

All about the Party? Constituency Representation – and Service – in Norway

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Abstract

The article investigates the relationship between Norwegian MPs and their home constituency. The approach is based on the concept of constituency representation, which combines representational focus and constituency service. The data used in the empirical analysis comprise both surveys and in-depth interviews with MPs. It shows that MPs have multiple representative foci. The party is most important, but (party) voters in the constituency are also considered essential. Moreover, MPs actively pursue constituency interests and rate this work very importantly. Indeed, constituency effort represents an essential and time-consuming part of Norwegian parliamentarians' work. They target local policy-friendly organizations and media, and work for general constituency interest simultaneously – when possible also in cooperation with MPs from other parties. In conclusion the article discusses contextual factors that may contribute to explain MPs' constituency representation in Norway.

Key words Political representation, political parties, constituency representation,

Introduction

Two concepts from the literature on political representation are particularly relevant in terms of how MPs perceive their tasks: the focus and style of representation (Wahlke et al. 1962). Focus refers to the interests that elected representatives defend, that is, ‘who’ they represent. The ‘style of representation’ refers to the way that such interests are defended or, more specifically, ‘how’ representation takes place. A first aspect of this ‘how’ question is related to the so-called mandate-independent controversy (see e.g. Pitkin 1967): should a representative act in accordance with the wishes of his/her constituency, or should he/she act according to his/her own beliefs. As Arter argues in the introduction to this special issue, the ‘how’ question also includes different components of parliamentary work – like constituency service. In this article we specifically study the representative practice of Norwegian parliamentarians.

Members of the Norwegian Storting have been the object of scientific enquiry for more than half a century (Valen 1966; Eliassen and Pedersen 1978; Heidar 1997; Esaiasson and Heidar 2000). The themes addressed in this research have varied from recruitment, representational roles and policy representation, to perceptions of power, the role of parties and gender equality issues. A lacuna in this research, and a quite surprising one considering the strength of the centre-periphery political cleavage in Norway (e.g. Rokkan and Valen 1964), has been MPs’ relationship with their home constituencies. Matthews and Valen (1999) do, however, acknowledge the importance of constituency service, but their empirical analysis on the matter is limited, probably due to lack of good data. In research on parliamentary representation, much more has been written on the representative focus than on practice, the ‘who’ question more than the ‘how’ question. These studies have included very little information on the basic elements of constituency service, as defined in this issue: casework,

information provision, outreach activities and parliamentary initiatives (e.g. Olsen 1983; Shaffer 1998; Esaiasson and Heidar 2000; Rasch 2014; Rommetvedt 2003; Nordby 2004).

More recently, a strain of comparative studies has focused on how different types of institutional arrangements influence European legislators' constituency representation (Andre and Depauw 2013), and some of these studies include Norway (e.g. Andre, Martin and Depauw 2015; Andre, Bradbury and Depauw 2014). Based on these studies MPs in Norway seem to spend average time on casework. However, little else is revealed about Norwegian MPs constituency representation in these studies, and Andre and Depauw (2013:1002) call for more context rich studies of home style repertoires, especially in the context of multimember PR systems.

In this article, we address this call in a study of Norwegian MPs' constituency representation. Although the focus is on the relationship between MPs and their home constituencies, there is arguably a strong connection between the 'who' and the 'how' question. We believe that 'focus' carries important information on how elected MPs prioritise their activities, and that the representative focus therefore lays the foundation for constituency service. We call this combination of 'who' and 'how' *constituency representation*. This theme leads us to study two research questions: first, what is the focus of representation among Norwegian MPs? We pay special attention to the MPs' focus on their constituency. Second, what do Norwegian parliamentarians do to serve and represent their constituency interests? More precisely, we explore who the representatives target when conducting constituency service: do they target the constituents individually – regardless of political affiliation – or do they target party voters and members exclusively? Do they serve the party organisation and the local corporate sector in their work as constituency representatives? To investigate these questions we rely on a

combination of three data sources: the Norwegian Candidate Survey 2013 and the Storting Member Survey 2012,¹ as well as in-depth interviews with MPs conducted during spring 2016.

We begin with a brief presentation of the context of parliamentary work in Norway: the election system, the nomination process and the organisation of parliament and parliamentary party groups. In the next section, we investigate the representative priorities of Norwegian MPs. Although MPs' representational focus has previously been described as party-centred, we show that the reality might be more nuanced and argue that the multiple representational foci expressed by the MPs provide a foundation for their constituency work. The 'who' issue precedes and apparently gives direction to the 'how' issue. We subsequently turn to the 'how' question proper, namely, the MPs' representative practice. Based on interviews with Norwegian parliamentarians, we extract essential characteristics of MPs' relations with their constituency. We find that Norwegian MPs do work their districts, although not to the extent and manner that for example US representatives actively pursue constituency interests. Most MPs still seem to rate that part of their job quite highly. In the final section, we conclude with a discussion on the contextual factors in the Norwegian political setting that may contribute to explaining the multifaceted foci and practices of MPs' constituency representation in Norway.

The Context of Parliamentary Representation in Norway: Nomination, Elections and Parliamentary Work

At first glance, the nomination procedure for Norwegian political parties and the Norwegian electoral system generates strong incentives for candidates and representatives to focus on their party, both during their campaigns and in terms of representation (Karlsen and Narud 2013; Karlsen and Skogerbø 2015). There is no preference voting, and success depends solely

on the party vote. However, although the nomination processes are controlled by parties, candidate selection is decentralised to the county party branches – which correspond to the constituency. Thus, there might be real incentives for MPs to focus on their constituency. Candidates need to capture the necessary votes in the constituency to secure their own election as well as to increase the basis for the party's parliamentary power. In what follows, we describe the electoral system, candidate selection, and the organization of the Norwegian Parliament in more detail.

The Electoral System

Norway's electoral system is based on proportional representation, a closed list system and a modified Sainte-Laguë formula that has been in use since the 1950s. The constituency is identical to the county region ('fylke', in 2017: 19), the intermediate level between the state and the municipalities. Over the second-half of the twentieth century, a series of electoral reforms were implemented, aimed at greater proportionality in representation. A pool of national second-tier seats was introduced and from the 2005 election, the number of adjustment seats was 19, equalling the number of county constituencies. As a consequence, the overall partisan proportionality was enhanced (see Aardal 2002; Aardal 2011).

The list system used in Norway leaves only a theoretical possibility of influencing the candidate order.² When candidates are nominated, their election depends exclusively on the party vote. Parliament has twice since 2000 discussed a change to preferential voting in line with the Swedish system. As in Sweden, however, the alternative would not have changed much (Bergh et al. 2016). In the Storting in the spring of 2016 when the proposal was last rejected, it was decided that the issue should be taken up again with the aim of introducing some element of preferential voting at the 2021 election. The debate centered on whether

voters have a democratic right to vote for individuals as well as party lists, and how preferential voting would interfere with parties ability to present voters with 'balanced' lists. In particular, some feared that women would lose out with the preferential voting system. Arguments related to MPs relationship to their constituencies were not salient in the debate.

Candidate Selection

Political parties recruit candidates for parliament through nomination processes in which local branch delegates meet at county nomination conventions to finalise the list.³ Recently, however, there has been a tendency for some county party branches to open their nomination process to allow greater participation by registered party members (Narud 2008).

Nevertheless, decentralized decision-making remains the norm in Norway, making the county party branches the decisive arena for parliamentary nominations (Valen et al. 2002). Hence, candidate selection procedures, in combination with the absence of preferential voting, leave parties with considerable control over parliamentary nominations. The Norwegian case may thus be regarded as more party-controlled than, for instance, its Nordic neighbours (Narud et al. 2002).

The credentials for desirable candidates have been rather stable over time (Valen 1988; Skare 1996; Valen et al. 2002). Political and professional competence is considered most important. A potential candidate's ability to present political messages, perform well in public and the ability to handle the media have been deemed increasingly important in recent years. In 2009, more than 80 percent of candidates running for parliament considered the ability to handle the media an important criterion for nomination.⁴ Still, political experience, also local political experience, must in most cases be substantial in order to get selected (Valen et al. 2002: 191). Local experience entails having served in different types of party positions at the local or

country party branch, as well as holding local or county public office on behalf of the party – in the municipality or county councils. Other local plus-points could be to be active in local organizations, in the media debate or in action committees. In other words: a candidate that will mobilize votes for the constituency party. In addition, the usual list-balancing elements are operative among all parties: age, gender and geographical and socio-economic background. A county consists of several local party branches, and the local interests are expressed in composition of the constituency lists: local branches will try to get ‘their’ candidates as high on the list as possible. Hence, most lists, perhaps with the exception of lists in Oslo, is balanced between different geographical parts of the constituencies.

The Organization of Parliament and Parliamentary Party Groups (PPGs)

The Norwegian Storting is a ‘working parliament’, i.e. an arena for both debate and (real) decision-making (Narud et al. 2014). Parliamentary decisions in Norway are not foregone conclusions given the predominance of minority governments. The work-horses of parliamentary decision-making are the committees. Here, MPs present the proposals and compromises that then go to the full Storting for a final decision.

There are 12 standing committees in the Storting, and the main rule is at all MPs have a seat in one – and only one – committee.⁵ Broadly, the subject areas of the committees mirror those of the ministries. The Speaker does not sit on any committee but leads the Speakers’ Forum, which decides on parliamentary business and directs the administrative section. The Speakers’ Forum is composed proportionally of representatives from the party groups and do not have significant influence on parliamentary decisions. The power is held by the parties. The PPGs give the broad direction on policies and voting for their MPs. The committee members must have the backing of their PPGs for the positions taken in the committees. This goes for

important political decisions and, in particular, for issues not covered by the parties' electoral programmes. For minor issues, MPs are less bound by the PPGs in their committee work, and they are given a general mandate to negotiate 'satisfactory' settlements with other parties in the committee.

The parliamentary party groups are the centres of power in the Storting. When international scholarship notes the important of the committees, the committee chairmen and the Speakers, this resonates weakly within the corridors of the Storting. When asked, there is close to unanimous support for the proposition that power lies with the PPGs and that the parties' parliamentary leadership are the most powerful of all groups (Heidar 2000; Heidar 2014; Rasch 2014). Moreover, committee members need the support of their PPGs to gain legitimacy and backing to fight for specific policies in their committees. There is no tradition of independent voting in the Norwegian parliament, and party cohesion is extremely high. It is accepted that MPs break out on issues they have declared before nominations. They rarely do, but these could be issues of a religious character as well as matters of conscience. In some cases, this could also involve issues with important consequences for their local constituency, provided their constituency party is strongly opposed to the majority party position. At the same time, it is extremely rare that disloyal MPs leave – or are expelled from – their PPG in the middle of a parliamentary term.

All administrative resources given to the MPs are controlled by the PPGs' leadership, and the individual MPs get nothing (apart from an entry card, salary and an office) independent of the PPG. The extra-parliamentary party organisation is also represented at the PPGs meetings – in the Progress Party with full voting rights.

Tension between constituency party interests, the national party organisation and the PPG leadership must find its solution in debates and negotiations inside the PPG forum – with the PPG leadership and its secretariat at the high table. The decisive text, to address and argue with in all these debates, is the party’s election programme.

Representative Priorities among Norwegian MPs

In Norway, ‘the party’ clearly dominates the representational focus of MPs (Figure 1). 45 per cent of MPs surveyed (in 2013) said that MPs should primarily represent their party, while 20 per cent believed that party voters in the constituency were the primary focus. This resonates well with existing research. While the role of parties was largely ignored in the first US-based studies (e.g. Eulau and Karps 1977), numerous studies confirm that party interests weigh heavily when representatives are asked to define their role as elected representatives in Europe (e.g. Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Esaiasson 2000; Narud and Valen 2007, Karlsen and Narud 2013).⁶

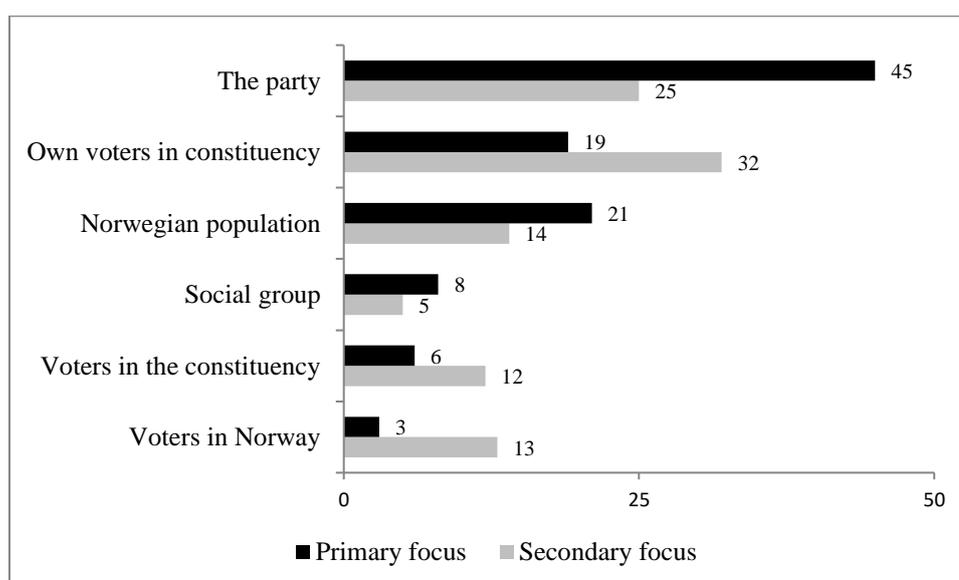


Figure 1: Representational Focus of MPs in 2013, N = 70

Q: There are different opinions about whom an elected member of parliament should primarily represent. What is your opinion? (Please rank all of the options in decreasing order of importance. You can do this by marking the most preferred as 1, the second most as 2, and so on – up to the number 5/6).

Source: The Norwegian Candidate Survey 2013 (see Hesstvedt and Karlsen 2017).

However, the importance of constituency party voters is evident when we also consider the secondary focus. Another 32 per cent, in addition to the initial 19 per cent, indicated that their own (party) constituency voters were the second most important group to represent. This means that a total of 51 per cent of surveyed MPs held their (party) constituency voters as either the primary or secondary focus of representation. Thus, MPs have multiple representational foci, and representing constituency party voters is considered essential. As expected, MPs were more focused on their own party voters – those who elected them – than on all constituency voters.

Another way to understand MPs' multiple representational foci is to ask how important they consider representing different groups or interests using scales for each item (not asking them to rank alternatives). This type of question was included in a 1996 and 2012 survey to members of the Storting. Although the parties emerged on top here as well, a rather nuanced picture emerged (Figure 2).

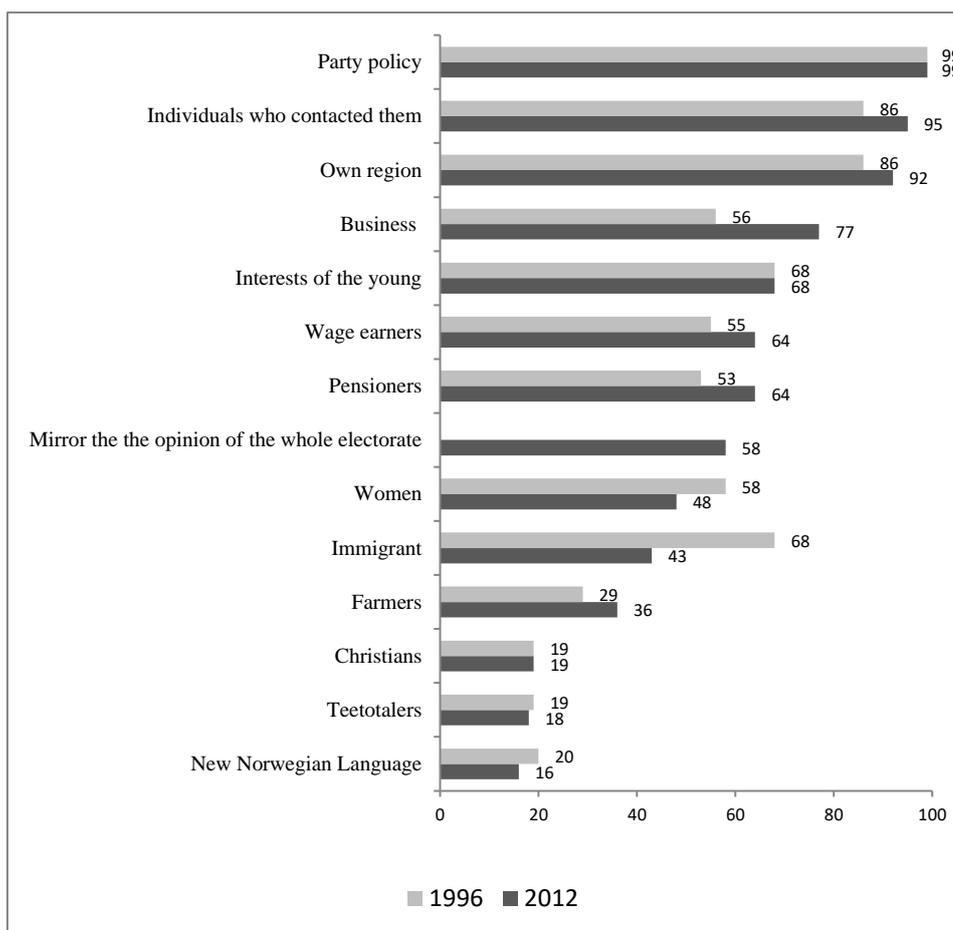


Figure 2: Proportion of MPs who find it important to represent different groups and interests, 1996 and 2012.¹ N 2012 = 110–115, N 1996 = 141–146.

¹ Question: ‘How important are the following tasks for you as an MP? To advocate...’ (Hvor viktige er følgende oppgaver for deg personlig som stortingsrepresentant? Å fremføre ...). Quite and very important reported.

Source: The Storting surveys of 1996 and 2012 (see Esaiasson and Heidar 2000; Narud et al. 2014).

Again, representing the party and party policy emerged as the top runner. However, the proportion of MPs finding it important to work for individuals who contacted them and to work for their home region got nearly the same high numbers. In Figure 2, we report the aggregated numbers for ‘very’ and ‘quite’ important. However, a greater proportion of MPs considered it ‘very important’ to work for party policies compared to working for individuals and their home region. Further analyses of the material (not shown in the figure) reveal that about half (48 per cent) of the MPs surveyed considered it *equally important* to work for party policy and individuals, while 44 per cent considered it *more important* to work for party

policy than work for individuals.⁷ Hence, even if MPs have multiple representational foci, the party was categorically the most important. Nevertheless, the results also indicate that focusing on the constituency was regarded as more important than representing special groups and interests like pensioners, immigrants, farmers, Christians etc.

The analyses corroborate earlier research findings that parties are the dominant representative focus for Norwegian MPs. However, at the same time, the representatives also emphasise other representative tasks. They represent more than parties. In the next section, we show how MPs balance different representational foci in their constituency work.

Constituency Links: Representative Activities

In this section, we report on eight semi-structured interviews conducted in the spring of 2016 with acting MPs. We selected members from most parties, from different parts of the country and with a mix of back- and frontbench parliamentarians.⁸ The sample is not representative. We approached them individually (about twenty) and interviewed those who agreed. There is a possibility of self-selection bias – only those who had a good record in constituency service may have agreed. To rectify this, in part, we asked about what they considered general practices within their own party group. We believe that the basic features of how Norwegian MPs link to their constituencies are fairly well reflected in this material.

Constituency Ties

Before 1952, the election law required candidates to live in their constituency, and this is still the standard practice (Hesstvedt and Karlsen 2017). There are few exceptions, which inevitably make headline news when they occur.⁹ Prospective candidates for office have had to live in the county constituency – and in reality, to have lived there for some time – as the

ties to the local community, organisations and party branches are instrumental in the nomination process (Valen et al. 2002). In the candidate survey, 90 per cent of respondents with parliamentary experience indicated that they lived in their constituency and had for some time. Our interviews confirmed this: all interviewed MPs kept a residence in their home county. Some were born there, some had moved there more recently for work or marriage. MPs from Oslo and the surrounding counties mostly continued to live at home after being elected. Most MPs outside the Oslo region commuted weekly for parliamentary work and spent Friday to Mondays at home. Representatives from the northern counties visited home frequently, although this depended on parliamentary duties.

Around 30 per cent of all MPs in 2009–2013 had a background as professional politicians – in paid public office or employed by the party – in their *local* municipality or the *county* (Allern et al. 2014: 310). Many MPs therefore had strong connections within the constituency and the constituency party before their election to parliament. Some interviewed MPs had also kept local elected offices in organisations, parties and municipalities while in parliament. Still, most acting MPs had dropped their formal engagements. One alternate MP, however, filling in for a colleague appointed to government, had offices in the local party, in a sports organisation and in the municipality – she tried ‘to keep up as best she could’. However, most interviewed MPs had an *ex officio* right to attend meetings in their local and county party boards, which they did as often as possible. They considered it a way to keep in touch, hearing local viewpoints on issues, and as an opportunity to inform constituents about upcoming issues in parliament of relevance to the constituency and the party in general. One MP reported to have attended local party meetings once a week while a backbencher, but now – as a frontbencher – every fortnight.

One interviewee even reported that these home contacts – with local organisations in the party, in sports groups, the housing associations, jogging around, meeting people at the local supermarket and attending music festivals, etc. – was ‘his life’. Another emphasised that he primarily paid attention to and participated in arrangements within his constituency: ‘They are my primary employer. They voted for me and can demand something from me. My aim is to say yes to all who asks’. He had earlier been criticised for not being much present in parliament, but his defence was ‘he had no voters in Oslo’, his voters were in his home constituency!

Channels of Communication

Old constituency ties, frequent visits or commuting were the basis of many personal contacts locally. One informant noted that her county contacts and their follow-ups took up between 20 and 30 per cent of her working days over the year. MPs made a point of visiting the annual local party conventions (when invited); they had meetings with mayors and local council members, visited businesses, media, festivals, hospitals, universities, entrepreneurs, old age homes, schools – wherever they could find potential voters – throughout the year. Many pointed to a broad network of contacts inside and outside their party, and one MP could not think of any person in his county ‘of some importance’ that he did not know personally, had not met or could not contact with ease.

MPs also pointed to the vast opportunities for making contacts available through emails and Facebook. Some maintained that they were very active on Facebook and had the maximum 5,000 followers. Facebook gave ‘a low threshold for contact’. Most also used the local newspapers for debates and interviews, and in particular, local papers with a web edition (more space and expanded follower groups) were targeted. They could also work with local

journalists to get an issue of local importance into the national debate. One MP published a short weekly newsletter from parliament by email to a large follower group in the county: party members, journalists and people with a general political interest. He also had included an option to respond to his letter, giving him information and input from the constituency.

Constituency Service: What Do They Do?

Analytically, it is useful to distinguish between casework, information provision, outreach activities and parliamentary initiatives (cf. Arter in this issue). Putting these categories into a survey with parliamentarians would also most likely yield interesting results. In practice, however, it is difficult to group the activities of MPs in this way. To some extent, all MPs serve multiple goals when they link up with their constituencies. Take the MP who organised visits to *all* municipalities in her county over a two-year period. She met the mayor, visited businesses, talked to groups of the elderly and youth as well as people working as volunteers in constituency service. She had regular meetings with business associations and unions. The focus of these meetings varied according to pressing local issues. Here, she could be approached by individuals, presenting relevant information from parliament and sound out local opinions on issues debated in parliament. Another ‘stunt’ was to visit all nursing homes (‘sykehjem’) in the county over a 48-hour period. They could generate publicity, and she could register ‘nuances in issues that were – so far – not politically blocked and where policy change was still possible’. Her aim was to bring local issues to parliament and to present information about current issues: ‘To have open doors for those who want and – if possible – to help open new doors for them’. During these visits, she did everything at the same time.

Most MPs interviewed emphasised both the supply and demand sides of constituency service. They were invited to attend particular arrangements and were contacted by individuals or

groups. They also initiated visits themselves, made arrangements with journalists, wrote letters to the papers and presented issues on their Facebook pages. Sometimes, it was a combined effort when ‘the local party arranged the meetings while we took care of communications’. Some constituency links were particularly central. The local party organisations – at the municipal and county levels – were priority contacts. All interviewees emphasised this. In addition, one MP with a background from the trade unions in her county found it natural to follow up that contact in particular. She had made about 150 visits to local workplaces over the past year. Finally, a frontbench MP with strong ties to his home county argued that MPs needed more resources to do their work as ‘ombuds’. Most resources now went to the central party level, and he would have preferred more ‘personal’ assistance locally.

Is there a standard approach to constituency service? According to one MP, the answer is no: All MPs are an ‘individual enterprise’ (‘enkeltmannsforetak’): ‘It is up to you what you do with your position as MP. No one carries you forward’. Another, an acting party whip who was well informed about the travel arrangements of her colleagues, had the impression that all in her group had the same high level of contact activities in their constituencies as herself. Another MP shared the view on ‘active colleagues’ but with the reservation that ‘still – it’s up to you’, and ‘some like to guard their personal exposure’. A third MP, however, pointed to large differences within his party group in terms of local contacts.

The Politics of Constituency Service

From our interviews with MPs, we noted eight relevant points in understanding the ‘what’ and ‘whys’ of MP constituency service activities. *First*, what characterises the issues MPs take with them to parliament from their constituency contacts? Clearly, they must be in line with the general policies of the party. A Conservative MP said that ‘no one asks *me* to promote a

proposal if it is not economically sound from a societal point of view'. He also emphasised that he always contacts the local party before following up on an issue, and he keeps a distance – as far as possible – from issues with strong disagreements within the county party. Moreover, they do not take on issues contrary to the party programme, unless this is made explicit before the nomination. The same MP argued strongly against wolves – and expressed wholehearted support for his county party on the issue – despite the environmentally friendly statements in the party programme and the policies of his party colleagues in government.

Second, the MPs only took on issues they thought had a fair chance of success or would make an impact. They tried 'to be realistic' about their prospects, explaining to locals how things look early in the process. One noted that he had fairly good experience of the kinds of issues that could succeed, thereby having to target the 'winnable ones'. Locals have, according to another MP, often higher expectations than is reasonable. He had lost some local causes on the way to government decisions, but if the locals 'perceive that I have worked sufficiently hard for it, it is not a problem for my local legitimacy'. He also admitted that some issues – where party ideology/program clashes with local interests – had been 'demanding' and that he did not seek a high profile on such issues.

Third, there were not many indications that singular cases figured prominently in the constituency work of Norwegian parliamentarians. Most mentioned many individual contacts but not for singular causes. One, however, noted a local contact complaining about a ban on foreign helicopter landings near a processing plant. Helicopter transport was necessary for sales. He called his contacts in the relevant ministry to fix it – and a permit was granted. However, not a great deal of this constituency work involved helping such individuals. These were rather *particular examples* used by MPs as input and ammunition to change the law, a

regulation or current practice. The reasons may be that decisions in public bureaucracies are guided by detailed rules and precedents. MPs therefore know that it is difficult to change the outcome in specific cases – they have to change the relevant rules.

Fourth, most MPs we talked to saw local contacts as part of their job description – part of the democratic system. One MP argued that ‘local contacts are important as politics is always fluid – always some relevant points to pick up regardless of your own point of view. In the process of making a new party programme, new policies are important. There are new issues in local politics that are not always covered in existing programmes’. Therefore, such contacts are crucial ‘all the time, not only before the nomination process in the party; the party MP also needs to be re-elected by *the voters*’. However, close ties were also considered helpful for re-nomination. Several MPs noted that some of their fellow MPs were not necessarily so active *after* deciding *not* to seek re-nomination. One stated: ‘I’m not seeking re-election, so I’m in a somewhat different mode’.

Fifth, MPs note that ‘the bench’, i.e. the MPs from the same county regardless of party, was important. The expression derives from the fact that the seating arrangement in the Chamber place elected MPs, not according to party but according to which county constituency they were elected from. The bench cooperated to ‘the extent that it is politically possible on local issues’. The bench is important for issues that are not explicitly addressed in the party programme. MPs agree – some with a little envy – that distance from Oslo decides how important the bench is. While ‘Oslo lacks the locally entrenched politicians as in other counties’, the northern and western constituencies are much better at ‘bench cooperation’. One MP noted that there were disagreements on territorial policies in ‘all parties, but perhaps particularly so in Labour’. Prime examples are disagreements over the national transport plan

and the public finance system for local municipalities. However, they all concluded that ‘the real impact has to go through the party groups. We are party politicians first’. There was also one partly dissenting voice: ‘I have no need to listen to the complaints of the opposition parties. Their voters did not vote for me – so why should I listen to them?’ He was not seeking re-election, and his fellow party MP from the same constituency took care of the bench.

Sixth, there is both a formal and informal division of labour within parliament and in the party groups. The ‘frontbench’ MPs – who actually do not sit on the front benches in the Storting but according to constituency – were responsible for the national party policies and did not meet the same expectations to undertake local constituency service. Particularly in the large parties, they could do better political service by promoting party policies in general: ‘You need different types of politicians’. One MP noted that his new job as national spokesperson for a specific policy area led to more travelling around the whole of Norway and gave less time for visits to his home constituency. An MP – representing a county far removed from Oslo – also voiced a ‘division of labour’ perspective: with two MPs from the party representing the same constituency, ‘both need not work with the bench to the same degree’. There are also other strategic differences: ‘In our group, local contact activity varies according to your role in the party, how safe you feel your mandate is and the distance from Oslo to the county’. The opportunity to be present in your constituency may also decline when the party is not represented in all constituencies. In some of the parties, you can be assigned an alternate, unrepresented county to attend *in addition* to your own constituency. Finally, at least Labour previously had a formal system whereby one county representative had the special responsibility to look after trade union interests in the constituency. These

formal assignments have disappeared from the group statute book, but most likely continue in informal ways. Trade union ties count significantly in Labour's nomination processes.

Seventh, committee assignment counts. The degree of contact varies both in terms of committee and your position within that committee. One MP noted the high number of contacts from his constituency when he was the party spokesperson in committees like transport, justice and local municipalities. Another had the experience of roads and local employment always being important. In particular, people contacted him during budget times, or – generally – ‘when they have a problem’. For MPs, the local contact profile changes with the committee: there are different groups filling into your calendar when sitting in the Social Affairs Committee compared to Industry. Another said she exchanged county contacts with her party colleague in order to match the policy areas they worked with in parliament.

Eighth, it matters whether your party is in government or in opposition. MPs note the differences flowing from being in or out of government. When in government, it is easier to make direct contact with the political leadership in the ministries, while in opposition, you must pursue local interests in other ways. One MP maintained that when in opposition, he made 53 televised appearances, while when in position he could contact the department directly. Another said that his strategy was to take issues to parliament through ‘question hour’ and ‘written questions’ when the case was still open and not politically blocked. In the early phases, the minister had not yet ‘dug the trenches’ (‘pigga ute’). He also used interpellations in parliament to force early debates on central issues to his constituency.

Conclusion: What do Norwegian MPs Understand by ‘Community Service’ – How Do They Do It and Why?

The question ‘How do you do community service?’ will not make sense to Norwegian MPs, while ‘Who do you represent, and how do you do it?’ will. ‘Who’ and ‘how’ questions are interrelated in the sense that they target the part of MPs’ daily activities that is contextually bound. This is not in the sense of rendering impossible comparisons between constituency linkages across countries, but in the sense that a concept and research tradition developed on the basis of the experience of ‘first-past-the-post’ (FPTP) systems cannot be transplanted without adjustments. An exclusive emphasis on casework will, for example, not tell us how the linkage works for Norwegian MPs.

Norwegian MPs signal multiple representative tasks. They aim to represent their party, their own constituency voters and the Norwegian population in general. MPs define their task as advocating party policies, to work for individuals who contacted them, for their own region as well as for specific interests and groups. Their primary representative activities and foci are concentrated on their party – at local, county and national levels. More specifically, they do constituency service in order to learn the needs and demands of their local party, local voters and local associations in order to bring these experiences into national politics. They give priority to their own local party organisation and their local party voters, but they also engage in activities to secure and broaden the electoral base of their party. They do this as party representatives but also in order to improve their own chances of re-nomination and re-election.

What exactly do MPs do in terms of casework, information provision, outreach and parliamentary activities? Our interviews with Norwegian MPs showed that individual casework was not foremost on their minds. They frequently met and talked to individual constituents – at workplaces, shopping centres and in meetings with voluntary organisations – but their emphasis was on the policy-generating aspect of these meetings, not the help they can offer to individuals. They did not present themselves as much as ombudsmen or lawyers for clients facing awkward public bureaucracies. The information regarding what MPs are actually doing showed that constituency work – defined as keeping in touch, sounding out opinions and informing – is an essential and time-consuming part of an MP's job. This is also part of their own job description. MPs have strong ties to their constituency despite the removal of the former residence requirement from the 1953 law. Often, they are born there, or they have lived there for many years. They keep their home in the constituency after being elected to the Storting and return home when parliament is not in session. They also visit almost every weekend and during the holidays. Many keep formal ties to local organisations, businesses and their local party at both municipal and county levels. MPs use a wide variety of communication channels to stay in touch and to inform their political followers – social media was considered particularly important in this regard. They work the PPG and present parliamentary questions to promote constituency interests. The cross-party constituency bench in parliament is seen as important for promoting general county interests.

Is representation in Norway all about the party – ‘all else embellishment and details’?¹⁰ Our answer is no. To assert that ‘the party is everything’ is to miss the important nuances in the MPs' quest for legitimacy, political success and re-election. The party is no doubt the political baseline for Norwegian MPs, but it has many faces. The *constituency party* is the local municipal parties with their particular priorities and factions as well as the county party

organization with its balance between different municipalities. The *party voters* are essential for representational and constituency work. However, there is also the *national party* and the *national party voters*. Still, there is more to constituency representation than the party. The local business community, voluntary organisations, municipal interests and non-partisan action groups promoting public infrastructure, employment environmental issues etc. all generate interests that must be looked after. These interests are of course relevant to the *constituency as a whole* – including other parties' voters. Consequently, MPs must prioritise between their different audiences and interests when serving the constituency.

The varied representative foci and diverse strategies pursued by Norwegian MPs give cues for the identification of causal forces. Three factors must be emphasised: the electoral system, the strong party factor and the centre-periphery conflicts within all parties. *First*, the electoral system with its multi-member constituencies and closed party lists shape MPs' constituency work to a significant degree. The political logic is different in multiple member districts compared to single member systems with FPTP. The 'county bench' is elected to represent the district as a whole. However, in multimember constituencies, MPs from different parties are elected, and their focus and services are directed primarily at voters from their own party rather than the 'constituency as a whole'. 'Constituency representation' is a politically contested notion as representative democracy is conceived as electing MPs to represent both *their voters* and *their constituency* – on a *party platform*. In practice, MPs must strike a balance. Multi-district MPs will be elected with strong supplementary representative tasks; particularly, parties with more than one MP will have some division of labour between them – targeting different groups, prioritising different tasks. Both inter-party and intra-party factors thus contribute to a more sectionalised representation and community service.

Second, strong party organisations and closed list systems interact to create highly party-dependent MPs. Despite their declining membership, Norwegian parties remain highly institutionalised and have a strong hold on MPs' parliamentary voting (Allern et al. 2016). An MP is not only expected to represent his or her party, but also sub-groups within the constituency – like a particular gender, age group, trade unions or the business community. The consequence is that representatives in multi-member districts are expected to serve their *political constituency*, as defined by the particular competitive logic operating *within* their *electoral constituency*. Their political constituency is composed of the county party board, the leading officials within the strongest county party sections, favourable local media, supporters within the business community, including industry, the private and public service sector, primary sector organisations and trade unions and relevant voluntary organisations – in short, all the people who voted for your party at the last election and those potentially supporting the party at the next. In the end, an MP seeking re-election must convince the county nomination meeting that he or she is attentive to party interests as well as able to capture votes for the party.

Third, the centre-periphery cleavage has been central to Norwegian party politics since parties first entered the scene. In all parties, we still witness a struggle over the electoral programme regarding the geographical redistribution of resources, particularly in terms of infrastructure and localisation. This is also reflected in the organisation and politics of the Storting – what one scholar labelled 'the central assembly of the periphery' (Rommetvedt 1992), as well as in the electoral system. An 'area factor' supplements the number of constituency voters when deciding the number of MPs to be elected from the various constituencies. In the northernmost county of Finnmark, the number of voters behind each MP is therefore between half and one-third of that in Oslo. The further away one is from the capital, Oslo, the more

opposition there is to the centrally located ‘power elite’ in Oslo. Again, the party is not everything; geography matters. The ‘constituency bench’ matters. The party leadership in the PPGs know that they can only pressure their fellow MPs to a certain point on issues of localisation and infrastructure. The party whip is not the right way to handle divisive issues where MPs have the full backing of their constituency party, i.e. the power elite at their nomination meeting. It is extremely rare that the central party elite interferes with constituency nominations. On some issues, the constituency bench, the constituency voters and the county party are ‘in one boat’. This is where MPs want to be when things get rough within the PPGs.

The notion of ‘constituency service’ is generically British, spreading to the US and the Commonwealth countries – and subsequently into the political science literature. MPs were expected to look after the interests of their constituency and its constituents at Westminster. This translated well into other single member district systems. There is, however, a potential tension between the notion of ‘constituency service’ and that of ‘constituency representation’. We may think of constituency service as something narrower, basically confined to ‘casework’ (Cain et al. 1984). This is when representatives act more or less like ombudsmen – connecting, helping, pulling strings on behalf of individuals, businesses and local authorities (from their constituency) in their dealings with public agencies. Conversely, the notion of ‘constituency representation’ directs attention towards MPs’ activities to promote the interests of individuals, businesses and local authorities when developing new policies in parliament. This is the work MPs do on behalf of their *political* constituency when deciding on budgets, laws and controlling the government. Based on what we have learnt about the approach of Norwegian MPs, the multi-dimensional, party-based practice is the Norwegian way of doing constituency representation.

Notes

¹ The Norwegian Candidate Survey is a survey of all candidates running for election for any of the eight parties that obtained representation in the 2013 parliamentary election. The response rate is 42 per cent (850 candidates). The Storting Member Survey 2012 was sent to all MPs, using questback for replies. The response rate was 69 percent.

² In theory, more than 50 per cent of the voters on a party list performing the same change can change the order of candidates, but this has never happened.

³ In Norway election laws have regulated the process of nominating parliamentary candidates. The old Norwegian nomination law prescribed a nomination procedure that was not obligatory. However, in order to have travel expenses paid by the state, parties had to adhere to the law.

⁴ The source is the 2009 Norwegian Candidate Survey.

⁵ There is one exception to this rule: All parties have the right to a seat on the Finance Committee as well as the Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs.

⁶ In addition, the importance of the party for representational style is confirmed by the high level of party discipline in parliamentary behaviour (Rasch 1999). Consequently, the ‘responsible party model’ has been the dominant theoretical paradigm for analyses of political representation in parliamentary systems (Thomassen 1994).

⁷ Consequently, just eight per cent considered it more important to work for individuals than party policy.

⁸ Interviews were conducted in March–April 2016 in the Storting building with Gunnar Gundersen, Conservative, Hedmark; Jan Bøhler, Labour, Oslo; Laila Marie Reiertsen, Progress Party, Hordaland; Sveinund Rotevatn, Liberals, Sogn og Fjordane; Trond Helleland, Conservative, Buskerud; Else-May Botten, Labour, Møre og Romsdal; Line Henriette

Hjemdal, Christians, Østfold; Jan Arild Ellingsen, Progress Party, Nordland. Shortly after each interview, they were written up in brief and subsequently sent to the interviewees for confirmation. Quotes from these interviews are not attributed to the MPs. The quotes represent translations and have been slightly adjusted to bring out the interviewees' intentions.

⁹ It was a public row when the new leader of the Christian Party, Dagfinn Høybråten from the county of Akershus near Oslo, where he lived in 2005, stood as candidate for Rogaland in the southwest. He was invited onto the Rogaland list as he would not/could not challenge his predecessor as party leader, Valgerd Svarstad Haugland, for the top place on the Akershus list.

¹⁰ Borrowing from Pultzer (1967) on the importance of class in British politics.

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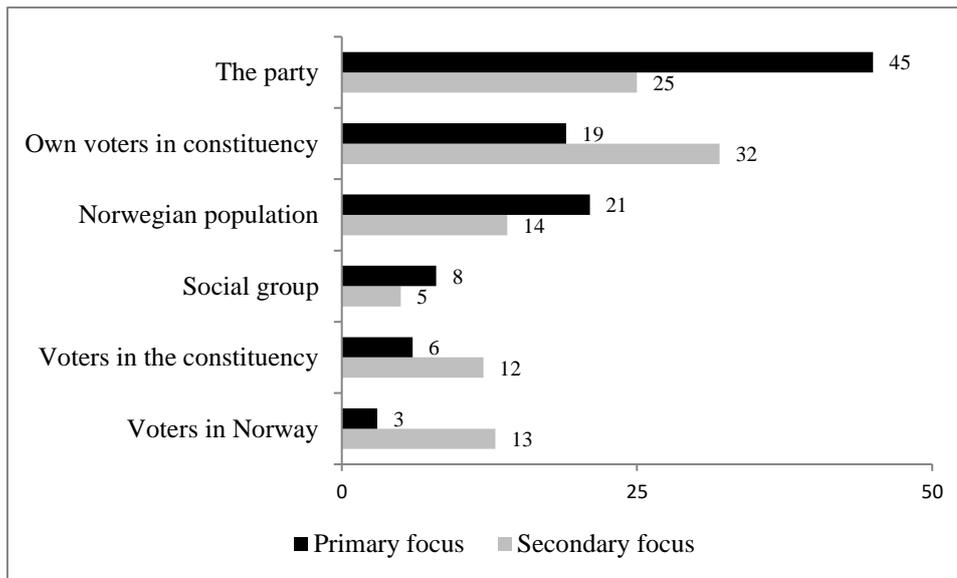


Figure 1: Representational Focus of MPs in 2013, N = 70

Q: There are different opinions about whom an elected member of parliament should primarily represent. What is your opinion? (Please rank all of the options in decreasing order of importance. You can do this by marking the most preferred as 1, the second most as 2, and so on – up to the number 5/6).

Source: The Norwegian Candidate Survey 2013 (see Hesstvedt and Karlsen 2017).

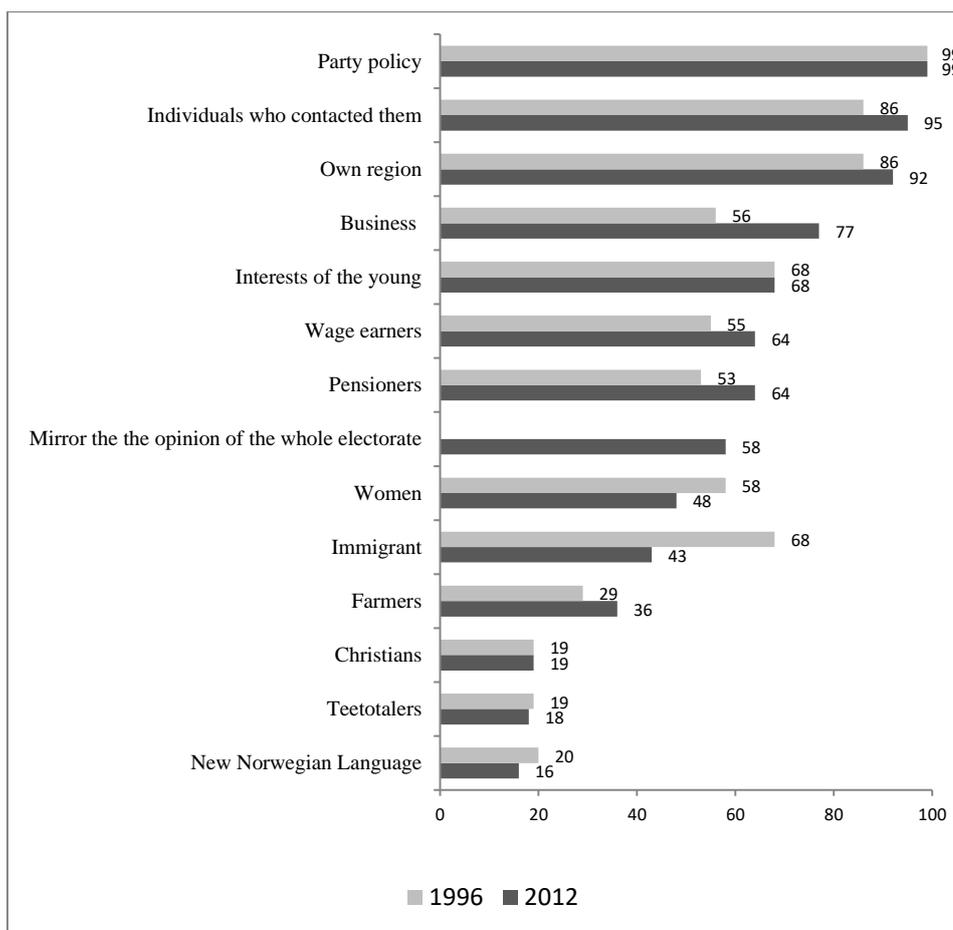


Figure 2: Proportion of MPs who find it important to represent different groups and interests, 1996 and 2012.¹ N 2012 = 110–115, N 1996 = 141–146.

¹ Question: ‘How important are the following tasks for you as an MP? To advocate...’ (Hvor viktige er følgende oppgaver for deg personlig som stortingsrepresentant? Å fremføre ...). Quite and very important reported.

Source: The Storting surveys of 1996 and 2012 (see Esaiasson and Heidar 2000; Narud et al. 2014).