Introduction

Out in the constituencies, my constant companion is the question:

What is there that I’m experiencing that might be of interest and assistance to my fellow political scientists? And how might my observations and conceptualizations contribute to our common enterprise? My inquiries and adventures in the everyday political world have had one ultimate goal: to help other political scientists—who have not “been there and done that” and who probably never will—to think afresh about the large subject of democratic representation. At the end of the day, therefore, the relevance and usefulness of my research will be judged within the
community of political scientists.

Between 1970 and 2002, I undertook five distinct exploratory adventures, each one consisting of numerous separate expeditions to a great variety of places. All were motivated by an interest in the constituency activities of our national politicians. All were voyages of discovery. And all were concerned ultimately with the subject of representation. Altogether, I soaked and poked in thirty-two House member districts and in eighteen state-wide Senate constituencies. I also lived for one year in Washington--watching and talking to eight of the senators there. I want to sketch out each of the five explorations and the ideas that emerged--some cumulative, some not.

For a political scientist whose approach to the study of politics is observational in technique and exploratory in purpose, the
narrative, case study form is especially appealing. It puts the observer front and center in deciding what questions are interesting; and allows for a richness of detail in presenting explanatory suggestions. Case study storytelling cannot, however, test and verify a relationship in a language of statistics or probabilities. Nor is it likely to produce propositions that can be easily put in measurable or testable form. And that being the case, it is especially incumbent on the storyteller to offer ideas or concepts that might help others think both broadly and carefully about the subject at hand.

As narrator, my obligation is to provide the reader with some organization of ideas which make sense out of my explorations and discoveries. In thinking about how to do that, I have concluded that my contribution has been to offer conceptualizations that would structure observations so as to help others to think about...
and to generalize about the large subject of political representation.

At an abstract level, the five exploratory efforts can be examined in terms of the conceptualizations that grew out of each particular effort and in terms of the ways they were used (or not used) developmentally as my explorations went forward. The explorations produced stories; the stories were told in a conceptual language; and the concepts were embedded in examples. I have come to think of myself as a conceptual gardener—tending a set of ideas—planting and nourishing, arranging and rearranging, weeding out and adding in. The experimentation and the results to date of this conceptual gardening can be pulled out of five explorations.


Exploratory details: Eighteen House members, sixteen states, Research Mostly Professional #7 (11/2/04)-4
thirty-six trips; anonymity preserved. One study. ¹

**Exploratory ideas:**

**Perceptions:** From an electoral point of view, House members perceive four constituencies, nested in a set of concentric circles. The geographical constituency is the entire district as legally prescribed, with all individuals and interests therein. The reelection constituency consists of those individuals and groups in the district who--the representative believes--have voted for the representative and will, more than likely, continue to do so. The primary constituency consists of those individuals and groups who--the representative believes--have provided the strongest support in the past and would stand by the member--with votes, work and money--in a primary. The personal constituency consists of trustworthy friends, family and advisors in whom the member confides and on whom the member depends for advice and emotional support.

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The problem of managing perceptual complexity helps explain why House members feel far more vulnerable electorally and far more uncertain about constituency support than we might expect by examining only their past electoral margins. Caution is advised, therefore, whenever election margins are used to predict a member’s legislative behavior.

**Activities:** House member activities are based on three types of choices they make at home. **Allocation:** How do I divide up my available resources of time, energy, staff and money? **Presentation:** How do I present myself as a person to my several constituencies? **Explanation:** How do I explain my activities in Washington to my various constituents at home? Presentation of self seems to be the central activity for most individual members; and it is the most discriminating activity for outside observers.

**Home styles:** The complex patterning of choices and activities produces for each House member a describable “home style.”
proximate object of every home style is the winning and the preservation of constituent support. The ultimate object is the winning of constituent trust. A variety of home styles exist; and many of them can be arrayed along a spectrum with a person-to-person emphasis at one end and policy issue emphasis at the other end.

**Constituency Careers:** House members pursue describable political careers in their home constituencies as well as in Washington. Constituency careers tend to proceed in two stages: expansionist, when members worry about the effectiveness of their home styles in winning constituent support, and then protectionist as they feel secure in their established home styles. A House member’s home style may change over the course of the member’s constituency career.

**Representation:** Heretofore, the empirical study of representation in the United States has been devoted largely to
correlating constituency characteristics with roll call votes—
especially votes on public policy. That study can be enriched by
increased attention to the constituency end of the
representative/constituent relationship. As representatives see
it, their constituents want much more from them than policy
decisions. They want the attention, access, communication and
trust-building provided by their House member’s allocations,
presentations, and explanations at home. The more satisfied a
member’s constituencies are with his or her home style, the more
leeway the representative will have in pursuing policy and career
choices inside Congress.

In order to take individual home styles into account, and in order
to consider the interaction between the home styles and the
Washington behavior of our representatives, the idea of
representation should be conceptualized somewhat less in the cross-

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sectional language of correlation and somewhat more in the across
time language of process.


**Exploratory details:** Five senators, five states, twenty-one trips,
59 days, one year in Washington, no anonymity. Five studies.²

**Exploratory ideas:**

**Sequence:** The six-year term of United States senators invites
a more textured examination of the home/Washington relationship
than was possible in the earlier mapping-the-territory exercise.
Given the length of their terms, senatorial activity can usefully
be treated in terms of a sequence—as a six-year cycle of
campaigning to governing and back to campaigning again. A
sequential view also encourages the examination of certain
interstitial activities. Three such activities are: interpreting
campaign results as a guide to governing, adjusting to the Senate
as a legislative institution, and explaining governing activity

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back home as a prelude to campaigning.

**Governing:** Studies built around the idea of a six-year cycle gave greater prominence to *governing* activity in Washington than did my previous study of House members at home. In addition to sixty days spent in the home states of the five senators, I also spent a year in Washington watching and talking with them about their governing performance. Four of the five studies of individual senators focused heavily on their governing activities. And their titles convey an across-time, sequential perspective, i.e., the “making” of Senator Dan Quayle, the “learning” of Senator Arlen Specter, the “emergence” of Senator Pete Domenici, the “failure” of Senator Mark Andrews. [The fifth study, with its focus on (presidential) campaigning, also carried a sequential theme, i.e., the “odyssey” of Senator John Glenn.] Whereas the earlier home-centered study had been a counterweight to political scientists’ near-exclusive concern for policy, the emphasis on...
governing in the five later studies restored policy-making to prominence.

**Careers:** Taken together, the macro level campaigning-governing-campaigning sequence and the micro level studies of individual senatorial performance gave central importance to the idea of political careers—in the constituency, in the institution, and in both at the same time. (Technically, since I can only claim to have studied a slice of each senator’s career, the term should be “career-segments.”) What had been a single chapter in the earlier House member study had become a broadly covering concept in each of the five senator studies.

**Process:** At the end of the *Home Style* study, the idea was advanced that representation could usefully be viewed as a process—one that was rooted in the complexity of a politician’s home relationships. No attention was given, however, to how this might be done. In that context, the five senator studies were
suggestive, because the campaigning-governing-campaigning sequence is process. Thinking about this process makes it easier, in turn, to think about our elected politicians as both representatives and legislators and to be attentive to both parts of their job.

Equally compatible with the sequential idea is an enlarged emphasis on individual careers, at home and in Washington, and their influence on one another. In broadest perspective, therefore, these Senate explorations moved beyond the mapping of activities such as allocation, presentation and explanation to employ a more longitudinal, more developmental look at our elected politicians.


**Exploratory details:** Ten senators, ten states, 38 trips, no anonymity. One study.$^3$

**Exploratory ideas:**

**Representational processes:** Within the broad conceptualization
of representation as process, we can consider three individual-level processes: deciding to become a representative, campaigning to win the position as representative and, having won the position, maintaining constituent support. These are the basic, sequential processes which mark the political career of every elected representative.

**Campaigns**: Election campaigns provide an especially wide and important window through which to view these representational activities. The careers and the campaigns of an elected politician are inseparable, since campaigns launch, extend and terminate careers. Campaigns create, recreate and test the complete range of a representative’s constituency relationships. In my research, representation is conceptualized as a home-centered idea. And campaigning is preeminently a home-centered activity. In this study, the representational activities of senators are studied in the context of their home state election campaigns.

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**Connections**: Campaigning at home is mostly about connecting politicians and constituents. And it is useful to think broadly about representational relationships at home as connections. Campaigns connect politicians and citizens. And those connections make possible the accountability of politicians to citizens that our representative government requires. “In short, no campaigns, no connections; no connections, no accountability; no accountability, no representative government.”

**Negotiation**: The many and varied connections sought and made and solidified—while pursuing a career, while campaigning for election, and while building a constituency—are developmental in nature. Each connection can be conceptualized as the provisional result of a cautious, over-time negotiation between politician and constituents. The politician wants support and offers responsiveness; constituents want responsiveness and they offer support. Neither can dictate outcomes. Through negotiation, the
performance of the politician is gradually, incrementally and over
time, brought into some kind of equilibrium with constituency
expectations—or it is not.

Only through some such idea as continuous negotiation can we
capture the incremental, tentative, changing, uncertain and
essentially experimental nature of the representative/constituency
relationship—as I have observed it. Once the representational
relationship is recognized as a negotiated relationship, it becomes
easier to think of representation as a process. And the
representational process can be conceptualized as a continuous
negotiation involving the connecting and reconnecting of elected
politicians and constituents.


Exploratory details: Two U.S. Representatives, one congressional
district, six trips, no anonymity. One study.\textsuperscript{5}

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Exploratory ideas:

**Representational Strategies:** A comparative study of the connective activities of individual elected politicians can be based on the interrelationships of three factors: the personal goals of the representative, the constituency context in which the representative pursues those goals and the negotiating sequences that develop over time between representative and constituents. In combination, the three elements tend to form distinctive patterns of representation, conceptualized and described as strategies of representation. Thinking in terms of these three elements--goals, context and negotiating sequences--facilitates individual level comparison among and across the full range of elected representatives.

**Comparative representational strategies:** The quarter-century of extraordinary political-social-economic change in the South provides a golden opportunity for comparative analysis of...
representational strategies. Personal visits to (essentially) the same Georgia congressional district in the 1970's and again in the 1990's reveals two very different representational strategies: one centered overwhelmingly around personal relationships, the other overwhelmingly centered around policy relationships. Different individual goals and different residential, economic-racial and partisan contexts, contributed to a substantial change from a person-intensive representational strategy in the 1970's, to a policy-intensive representational strategy in the 1990's.

This case study of change in the representational strategies of two individuals--from that of a conservative, old-style, rural southern Democratic House member, to that of a new-style suburban Republican House member can contribute usefully to our understanding of the historic change from Democratic to Republican political dominance in the late twentieth century South.

**Exploratory details:** Four House members, three congressional districts, thirteen trips, no anonymity. One study. 6

**Exploratory ideas**

*Experiential Learning:* The usefulness of the variable in the previous exploration is confirmed in conceptualizing the representational behavior of African American House members. The idea of *experiential learning* (instead of the negotiating sequences of the previous study) appears to improve the paradigm by making it easier to focus on a given representative and to trace his or her path of individual behavior over time.

*Group Interest and Institutional Influence:* The distinction between person-intensive and policy-intensive representational strategies is confirmed. Two additional sets of personal goals and related strategies are observed and described. One set is dominated by the protection and the assertion of *group interests*, the other dominated by the pursuit of *institutional influence*.

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The first seems especially relevant for representatives of a minority group seeking political inclusion in the polity. The second seems appealing to any representative. Altogether, their differences in representational behavior are more remarkable than their similarities.

**Symbolic and Organizational Connections**: Our working inventory of representational connections between politicians and constituents must be expanded from the personal and policy connections—which dominated in the previous studies—to include symbolic connections and organizational connections. In thinking about African American representatives (and perhaps those of any other large minority), symbolic connections are crucial to preserving group unity, pride and strength, while organizational connections are crucial to bargaining for access and power in dealing with white-dominated political organizations.

**Context and Careers**: A quarter century of slow contextual
change from black protest to black politics has brought about a marked change in the prominence, the accomplishments and the stability of black representation in Congress. For contemporary African American House members, their varied--but solidly established--representational connections at home serve to anchor increasingly successful and important careers inside the nation’s most important representative institution.

The research reports that have emerged from these efforts at participant observation are essentially exploratory. The openness to personal experience in shaping questions and the method of participant observation lead to exploratory rather than to verifying work. It leads to the formulation of hypotheses rather than to the testing of hypotheses. Research reports from the politicians’ world can, at their best, give other political scientists a feel for the real world of politics and a politicians-
eye-view of the world. And in this process, they may produce conceptualizations that can help others to organize their thoughts, discipline their work and produce, perhaps, new research questions.


4. Ibid, p. 75.

5. Fenno, Congress at the Grassroots: Representational Change in the South, University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill, 2000).