but they are different sorts, one of which would prefer not to be so closely associated with the other.

It is unusual to find large partisan differences in distributions of parliamentary roles (Jewell, 1970; Gross, 1978; Davidson, 1969). And Labour MPs are only slightly more likely (9 percent) than Conservatives to choose the role of constituency member as their principal job.¹⁵ Distances between the subtypes in table 1 are greater: 82 percent of Labour's constituency members are welfare officers, compared to 68 percent among the Conservatives, who are more likely than their Labour counterparts to emerge as local promoters (cf., Barker and Rush, 1970, pp. 192-95). These data understate the difference somewhat since Labour's strength is disproportionately concentrated among the "very strong" welfare officers where they outnumber conservatives four to one. Nevertheless, the great majority of Conservative constituency members are welfare officers too.

ACTIVITIES IN THE CONSTITUENCY

In the constituencies, welfare officers and local promoters have contrasting styles of constituency service which are more easily differentiated than are their activities at Westminster. To investigate characteristic activities in

¹⁵ The probability at the bottom of table 1 refers to the probability that local promoters would be this different by chance alone. The probability that welfare officers would be this different by chance alone is weaker: $p \leq 10$. It is often assumed that the gap between the parties is much larger than this: that Labour MPs constitute a still more disproportionate share of constituency members because they are more elderly, have fewer outside responsibilities, and have constituents who are more likely to need help (Sutcliffe, 1970, p. 89). The fact is that there are many more Conservative constituency members than is generally recognized—even during a period when the Conservative party was in Government and Conservative backbenchers might be expected to be most likely to gravitate towards the roles of policy advocate and ministerial aspirant.

the constituencies, the two types will therefore be considered separately.¹⁶ Moreover, to reconstruct this and other aspects of the role, I shall lean heavily upon quotations which present the material as it appears to the constituency members themselves.

Welfare Officers

The welfare officers' best-known service is talking with constituents at their surgery or advice bureau. Nearly all MPs hold surgeries, but welfare officers hold them much more regularly than most (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984, p. 115). They advertise in the local newspaper and open the doors on a Friday or Saturday morning to install themselves, for as long as it takes, in a centrally located meeting room or office (Munroe, 1977; Dowse, 1963). It usually takes two to three hours to listen to the ten to twenty constituents, who tend to be older, working class, and not very articulate. Hence, the most successful welfare officers are the good listeners, like this Conservative MP:

They are nervous because it's an ordeal for them to have to come and sit and see you. And what you have got to try and do is make them feel relaxed, because if you scare them they are never going to tell you what they want to tell you, they will mumble on about something and then walk out, and they haven't really told you. . . . You have got to try in a short space of time too, to get their confidence and get them to open up.

But the surgery is only one event in the welfare officers' weekends, for they are more likely than other MPs to make themselves available throughout Saturday and Sunday: "I'm there whenever they feel, whenever they need me . . . whatever problem they have they can come and see me." Many live in their constituencies, which allows them to work while attending to their families. Through promotional activities, several of the "very strong" welfare officers boost awareness of their services and the level of demand for them (Gould, 1978, pp. 84-85). A few MPs have taken mobile surgeries around their constituencies each week (Cain and Ritchie, 1982, pp. 74-75). And one even scrapped his surgeries altogether and went instead to seek his casework at pubs, clubs, and shopping centers. Some welfare officers also try to visit the homes of constituents who contact them, while others make special efforts to visit those who cannot come to them at all.¹⁷ During the

¹⁶ Before reviewing the activities of constituency members, it should be stressed that all MPs do some constituency work, and that many of them who are not singled out here as constituency members (because they do not regard these activities as their primary focus) may do perfectly satisfactory and even outstanding work for their constituents.

¹⁷ The MP and local civil servants usually strive to maintain good working relations, but there are strains built into their relationship. In particular, local officials may resent the MP's efforts to be an ombudsman when these seem to go beyond the call of duty and especially when they generate adverse publicity (Cain and Ritchie, 1982, pp. 75-76).

weekend, they pursue their representations with local civil servants and with the local authority and its representatives; they make phone calls, write letters, and act as facilitators to see that the system works properly and that those who need help get it.

Difficulties for which constituents seek their MP's help are a mixture of matters concerning local government, central government, and private institutions and individuals. By far the most common problem is housing. Nearly all welfare officers spend a vast amount of time trying to sort it out. The local council is involved because the difficulty usually concerns availability of council houses administered by the local housing authority. MPs who are not welfare officers are tempted, therefore, to advise constituents to take their complaints to the local council (Willey, 1974, p. 154; King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 3-12). But welfare officers, by contrast, take it up themselves. Pension problems concern the central government and can be more complicated. One member, who describes "the strength of my constituency representation as the cases of old age pensioners," seeks out people who are unaware they are entitled to pensions, like the old man with a war injury to whom he explained: "Now people like you ought to have a pension. You gave your service to your country. Go home and get your papers and bring them back." Tax and social security matters are also common cases that require redress from departments of central government. One Labour welfare officer worked for over a year to get a few pounds back from the Inland Revenue which, he believed, had treated his constituent unfairly. Another cited the example of a seventy-five-year old woman who was told by the Social Security that they had overpaid her for three years and now wanted 105 pounds back, 105 pounds she didn't have.

Occasionally, welfare officers take up private problems that would be regarded as peculiar pursuits for representatives even in the most populist democracies. It is unusual, but not all that unusual, to hear how they have dealt personally with cases of mental illness or attempted suicide: "One woman had attempted suicide twice, and by weekly visits to her home, to her children, her confidence was built up. . . . People might argue that that's the social worker's job, but the strange, fascinating thing about an MP is that if an MP steps in, confidence steps up." These amateur social workers are usually Labour MPs; Conservatives prefer the mantle of local ombudsman even when, in the age of the welfare state, it draws them into small matters such as the case of a constituent who was having trouble with the Gas Board: "And I got on to them. And the result of it is that far from her owing them money, they owe her money." It might be a private business whose boss has unfairly treated one of his employees. Or it might be a schoolgirl refused a refund when she returned unsatisfactory goods. Often the problem is more private still and requires not action but simply sympathetic listening.

Local Promoters

The strength of the constituency service rendered by local promoters lies not so much with making representations about individual difficulties as with the constituency's collective needs, be they economic, environmental, or social. Thus, when promoters talk about what they do in their constituencies they are less likely to discuss surgeries than to review visits to local factories, disablement centers, comprehensive schools, hospitals, or other institutions. At all these places they seek information about the broad range of contributions being made and about needs in areas where they might be of help.

Their work also involves local party activity, for all MPs are expected to aid the local party organization between elections by making political speeches and attending political dances, bazaars, and meetings on the weekends (Richards, 1972, pp. 156-57). Yet promoters do more than the minimum of this sort of thing and gladly accept as well a part in nonpartisan functions such as opening a showroom for the South of Scotland Electricity Board or giving speeches about delinquency or the environment. One way of looking at it is that, "in his constituency," the MP "should be a catalyst to make sure all the organisations that make up a constituency, work. And if they don't work he should make representations to them."

At the time of the interviews, unemployment was among the most pressing collective constituency concerns. In some areas, like Northumberland, it had long been the dominant problem: "When I went there, there were 30,000 mining jobs in Northumberland. . . . It's a full-time job in itself, the question of the rundown of the industry and all the upheaval, social, economic and industrial, that it caused." One strategy local promoters followed was to seek to improve the constituency's industrial base. This might involve the attraction of new industry to bring firms to the constituency. Or, it might involve mounting a joint effort with the trade unions and the constituency party to save a particular plant which is in danger of being closed down. It can also be done by securing government investment, grants of money for shipyards, for steel mills, aircraft orders for local firms, etc., by meetings with the minister to see that oil rigs are built in "my part of the world" rather than somewhere else.

The quality of life is also affected by provision of health and recreational services. More than a few MPs claim to have kept open or improved a hospital in their constituencies. But perhaps one of the most satisfying projects, and for that reason one which conveys well the civic and service-oriented texture of this role, concerns the promoter who helped develop a park:

We have a very large park in Plymouth that was gifted by the government to Admiral Baker to commemorate his great victory. His successors didn't want it and the Plymouth Corporation

bought it. Since that time the park was practically never used in spite of the fact that it was a colossal size of a park—it's something like 750 acres. . . . You had a mile to walk, all the way up, before you could sit down on the grass or get a seat of any kind because there were railings all the way up. So naturally hardly anybody used it. I persuaded the Council to pull down these railings and provide seats all the way up and to spend something like 25,000 pounds on developing this remarkable park. And now there are more people [who] go there from Plymouth on a good weekend than to the seaside. So that when I walk up to that park, as I often do, I get quite a kick out of seeing all these people enjoying themselves.

The subject of planning decisions is a magnet for local promoters who are drawn to the larger schemes. A Lancashire MP, who characterized his role immediately "as a good constituency member," illustrated his claim by describing his activities in affecting the course of development of the Lancashire New Town. A more common concern than developing new towns is dealing with decay in old ones. And less grand, but more common still, are campaigns for road improvements, such as a bypass. Finally, there is a large residual category of special local matters that local promoters pursue: an amendment to help horses, creating a register of disabled people in the constituency, seeing that an equipment failure at the funfair is properly investigated, etc. They expect to help with a wide range of local matters because they are regarded by their constituents and tend to regard themselves "as some sort of civic leader who should take a responsible role in the community of 80,000 people — a purely local point of view."

CONSEQUENCES FOR BEHAVIOR

Many investigations which have sought to link roles, usually representational roles defined by structural approaches, to behavior have produced mixed results (Jewell and Patterson, 1977; Friesema and Hedlund, 1974; Gross, 1978; Kuklinski and Elling, 1977; McCrone and Kuklinski, 1979). This section examines relationships between the role of the good constituency member and important behavior in two arenas, the constituency and the House of Commons.

Time in the Constituency

Listening, being available to help, promoting local improvements, seeing that the system works properly, all these activities require spending a good deal of time in the constituency. Since constituency representation in Britain concerns redressing grievances and promoting local interests, "time in the constituency" becomes a key behavioral variable for those who play the constituency-member role.¹⁸

¹⁸ "The difference between a Constituency MP and a non-Constituency MP," said a constituency MP, "is that a Constituency MP is one who does quite a lot of advice bureau, is in the constituency a lot. A non-Constituency MP would do the minimum."

TABLE 2
 TIME IN THE CONSTITUENCY BY BACKBENCH ROLE
 BY DISTANCE FROM WESTMINSTER

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS PER WEEK IN THE CONSTITUENCY	ROLE TYPE(%)		DISTANCE FROM WESTMINSTER	
	NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS (N = 174)	CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS (N = 60)		
0-9	44	28	I	II
10-14	37	35	North,	Wales,
15-48	18	37	Scotland	North West, Yorkshire
	99	100	.10 (.21)	.24 (.14)
	Gamma = .34 (.01)		III	IV
			Southwest, West Midlands, East Midlands, .53 (.06)	London, South East, East Anglia, .73 (.004)

The interview's mail-back questionnaire asked respondents to estimate the number of hours they spent, during an average week, on various political activities. Some found this difficult; some said there were no "average weeks." But sixty constituency members did the estimates. And the number of hours per week they devoted to "constituency and party work" in their constituencies provide the data for table 2.

All MPs have constituents, and all face individual and collective problems to which some response is required: it is difficult to ignore old age pensioners driven to distraction by the Social Security; it is difficult to ignore 500 seaside landladies going bankrupt because of a clause in the recent Fire Prevention Act; and it is imprudent to ignore one's local party association when it requests a little attention and attendance at local functions. The difference between constituency members and non-constituency members is that constituency members do *more*, not that the sorts of things they do are left completely undone by non-constituency members. Since it is an extra effort rather than a unique effort that defines constituency members, differences between the time they spend in the constituency and the time spent by other backbenchers should be noticeable but not immense. Results in table 2 fit that expectation. The correlation is .34 across a range from 0 to 48 hours per week. At the top of the range, constituency members outnumber non-constituency members two to one, a proportion that is nearly reversed among those who spend fewer than ten hours per week in their constituencies.

This relationship supports the hypothesis that the role is related to behavior, that those who think of themselves as good constituency members are also likely to spend the most time in their constituencies. Such findings are reassuring because the purposive assumptions underlying the motivational approach are expected to direct the construction of its role definitions around goals central to the actors' own belief systems — a strategy suited to generating links with behavior such as the relationship found in table 2. Moreover, this result can be strengthened considerably by adding to the hypothesis the following condition: the shorter the distance between the constituency and Westminster, the stronger the relationship between the role and the behavior. Backbenchers whose constituencies are in Scotland, for example, can get there only on weekends—whether they are constituency members or not. But MPs whose constituencies are in London have a choice about how to allocate their weekdays as well.

To take account of distance from the House, four concentric circles were drawn on a map of Britain's regions; four regional groupings were thereby created (I-IV in table 2), each one a shorter commute from Westminster than the next. Comparing from far to near, from I to IV, the correlations suggest that distance makes a difference, an enormous difference. Thus, the relationship between constituency-member roles and time spent in the constituency is very low and not very significant in the North and in Scotland, but it rises in three steps to reach .73 for East Anglia, the South East, and, of course, London, where a backbencher can, if so desired, be

TABLE 3
REGRESSION OF TIME IN THE CONSTITUENCY ON A
SELECTED SET OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	BETA	F RATIO
Role	.230	(11.44)*
Tenure	-.182	(6.91)**
Marginality	-.083	(1.37)
Party	.079	(1.15)
Distance	-.023	(0.11)
Value-Security	.008	(0.02)
<i>R</i>	.326	
<i>R</i> ²	.106	
<i>R</i> ² (Adjusted)	.080	

* $p \leq .001$.

** $p \leq .01$.

"in my constituency four or five times a week. . . . I can leave the House at 4 o'clock, I can be at an old age pensioners' tea party at 4:30, I can cut the cake and be back here by six o'clock."

The sparsity of convincing links between role variables and behavioral variables in structural and interactionist studies makes it advisable to investigate this relationship further. Thus, the multiple regression analysis reported in table 3 assesses the impact of the role variable in the context of other independent variables which are widely believed to be involved.

The dependent variable, "time in constituency," is measured as it was before. "Role" (constituency member/non-constituency member) is entered as a dummy variable. Electoral security ("marginality"), constituency location ("distance"), and the political value "security" have been included in the equation.¹⁹ And I have added "party," also a dummy variable, and length of service ("tenure") because they have been found in other studies to be related to constituency work (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1983). Inter-item correlations among these independent variables are sufficiently low to minimize the danger of multicollinearity. The standardized regression coefficients, beta weights, reported in table 3 show the impact of each independent variable upon time spent in the constituency when the remaining independent variables are controlled statistically to remove confounding effects. It can readily be seen that the only independent variables exerting a substantial force are role and tenure. It is the constituency members and the recently elected backbenchers who spend the most time in their constituencies. But the striking finding table 3 provides is that the role variable here outperforms all others including standard workhorses such as electoral security (marginality) and political party.²⁰

Cross-Voting

At Westminster, cross-voting behavior (voting with the other side) has more to do with policy goals than with representational roles. Indirectly, however, representation can become involved because disrespect for the

¹⁹ Electoral security ("marginality") is the difference between the winner's percentage of the total vote and that of the candidate who came second. Constituency location ("distance") measures the constituency's distance from the House of Commons by means of the concentric circles discussed above. "Value-security" enters from a rank-order instrument the political value with the closest ties to constituency service.

²⁰ To investigate whether extreme cases on the dependent variable might be distorting the performance of electoral security or other independent variables, the regression was rerun with these cases recoded. There was no change in the results. In the same vein, because of the important part played in role choice by "Distance from London" as a control, the regression was rerun introducing "Role X Distance" as an interaction term. Again, there was no change.

representation that good constituency members pursue irritates them and may make them less loyal than they might otherwise be. This hypothesis contradicts the traditional ballast thesis which casts constituency members as the most reliable troops on the backbenches.

The ballast thesis overlooks the disdain and underestimates the resentments. In fact, many activities appreciated in the constituencies are depreciated at Westminster. "You know," remarked a policy advocate, "to say that he or she was 'A Very Good Constituency Member,' what that really means is that you don't count in the House of Commons." Part of this disdain carries over from the nineteenth century when the role of the constituency member lay dormant and MPs were admired as politicians who debated and took stands on the great issues of the day (Mackintosh, 1978, pp. 141-44). But another part arises from strongly ambivalent feelings about new aspects of the role which appear trivial to those who do not play it full time. The local promoter's representations are on the whole accepted because these pursuits fit the role's ancient traditions. They are not so very different from the type of constituency problems pursued in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, viz. granting local charters and privileges, intrusions of alien merchants and traders in an area, impediments in the river Thames (McKisack, 1932, pp. 134-36; Hirst, 1975, pp. 160-63). The welfare officer, by contrast, runs together the task of ombudsman with that of social worker. At best, the social work dimension means helping people with genuine policy-related problems. At worst, it means commiseration over blocked drains. And it is the social work aspects of the role that draw the most disdain from colleagues who feel the image of the MP is being trivialized.

Welfare officers apologize for it. Local promoters distance themselves from it. Non-constituency members sneer: "Notice, by the way," said one when describing his role, "that I don't put the stress on seeing that all the toilets are working in your constituency. . . ." And constituency members get the message. Their reactions sound awkward and resentful,²¹ particularly the reactions of Conservative welfare officers, since on the Labour side the role's social work aspects draw less disdain. Thus, on a mail-back item, constituency members had slightly more negative views of their colleagues than did non-constituency members; welfare officers were more sour still; and the most negative perspectives were offered by Conservative welfare officers. When one of them explained to his senior colleagues his conviction that welfare officers are what the country wants, "they looked slightly shocked."

²¹ "Perhaps this is a sign of an inferiority complex, but sometimes you're regarded as a slightly inferior type of Member compared to the Member who is floating off to the Councils of Europe and foreign parts. I resent anybody who thinks that a grass-roots Member is a second class type of Member. I think we've all got something to contribute."

TABLE 4
 BACKBENCHERS: CROSS-VOTES BY BACKBENCH ROLE BY POLITICAL PARTY (%)

NUMBER OF CROSS-VOTES	ALL*				LABOUR		CONSERVATIVE**	
	NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS
None	36	28	21	28	45	22	22	22
One	25	25	30	28	23	22	22	22
Two or More	39	47	50	44	32	56	56	56
N	100 (249)	100 (85)	101 (105)	100 (45)	100 (140)	100 (36)	100 (36)	100 (36)

* $p \leq .10$.

** $p \leq .01$.

Table 4 compares the number of cross-votes cast between 1970 and 1973 by constituency members and by non-constituency members. Resentments that constituency members feel can be expressed by occasionally kicking over the traces with a cross-vote. Table 4 suggests that constituency members may indeed be slightly more likely to cross-vote than non-constituency members. The "All" columns show a difference of only 8 percent, but this is in the opposite direction from what is predicted by the ballast thesis. Party controls uncover more convincing results. Thus, the ballast thesis is not overturned in the Labour Party, whereas in the "Conservative" columns, constituency members are nearly twice as likely as non-constituency members to be delinquent. The correlation for Conservative constituency members is .42, and it rises to .49 for Conservative welfare officers. This is why some Conservative welfare officers don't spend much time in the Smoking Room and would really like to spend most of their time in the constituency. They look fondly to the constituency, to the place where their talents are truly appreciated: "going round to all the people one knows in every town and village. And it becomes more and more satisfying as time goes on I think."

Relationships between the role variable and cardinal behavior in the constituency and at Westminster have been uncovered by concentrating the study's role concepts on activities and goals and on the links between them. The following two sections will add further information about activities at Westminster and about constituency members' goals. They will thereby complete the description of the role and prepare the next theoretical phase of the investigation, which seeks to explain why backbenchers take up this role in the first place.

ACTIVITIES AT WESTMINSTER

Constituency members achieve moderate scores on the policy-advocate role because at Westminster they pursue advocacy in constituency-related matters. Moreover, the Westminster sides of the roles that welfare officers and local promoters play are very similar. Whether the constituency service problem is individual or collective, the task is basically the same: to secure a particular ruling favorable to a particular person or condition in one's part of the world.

Much of what they hope to achieve for their constituents can only be achieved at Westminster. And their devotion in the House of Commons to constituency matters distinguishes them, even more than time in the constituency, from backbenchers who take their constituency work seriously but whose primary interests are in other roles (e.g., Grant, 1974). When constituency members speak, they typically speak about constituency affairs, for they may be struggling with more than sixty cases per week, and the

number of constituents writing to them at the House is at least double the number who attend surgeries at home (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina, 1984, p. 115). Each morning they spend hours responding to letters from constituents seeking redress of grievances from departments like Health and Social Security which, in the age of the welfare state, have been created to serve the public directly and therefore have more contact with the public than do others (Norton, 1982, pp. 61-62; Barker and Rush, 1970, pp. 189-91).

First constituency members must decide whether the grievance is genuine and whether they can do anything about it. If they choose to pursue it, they may begin by using Question Time to draw the department's attention to the matter (King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 118-19). Tabling a series of questions for written answer can be even more effective. "And if a government department has been incompetent or has behaved very badly, a Member of Parliament can blow them straight out of the water." It isn't often possible to blow them out of the water, but it is easy to get a great deal of useful information, for the Government is obliged to give it. At the least, such information can clarify the case and provide a basis for deciding what to do next.

Should the case not be resolved to the member's satisfaction, the next step is to write a letter to the minister concerned.²² Such letters are carried directly to the minister's private office, sent to the relevant section for investigation, reviewed at a high level, and then presented to the minister for final consideration (Norton, 1982, p. 63). In centuries past it was the threat to withhold supply which drew the authorities' attention to personal cases and local problems. Today it is the constitutional doctrine of the individual responsibility of ministers. When subordinates have blundered, ministers can readily be discomfited and, in exceptional circumstances, may be compelled to resign. Thus, if the constituency member is still dissatisfied, further steps are available. The most important of these is to arrange an appointment with the minister in order to press the case personally (Richards, 1972, pp. 167-71). When one approaches the minister properly, behind the scenes, then it is widely believed that something positive will be done. When it is necessary to seek a general policy change in order to resolve one's particular constituency problem, constituency members make common cause with other MPs experiencing similar problems in their constituencies, and together they press their case upon the Government.²³

²² As a Conservative explained, "When I became a Member, I was told by an experienced Member that if I wanted my name in the papers I should ask a question, but if I wanted something done I should write to the appropriate Minister" (Dowse, 1963; Gould, 1978). Others aren't so sure and suspect that results are unlikely unless "you really create hell, and you're not prepared to take 'No' for an answer."

²³ This is the point at which representation as redress of grievances can intersect with the representation of political opinion on matters of national importance.

If all this fails, there isn't much more to be done — unless the matter is likely to attract the sort of publicity which has an electoral bite. Then, the member may mount a campaign to capture public opinion and mobilize interest groups to pressure the Government (Richards, 1972, pp. 167-71; Gould, 1978). These efforts are always long shots, but they bring a bonus: the MP's supplementaries and speeches will be reported in his local press (King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 119-20). An important step here is to seek an adjournment debate. This affords members fifteen to twenty minutes to discuss a problem in hopes it will be picked up by a national newspaper or television program. Most adjournment debates are moved by back-benchers pursuing, as a last resort, either an individual's complaint or a matter related to economic or other collective constituency concerns (Herman, 1972-73).²⁴

Yet, constituency members' activities at Westminster aren't all investigating and pressing forward constituency cases. Known to their people as "good constituency members," they may get more than the usual share of visitors. They will serve them as a guide around the Palace of Westminster, as a dispenser of tickets to the Strangers' Gallery and, for special guests, as a host for drinks, dinner, or strawberries and cream on the terrace. Constituency members like taking care of their constituents and are nearly always pleased to do whatever they can: "A couple of old dears, for example, 'Never been to London before and we do want to go down to Greenwich on the river. Could you book us a couple of seats?' Well, I know I'm the only person in London they know, so of course I go and do it although it's not part of my job."²⁵

THE FOCUS OF REPRESENTATION

Since constituency members are the MPs whose practice of their profession puts representation top of the list, it is instructive to clarify what this

²⁴ The principal difficulty with this strategy is its uncertainty: members compete in a ballot for the privilege. By the time the constituency member wins the right to move the adjournment and debate her topic, the topic may no longer be topical (Sutcliffe, 1970, p. 88). But even if the adjournment debate doesn't solve the problem, it at least provides ventilation: "The greatest ventilation I would say in the world, the opportunity to ventilate something that you feel is wrong. I've had two Adjournment Debates about matters that affected people in my constituency. . . and after I sat down I thought, 'Well, I may not change the world, but at least I've given it ventilation.' And the people I represent will have the satisfaction of knowing that their complaint has been raised in the greatest assembly in the world."

²⁵ It may not be part of the job, but there have always been constituency members who have on occasion performed this sort of constituency service. In the fourteenth century, for instance, many parliamentary burgesses were expected by their communities to undertake errands and other local business in London. This included tasks such as: buying wine, collecting debts, paying farm fees, and concluding agreements about tolls (McKisack, 1932, pp. 136-39).

TABLE 5
CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS: THE FOCUS OF REPRESENTATION

CENTRALITY OF REPRESENTATION	ARTICULATE POLITICAL OPINIONS				FOCUS OF REPRESENTATION(%)				ADVOCATE CONSTITUENCY INTERESTS*			
	WELFARE OFFICERS	NON-CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS	WELFARE OFFICERS	NON-CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS	WELFARE OFFICERS	NON-CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS	LOCAL PROMOTERS
Central to Discussion Present but Not Central	00	02	08	08	97	50	39	06	11	54		
Not Present	13	11	08	08	02	25	31	11	14	23		
	88	88	85	85	02	25	31	83	75	23		
N	101 (64)	101 (249)	101 (13)	101 (13)	101 (64)	100 (249)	101 (13)	100 (64)	100 (249)	100 (13)		

Notes: This table is derived from responses to these questions: Thinking about your broad role as a member of Parliament, what are the most important duties and responsibilities involved? Thinking for a moment very broadly about British society, how do your duties and responsibilities fit in with the work of the society as a whole?—How important is your work as an MP to the functioning of society as a whole? Also, constituency members who were coded as giving equal weights to the roles of welfare officer and promoter of constituency interests (N = 8) were excluded from this analysis.

*p ≤ .001 (welfare officers vs. local promoters).

concept means and does not mean to them. Long before the role codes were developed, responses to the first two questions were scored for themes concerning functions of parliamentary government. Among these themes were three foci of representation: articulating constituents' political opinions; redressing individual constituents' grievances; and advocating constituency interests to central government. Table 5 reports the distribution among welfare officers, local promoters, and non-constituency members.

In discussing their roles, all welfare officers and local promoters introduce at least one of these themes, usually as a central feature in their discussions. They are indeed concerned with representation. But they are not concerned with representing the political opinions of their constituents. Table 5 shows that hardly anyone mentions this as part of their role. When political opinions are represented in Britain, the process typically has a national rather than a constituency focus; it is national views and moods which are considered by British Governments. Ordinary MPs are not cutomarily expected to articulate the particular policy views of their particular constituents on matters of national or international significance. From a populistic perspective, Britain is an elitist democracy. From the British perspective, representation is nevertheless alive and well. Constituency members believe that what their constituents really want from representation is "not so much that they particularly want you to put their views over, but rather that when something goes wrong there is somebody who will shout for them."

Table 5 makes it clear that the modes of representation that attract constituency members are the redress of constituents' grievances and advocating constituency interests to central government. For all MPs, one of the first definitions of the verb "to represent" is acting as an agent to protect and advance the interests of the individuals and groups on whose behalf one is acting (Norton, 1982). Of course welfare officers do much more than redress individual grievances. But this is a dominant aspect of their role dispositions: 97 percent make it central to their discussions. Constituents write to them almost exclusively about personal problems (Barker and Rush, 1970, pp. 174-76). And their duty seems plain: "not so much representing the political views of constituents at Westminster, because you don't do that, but rather being able to bring the private trouble and complaint of a constituent to the notice of authority and get it put right." Likewise, promoters do far more to represent their part of the world than simply advocating constituency interests to central government. These data should be interpreted with some caution because the *N* for the local promoters is very small.²⁶ Nevertheless, nearly eight out of ten of

²⁶ The small *N* may not be such a serious problem, however, because traditional significant tests, which take account of small *N*s, suggest statistical significance at the .001 level.

them discuss this particular theme when describing their roles, for bringing industry to Preston or a hospital to Luton frequently involves working with central government.

Welfare officers and promoters are tribunes who shout for their people. But they shout for constituents' needs rather than for their political opinions. And they shout where they are most likely to be heard—at Westminster. This pleases their constituents, since this is what their constituents believe they should be doing. This also helps to check the executive, since when they shout at Westminster, administrators become more sensitive to possible errors or injustices than they would otherwise be (Gilmour, 1969, p. 275).

SOURCES OF ROLE CHOICE

It should no longer be difficult to see how the role of constituency member fits in Britain's nationally oriented political system. Members of Parliament have always spoken for local needs and represented by making representations on behalf of their constituents' interests (Hirst, 1975, pp. 158-61). It is not at all peculiar that most backbenchers regard this as part of the job. But why do some backbenchers, the good constituency members, make it the dominant theme of their duties and responsibilities? Role choice is a function of demands and incentives, in this case the demands of constituents who desire services and the incentives of backbenchers who pursue goals.

Demands of Constituents

In the United States, regional variables help explain the constituency services provided by members of Congress because regional variables affect the demand for these services (Johannes, 1983a). Similarly, in Britain demands are said to vary with whether constituencies are located in the provinces or near London, and with whether they are situated in rural areas or in urban areas.

Table 6 groups backbenchers' constituencies under the Registrar General's Standard Regions. From these regional groupings, constituencies in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh, and "Other Major Cities" (Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool) have been removed for separate examination. Within each grouping, the table reports the percentage of respondents who have become constituency members. Constituencies in Scotland, Wales, the North, and the Midlands tend to be less prosperous than constituencies in the South, and they are believed to demand greater attention from their MPs (see Mishler and Mughan, 1978, pp. 391-92; King, 1974, pp. 27-28; Lindsay, 1967, p. 70). Table 6 suggests they get it. The only region outside the South that has as low a proportion of constituency

members as southern constituencies is the North West. This pattern holds for both parties.²⁷

Hypotheses about urban-rural effects are more contradictory. It is sometimes argued that demands are greatest in urban constituencies, and that MPs from such constituencies are most likely to choose constituency member roles. But if urban areas have declining industries and decaying housing, rural areas have dispersed populations. And these dispersed populations are the basis of a contrary hypothesis, namely that MPs from rural areas are most likely to become constituency members because they spend so much time ministering to their far-flung constituents that they become immersed in the local society and its problems.

The data in table 6 tend to support the claim that rural areas spawn more than their share of constituency members, but they do not support it unambiguously. If we contrast London with the provinces, as is usually done, the rural case seems plausible since London has one of the smallest proportions of constituency members in the table. Still, the North West and Southwest regions are just as low and, when the rest of the cities are compared to the regions from which they have been removed, the relationship weakens further. Scotland does have more constituency members than its principal cities Glasgow and Edinburgh, but only slightly more. The Midlands and Yorkshire do have higher concentrations of constituency members than their "Other Major Cities," but the North West has fewer.²⁸

Now we turn from demands for constituency services to incentives for providing them, from constituents who seek representation to backbenchers whose goals are said to involve reelection, political values, and psychological satisfactions.

Incentives of Backbenchers

The dominant view among political scientists who study the constituency service of members of Congress is that the primary incentive in performing such work is an electoral reward (Johannes, 1983b; Davidson, 1969). And although some Americans have recently suggested that there may also be a significant electoral incentive which leads British MPs to focus their attention on their constituencies (Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina,

²⁷ At the same time, Conservatives appear to shoulder more than their share of the load in Scotland and Wales, perhaps because they favor promotion of constituency interests — and Scotland and Wales have the most distinct regional interests to promote. Similarly, Labour constituency members, who prefer welfare-officer work with individuals, also seem to be found where they are most needed — in the Midlands, Yorkshire, and the North, regions that have serious socioeconomic problems.

²⁸ Weakening the relationship still further, a separate investigation of the fifty most agricultural seats finds the proportion of constituency members at 29 percent, only 4 percent above average for all backbenchers' constituencies.

TABLE 6
 BACKBENCHERS: IMPACT OF CONSTITUENCY LOCATION (REGION AND CITY) UPON ROLE CHOICE (%)

BACK- BENCH ROLE	PRINCIPAL REGIONS						PRINCIPAL URBAN AREAS				
	SOUTH EAST AND ANGLIA	SOUTH- WEST	NORTH WEST	MIDLANDS (EAST AND WEST)		YORKSHIRE AND NORTH	WALES	SCOTLAND	LONDON	GLASGOW AND EDINBURGH	OTHER MAJOR CITIES ^a
				34	35						
CONSTITU- ENCY MEMBERS	21	15	13	34	35	31	41	14	33	22	
NON- CONSTITU- ENCY MEMBERS	79	85	86	67	66	69	59	86	66	79	
N	100 (48)	100 (20)	99 (38)	101 (47)	101 (46)	100 (16)	100 (22)	100 (57)	99 (12)	101 (23)	

Note: Constituencies have been grouped under the Registrar General's Standard Regions. Major cities within regions have been removed from the regional data and are examined separately in the table.

^aBirmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool.

TABLE 7

BACKBENCHERS: IMPACT OF ELECTORAL SECURITY UPON ROLE CHOICE (%)

BACKBENCH ROLE	MARGIN OF VICTORY ^a						
	0-2%	3%-4%	5%-8%	9%-14%	15%-21%	22%-31%	32%-97%
CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	26	30	33	25	21	24	27
NON- CONSTITUENCY MEMBERS	74	71	67	75	79	77	74
	100	101	100	100	100	101	101
N	(31)	(27)	(30)	(48)	(68)	(63)	(68)
$p \leq .39$							

^aMargin of Victory = difference between winner's percentage of total vote and that of closest rival.

1979, 1983, 1984), this view is not generally accepted in Britain. In fact, most British commentators dismiss this hypothesized connection between electoral marginality and constituency orientation because (a) British voters vote for the national party rather than for the individual candidate, and (b) MPs believe that 500 to 1500 votes is about all they can expect from work as a good constituency member (Richards, 1972, p. 160; Hornby, 1965; King and Sloman, 1973, pp. 13-14). The measure "margin of victory" is the difference between the winner's percentage of the total vote and that of the candidate who came second. Table 7 groups constituencies by margins of victory that reflect various degrees of electoral insecurity. The most familiar definitions of marginal constituencies would fall in the ranges 0-2 and 3-4 percent.

For constituencies at each degree of electoral insecurity, table 7 reports the proportion of backbenchers who have adopted the role of constituency member. These data make it clear that, in general, safeness of seat has no linear relationship to whether or not backbenchers choose this role.²⁹

²⁹ The reason that no linear relationship exists between marginality and choosing the role of constituency member is that there are too many constituency members like this one: "Sometimes people will say that the Constituency MPs are those that (are in marginal seats) and therefore have to do a lot of constituency work in order to maintain their vote. But it doesn't affect me, because I have a very large majority. Whether I did it or not wouldn't make a scrap of difference to my vote. I get 28,000 votes every time. My majority goes between 12,000 and 8,000, but my vote remains 28,000 whatever happens — the others go up and down."

Twenty-six percent of those in the most marginal seats cast themselves as constituency members, 1 percent less than those in the safest seats. Thus, although electoral security may be an incentive for a few constituency members, it apparently does not function as a generally important factor in decisions to take up the role.³⁰

In the same vein, it would be surprising if political values were not somehow involved, but more surprising if they dominated the choice. Thus, attempts to use ideology in explaining constituency service in the United States have produced only mixed results (Johannes, 1983b). If ideology is important, then the proportion of constituency members in ideological groups within the parliamentary parties should vary systematically across each party's political spectrum. It doesn't. The proportion of constituency members in each group hardly differs at all.³¹ Values that play an important part in choosing roles are more likely to be personal and instrumental rather than politically charged "ends" such as capitalism or socialism. Both sorts of items were included in an instrument on which MPs were asked to rank-order according to personal preferences thirty-six values arranged in four lists of nine items each (Searing, 1978).³² Correlations between these items and the dummy variable constituency member/non-constituency member show that relationships are few and modest—and include no politicized ends values at all.

The strongest correlations are with the value "Security," defined as creating freedom from uncertainty about the future. These are: .34 with the

³⁰ Like thwarted ambition, however, electoral insecurity has idiosyncratic effects. In other words, there are special cases where backbenchers have turned to the role of constituency member because their ministerial ambitions have been frustrated (King, 1981, p. 280; Lindsay, 1967, pp. 69-70; Sutcliffe, 1970, p. 88). Likewise, one can find backbenchers who do serve energetically as constituency members in hopes of collecting votes. There was even at least one who perused local newspapers for announcements of births, deaths, and other events so that he might improve his image as a good constituency MP by sending personal messages of congratulations or condolence (Willey, 1974, p. 157). But all together it is not enough and not systematic enough to create a noteworthy impact upon role choice.

³¹ The ideological groups used in this analysis correspond roughly to each party's Left, Center, and Right. In the Labour party these are the Tribune Group, the Fabian Society, and the social democrats. In the Conservative party they are P.E.S.T., the Bow Group, and the Monday Club. This absence of structuring is also apparent in an analysis of backbenchers' ideological reputations. Their reputations were coded from journalistic assessments presented in Andrew Roth's *The MP's Chart* (1971). The data should not be taken for more than what they represent, i.e., a journalist's generally well-informed but rather casual ideological sketches. Yet, the same procedure used with the groups—arraying backbenchers Left to Right and looking for systematic differences in proportions of constituency members—supports the same conclusion: no obvious ideological effects.

³² For this analysis the ordinal scales were recoded into three ranks: 1-3, the values respondents placed at the head of the lists; 4-6, the middle ranks; and 7-9, the values liked least.

role of constituency member; .38 for the subtype, welfare officer; and .47 for strong welfare officers. Although Security is not a highly politicized value, it is emphasized by Labour. And this may help explain why Labour backbenchers are somewhat more likely than Conservatives to become constituency members, welfare officers, and, especially, strong welfare officers. The fact that security comes at the top of the list gives a clue about the nature of the goals behind this role. Equally revealing is that "Compassion," also included on the value inventory, plays no part whatsoever, even for strong welfare officers.

In sum, reelection incentives do not appear important. And political values play only a modest role. These outcomes are consistent with those of Johannes (1983b), whose main finding was the overall weakness of models used to explain constituency service in the United States. Both he and Richard Fenno have speculated that the most powerful incentives may be subjective and highly individualized. When British constituency members were asked directly about their incentives, the variables they identified were subjective but not highly individualized; the most commonly discussed motivations were "sense of competence" and "sense of duty." I do not have the measures to test their claims convincingly. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to overlook the fact that sense of competence and sense of duty are two "internal rewards" found in so many constituency members' accounts of the role.

Looking after people and protecting them generates the sense of competence. When welfare officers talk about helping individuals, what they say has much to do with protection and security. "You are their protector," said a Conservative member with ten years' experience. "You find people going to nationalised industries, to Gas Board, Electricity Board, and in a lot of cases just being brushed aside. And their MP takes it up." "I personally draw great strength from my constituency," another explained, "and talking to people who rely on you to do something for them gives one immense strength, and that's very satisfying." For others, it is the test of their abilities that makes the role attractive. It is writing a letter to a minister or an organization and getting a reply when people have written dozens and gotten no reply at all.³³ Promoters of constituency interests derive similar satisfactions from shaping in some small way their part of the world, from serving as local benefactors to their communities. Compared to great

³³ And the greater the problem the greater the satisfaction in wrestling with it. "Helping people is the most fascinating job in the world," explained a member from a rural constituency, "and during one of the great storms in Scotland, where we went through a dreadful time, I was able full-time to assist and help people who possibly gave up hope. You're able to step in . . . it's a special relationship."

matters of state, "these are little things, but they are little things that in fact have done my people an awful lot of good."

A sense of duty is the other psychological satisfaction found throughout the transcripts. Foreign observers sometimes express skepticism when this is put forward as a motivation for politicians, when MPs are quoted as claiming that "you do it because it's your job *and your duty* to help everybody." Yet redress of grievances has for centuries been a traditional feature of the public life of the country and a constant feature of the job of the MP. It should not be surprising, therefore, that many constituency members simply regard their surgeries as "a civic service" that is part of their unwritten contract of employment. Civic orientations are coupled with the medieval conception of the role of the representative as that of an attorney, "as a lawyer, as an advocate for my constituents, the people I represent." If someone brings him a problem, continues this constituency member, he sees it as his duty to present his case, to represent him, full stop. For motivations which drive the duty, much can be learned from reactions to the post: "And every now and again you do have a success. And my secretary will say, 'It's a lovely post today, you have got three or four thank you letters.' And, er, it makes you feel good." It feels good because one has done one's duty in taking the trouble to provide a service: "And she wrote me such a sweet letter saying, 'Thank you so much for taking the trouble to look after my small interests.'" Another constituency member said that the emotions involved are much like those of a family doctor of the old-fashioned kind, for "one gets this sense of having helped somebody, and that's the most important thing that one gets out of it."³⁴

CONCLUSION

The House of Commons is a representative institution, and its members perform the function of representation. Central to the British concept of representation is the notion that "[a]n MP is expected to defend and further the interests of his constituents, collectively and individually" (Norton, 1982, p. 59). Representing by making representations is, in fact, the first of three usages of the term "representative" listed by Birch (1964, p. 14) in his

³⁴ The sense of duty is also reflected in characterizations of constituency service as a safety valve and of the good constituency member as "a priest in a post-Christian society, someone to go and unburden their troubles to him. . . a purely therapeutic sense, a safety valve." Labour's constituency members tend to see it in terms of this therapeutic service for individuals, whereas Conservatives are more worried about dangers for the political system. Both, however, share satisfactions gained from doing one's duty to turn the tide: "The fact of being of service . . . an MP who's doing his job properly is fulfilling a tremendously important purpose—making people realise that they have a representative at or close to the seat of power."

well-known essay on the Constitution. It is also the core of the role of the good constituency member.

But is it really representation? This puzzles Americans, for we associate representation mainly with political opinions and consider the representative's part well played when her policy positions correspond as closely as possible to those of her constituents (Powell, 1982). From the British perspective, this confounds two dimensions of representation: their national dimension which focuses on policy opinions, and their constituency dimension which focuses on redress of grievances. Policy opinions are represented nationally, not by constituency MPs, for it is national views which are aggregated in party policies, tested in general elections, and promoted through party discipline (Birch, 1964, p. 227). And, of the two dimensions of representation, the constituency-based redress of grievances is certainly the more hallowed by time.

Most MPs take it seriously, and some make it their chief role. This role subsumes two distinct subtypes: welfare officers who assist individual constituents, and local promoters who advance constituency interests. Around these purposes I have reconstructed characteristic activities in the constituencies and at Westminster, and I have shown that backbenchers who choose the role are influenced by constituency demands and by political values and internal rewards. Ambitious American politicians may feel compelled for electoral reasons to work constituency gardens, but their British counterparts are more likely to work the corridors of Westminster and leave the role of the good constituency member to others. The dispositions of these others have been brought into relief by the motivational approach which has the further advantage of generating measures that are sensitive to behavior. Thus, relationships demonstrated between the role variable on the one hand and the behavioral measures of time in constituency and cross-voting illuminate not only this role but also role theory because few role measures have in the past been successfully linked to behavior.

The House of Commons is not a legislature. It does not make laws. It does, however, redress grievances. And this, its most ancient function, has become its most popular, for this allows ordinary citizens, via their MPs, to have their problems considered directly by the highest authorities. Senior ministers make the replies and thereby continue the tradition of reform by petition which, during the reigns of the three Edwards, replaced the feudal expression of grievances by the point of the sword (Jolliffe, 1937). The need for this ancient function has been revived and intensified by the expansion of central government. And flippant comments about drains and pedestrian crossings give a useful role a lopsided portrayal by diverting attention from its genuine importance:

I think probably the most important thing of all is to serve as a brake on, and as a warning to, bureaucracy. That to my mind is the great importance of the constituency system. Everybody in this country has got an MP to go to. And it's his job to take their protest, if it's a good one, right to the top. And every bureaucrat in the town hall and the local government office is subject to the quite considerable threat: 'If they behave like this, I'll go and see my MP' — that's very important. You have got to have an awful lot of government in an advanced society. And the great danger is the tyranny of the bureaucrat. We are the limitations on that tyranny.

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