With Happiness and Glory, from your MP: The Use of e-Newsletters in the UK Parliaments

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This article extends the empirical evidence for the use of e-newsletters in parliamentary communication in between elections. It assesses the effect of electoral incentives and parliamentary institutions on members (MPs[1]) from all four legislatures in the UK. I find that electoral incentives to cultivate a personal vote increase the e-newsletter usage by MPs. However, being an MP in subnational parliaments or smaller parties decreases it. These findings throw a fresh light on why only some parliamentarians are happy to adopt new and seemingly resource-efficient ways to reach out to voters.

Keywords: Communicative accountability, e-newsletters, Electoral incentives, Legislative behaviour, Parliamentary communication

'*Certainly . . . it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents.*'
                                                                                      —Edmund Burke

   This article analyses the communication of parliamentary representatives to their constituents via electronic newsletters, with a focus on the role of electoral incentives and parliamentary institutions. Since the famous speech of Burke (1801 [1774])—then a member of parliament—to his constituents in Bristol almost two and a half centuries ago, the resources available to MPs to communicate with their constituents have increased dramatically (Norton, 2007). In the last couple of decades, the Internet alone opened a new era for parliamentary communication (Zittel, 2003; Leston-Bandeira, 2013). Newsletters are one good

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[1]For the sake of simplicity, this article refers to all legislators in the UK as members of parliament, or MPs. Otherwise, they are known as Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) in Northern Ireland, Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) in Scotland and Assembly Members (AMs) in Wales—leaving the term MPs for the representatives from the House of Commons.

example of this transformation, with MPs now able to distribute the electronic versions on their website or to their subscribers at virtually no cost. As such, e-newsletters offer an unmediated channel of communication to any MP seeking to broadcast their messages in between elections (Jackson, 2011).

Since Burke's speech, representative democracy has spread to much of the world as well. In an ever increasing number of countries, citizens authorise a fellow member of their public to represent their beliefs, ideas and interests in an assembly with the representatives of the others. This separates representatives from the represented, and thus creates information asymmetries (Lupia, 2003; Müller *et al.*, 2003; Strøm, 2003), where the representatives possess considerably more information than the represented. Elections and communication are two different—static versus continuous—but interrelated mechanisms that help overcome this asymmetry. To be able to make a meaningful choice in elections, citizens need information about who the candidates are and what they will do if they are elected. Yet, the need for information is not limited to election times; to be able to re-consider their choice, citizens also need to know what their representatives are doing in parliament once elected. One of the important functions of representatives, therefore, is to inform their citizens with the valuable information that they possess (Norton, 1993; Bagehot, 2001 [1867]).

However important the parliamentary communication might be, *importance* cannot explain why MPs—who have many other important things to do—find 'happiness and glory' in communicating with their constituents. Explaining why parliamentary representatives do what they do is a substantial focus for political science because 'in order to understand representative democracy, we need to develop analytical tools by which we can make sense of the behaviour of the elected representatives of the people' (Strøm, 1997, p. 171). This article uses one of these tools, the rational choice approach to legislative behaviour, which assumes that MPs choose their actions strategically to secure, first and foremost, their re-election (Cain *et al.*, 1987; Mayhew, 1974). They have to choose, and they have to do so strategically because legislative motivations are not free from institutional rules or resources that constrain them. Therefore, I argue that the decision to provide e-newsletters to constituents depends on (i) the incentives for individual MPs to cultivate an electoral support and (ii) the resources available to them to do so.

This article extends the empirical evidence for the use of e-newsletters in at least two ways. First, the case selection includes not only the House of Commons, but also the subnational legislatures in the UK. This breaks the exclusive focus on national parliaments in the literature as subnational MPs' communicative behaviour in general, and especially their use of e-newsletters, is yet to be investigated. In fact, there is a need to update the existing evidence from the House of Commons itself, which originates from the time when 'providing an e-newsletter [appeared] to be niche area' (Jackson, 2006, p. 230). The popularity of

e-newsletters has risen steeply since those times. Secondly, as a result of its case selection, this article provides new evidence for the legislative behaviour of MPs elected under *various* voting systems. Within the rational-choice approach, existing studies on parliamentary communication are largely based on individual-level measures of incentives such as an electoral safety. However, electoral systems also affect the level of incentives for MPs to cultivate a personal vote for their name (Carey and Shugart, 1995). Therefore, to be able to explain the role of electoral incentives in parliamentary communication, we need measures at the levels of both the electoral systems and the individual MPs therein.

This article draws on data from the members of the House of Commons, National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. Specifically, its analysis is based on whether their websites provide e-newsletters or subscribe constituents to e-newsletters. The results show that electoral incentives and parliamentary institutions affect MPs' decision to use e-newsletters in between elections. This suggests that (i) the communicative accountability of parliamentary representatives depends on elections and (ii) institutional resources can help MPs contribute to parliamentary accountability by supporting them to communicate to their constituents.

1. Legislative communication and newsletters

Much of what we know about the determinants of legislative communication—including the use of specific communication channels such as newsletters—comes from case studies of individual legislatures, most notably the US Congress. Overall, despite the proliferation of information sources outside the legislatures, these studies show that legislative communication benefits both representatives and the represented (Cover and Brumberg, 1982; Cover, 1985; Lipinski, 2004; Jackson, 2008*a*): if legislators make the effort to communicate with their constituents, this has a significant impact on what the represented know, and in return, the representatives get rewarded for their efforts at the following elections.

Experimental studies on the effects of legislative communication find that the contact between representatives and the represented enhances the electoral prospects of incumbents. When constituents learn more about their representative, they are more likely to take into account what they hold in common rather than their differences (Larson, 1990). In fact, representatives do not need to worry much about justifying their differences. Recent experiments show that simple cues, such as where legislators or their party stand on a policy issue, work just as well without any explanations (Bullock, 2011; Broockman and Butler, 2017). What matters the most is the frequency of contact; the benefits of legislative communication increase with the number of times legislators contact their constituents (Grimmer *et al.*, 2012; Matsubayashi, 2013).

It stands to reason, then, if legislators are electorally unsafe and thus in need of the electoral rewards, they try to reach out more to the constituents. Information and communications technology is a very useful tool for this aim, and therefore many use it for their re-election (Norton, 2007) by promoting themselves to their constituents (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Golbeck *et al.*, 2010; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). Indeed, studies repeatedly show that legislators in marginal seats are quicker than their colleagues in safe seats to adopt and master online technologies, such as websites (Ward and Lusoli, 2005) or social networking sites (Jackson and Lilleker, 2009) including more recently Twitter (Obholzer and Daniel, 2016; Scherpereel *et al.*, 2016). These studies suggest that party membership, age, gender and seniority are among other the determinants of legislators' presence or activity on the Internet (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Lassen and Brown, 2011; Peterson, 2012; Hemphill *et al.*, 2013).

There is similar evidence from newsletters—members of Congress in marginal districts send significantly more franked mails (Cover, 1980; Lariscy and Tinkham, 1996; Lipinski, 2004; Goodman and Parker, 2010; Hall *et al.*, 2012), carrying newsletters and other publications to their constituents at no cost to themselves. With regard to the content, Congressional scholars find that both district (Yiannakis, 1982; Cormack, 2016*a*) and personal characteristics (Dolan and Kropf, 2004; Cormack, 2016*b*) have an impact on the content of newsletters. For instance, Yiannakis (1982) shows that the legislators representing wealthier districts prefer to emphasise policy positions in their newsletters, whereas credit claiming is a strategy used more often in economically poor districts. Those constituents who receive newsletters do remember these positions (Lipinski, 2004), which can lead to significant electoral consequences for the incumbents (Lipinski *et al.*, 2003).

Compared to Congress, the literature on legislators' newsletters is rather limited in parliamentary democracies. An important exception is the series of studies by Nigel Jackson on the House of Commons, conducted in the relatively early stages of e-newsletters as a political communication channel in the UK. Using contingency tables to analyse 39 members offering e-newsletters at the time, Jackson (2004) found that those who offered this service held rather marginal seats. Although this is yet to be tested in a multivariate analysis that does not select on the dependent variable, there are some cues to expect a correlation between seat marginality and the provision of e-newsletters. For example, just as in the USA, the data shows that British MPs are electorally rewarded for providing e-newsletters (Jackson, 2008*a*). And perhaps more importantly for legislative behaviour, MPs themselves believe that sending out e-newsletters in between elections increase their vote when the election day comes (Jackson, 2011). Besides, the content of their e-newsletters emphasises the role of MPs as constituency

service providers (Jackson, 2006) more than any other political roles (Wahlke *et al.*, 1962; Searing, 1994) that they assumed while in office.

In its early days, the Internet spread optimism among scholars about its potential contribution to representative democracy (see, e.g. Grossman, 1995; Browning, 1996; Coleman *et al.*, 1999). This optimism was not based on the opportunities for representatives to reach their constituents with ease alone—it was also based on the opportunities to listen to the represented, through increased feedback and conversation. As this would help legislators to fulfil their political roles better, using new communication channels, such as e-newsletters, could be a part of 'appropriate or exemplary behaviour' in parliament (see March and Olsen, 2006). However, there is very little evidence in the literature to substantiate this alternative explanation. One notable exception is the study of seven MPs' weblogs in the UK, where Jackson (2008*b*) suggests that representatives used this particular channel for discursive engagement with and among the citizens. Otherwise, the majority of the existing research, as discussed above, is in line with the rational-choice explanations of legislative behaviour.

2. e-newsletters, electoral connection and institutional resources

MPs are just like the people—butchers, brewers or bakers—that they represent, and 'it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest' (Smith, 1986 [1776], p. 119). The rational choice approach to legislative behaviour originates from similar assumptions on self-interested individuals in economic transactions: like rational individuals in a market, actors come to the political arena with preferences and behave purposefully to realise these preferences (Downs, 1957; Ordeshook, 1986; Coleman, 1990). MPs have to behave purposefully due to certain constraints over their preferences, such as elections and resources. In the following subsections, I develop five hypotheses based on these two constraints.

2.1 Elections

The first set of theoretical expectations is related to elections, in other words, the need to be re-elected. Fenno (1973, p. 1) argues that members of the US Congress have many objectives, three of which are basic: re-election, influence in the legislature and good public policy. Others note similar preferences such as policy, office and votes (Strøm, 1990; Müller and Strøm, 1999). Still, rational choice approaches to legislative behaviour often reduce these motivations to re-election; to be able to talk about various objectives of a parliamentarian, one has to be an MP first. That is to say, re-election has a priority over the other objectives (Mayhew, 1974, pp. 16–17; Cox and McCubbins, 1993, p. 109; Strøm, 1997).

This is why elections are a big constraint for the MPs seeking to achieve their preferences while in parliament.

I expect e-newsletters to be particularly popular among MPs with a reason to be concerned about their re-election. These are the MPs with stronger incentives to cultivate a personal vote for themselves, and therefore they invest more resources into the communication channels. In general, all 'electorally-oriented activities' that legislators undertake to win elections—(i) advertising themselves, (ii) credit claiming for the policies that they have contributed to, (iii) position taking on any policy issue that might interest their citizens (Mayhew, 1974)—necessitate communication to constituents. E-newsletters are among the channels that the MPs can use for this purpose. Indeed, to reiterate the literature above, MPs use e-newsletters as a part of their election-winning strategy (Jackson, 2011),which does increase their votes (Jackson, 2008a).

One reason to be concerned about re-election can be related to electoral systems. In elections, voters can allocate parliamentary seats to political parties or directly to candidates, depending on the electoral system in use (Carey and Shugart, 1995). MPs are much more open to the influence of the voters in the latter—candidate-based systems—than in the former, party-based systems such as closed proportional representation lists. These electoral systems yield significantly different levels of incentives to cultivate a personal vote. Studies that compare electoral systems across legislatures (Crisp *et al.*, 2004; Heitshusen *et al.*, 2005) or in single legislatures with mixed electoral systems (Stratmann and Baur, 2002; Scully and Farrell, 2003; Hix, 2004; Farrell and Scully, 2007) show that MPs pay more attention to constituency service under candidate-based systems. Therefore, I expect to find a similar result with regard to the MPs' e-newsletter service to their constituents.

> *Hypothesis 1*: MPs are more likely to provide e-newsletters if they are elected under candidate-centred systems rather than party-based systems.

At an individual level, the electoral safety of their seat can be another source of re-election concern for MPs. Some MPs are safer in their seats than others in any parliament. As the electoral safety of a seat decreases, each vote becomes more valuable for the incumbents. Existing evidence shows that MPs who only marginally won their seat prioritise re-election seeking activities during their time in parliament (Cain *et al.*, 1987; Norton and Wood, 1993; Gaines, 1998; Heitshusen *et al.*, 2005). As they have fewer incentives to cultivate a personal vote for their name, I expect that MPs from electoral safe seats are less likely to use e-newsletters to communicate to their constituents.

Hypothesis 2: MPs' likelihood of providing e-newsletters decreases with the electoral safety of their seats.

Electoral safety is particularly important for newly elected legislators (Fenno, 1978; Norton and Wood, 1993). Senior MPs can enjoy the successful reputation that they have built up over time among their constituents (Akirav, 2015, p. 91). Those who have achieved re-election several times can then spend more resources on other goals, such as attaining a ministerial office (Klein and Umit, 2016). As seniority in parliament decreases the attention to constituency service, I expect senior MPs are less likely to provide an e-newsletter service to their constituents.

Hypothesis 3: MPs' likelihood of providing e-newsletters decreases with their seniority in parliament.

2.2 Resources

The second set of theoretical expectations is related to resources. Although e-newsletters are generally known as resource-effective channels of mass communication (Katz, 2003; Jackson and Lilleker, 2007; Gray and Hopkins, 2013), they are nevertheless not completely free. In addition to the cost related to the time that goes into their preparation and distribution, MPs report that e-newsletters generate a considerable amount of e-mail enquiries from the recipients (Jackson, 2006). Hence, they need to spare time and staff for e-newsletters (Jackson, 2004; Williamson, 2009). However, resources available to parliamentarians in pursuing their legislative goals, such as—and primarily—their time, are scarce (Döring, 1995). MPs frequently find themselves having to make decisions about what to devote these scarce resources to, and as a result their strategic behaviour is constrained by what is available.

Parliaments provide some resources to MPs to support them in carrying out their representative functions. Although the level of financial support changes from one parliament to another (for a comparison of allowances in Europe, see BBC, 2009), one pattern is that seats at the national level come with more parliamentary resources than the ones at subnational levels. For example, members of the House of Commons had an allowance of no less than £161,850 to cover the costs of their parliamentary office and staff in 2014–2015 (IPSA, 2014).[2] In comparison, MPs in the UK's devolved parliaments received, on average, half of that amount for the same period.[3] I expect the likelihood of MPs using e-newsletters

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[2]These allowances are slightly higher for MPs representing the constituencies in the London Area.

[3]Precisely, MPs received £95,043 in Wales (Remuneration Board, 2014), £78,400 in Scotland (Scottish Parliament, 2014) and £69,043 in Northern Ireland (IFRP, 2013).

to reflect this difference in parliamentary resources between the national and subnational levels.

> *Hypothesis 4*: MPs in national parliaments are more likely to provide e-newsletters than MPs in sub-national parliaments.

Political parties, too, support their MPs with resources for communication. Their electoral fate is closely tied together, and if MPs increase their own re-election prospects by communicating to voters, their parties benefit as well. Beside individualistic messages, each MP is potentially a broadcaster of their party brand at the same time (Ward *et al.*, 2007), especially in parliamentary systems with characteristically high party discipline (Williamson, 2009). For example, some parties provide their MPs with templates for online channels such as personal websites, which decreases the costs for MPs while enhancing the brand of these parties (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Ward *et al.*, 2007; Williamson, 2009). However, as with parliaments, not all parties have the same level of resources, and I expect being a member of large parties increase the likelihood of MPs' having e-newsletters.

> *Hypothesis 5*: MPs from large parties are more likely to provide e-newsletters than MPs from small parties.

3. Research design

To test these hypotheses, I analysed the use of e-newsletters by MPs from four parliaments in the UK—the House of Commons, National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. This case selection brings together similar parliaments in terms of overall institutionalisation while also providing a useful variation of electoral systems—a key variable of interest for Hypothesis 1. As Table 1 shows, there is a sufficient variation in the other variables as well.

Selecting four parliaments from one country helps keep several factors constant. These include the importance of digital media between representatives and the represented. For example, the websites of all four parliaments provide links to their members' personal websites or e-mail addresses, and indeed a large majority of MPs use these channels. Going through MPs' official websites in the first week of September 2014, I coded whether MPs provided an e-newsletter service to their constituents (as 1) or not (as 0) to create the dependent variable. Many of these websites had dedicated sections to newsletters, and the dependent variable was coded as 1 if these sections included at least one e-newsletter. Also coded in this category were the MPs accepting subscriptions to e-newsletters despite not having

Table 1 Summary statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
e-Newsletter	0.53	0.50	0	1
Voting system				
PR	0.08	0.27	0	1
STV	0.11	0.32	0	1
FPTP	0.81	0.40	0	1
Electoral safety				
Marginal	0.32	0.47	0	1
Competitive	0.31	0.46	0	1
Safe	0.37	0.48	0	1
Majority	18.41	12.44	0	59.68
Seniority	11.80	8.18	1	53
National parliament	0.69	0.46	0	1
Big two parties	0.70	0.46	0	1
Age	53.30	10.52	23	84
Female	0.25	0.43	0	1
Minister	0.18	0.38	0	1

copies on their website.[4] Numerous e-newsletters in this category were exclusively for territorial constituents and their subscriptions required personal information. As a result, it was not possible to observe whether these e-newsletters were actually delivered to subscribers. Some MPs, despite accepting subscriptions, may never deliver an e-newsletter in a limited time period (Jackson, 2006), but there is no study that covers a whole parliamentary term to confirm this. Hence, only in cases where the websites did not include e-newsletters, the dependent variable is based on MPs' declaration to their constituents—a declaration that they could easily remove from their website if they did not provide e-newsletters at all.

As another similarity of the case selection, 2014 was a non-election year for all parliaments under analysis. This ensures that (i) MPs had enough time to set up websites and e-newsletters since the previous elections and that (ii) they were not in a campaign period for the following ones. Importantly, the selection brings together all three main types of electoral systems: first-past-the-post (FPTP) in the UK, single-transferable vote (STV) in Northern Ireland and a mix of *FPTP* and closed-list proportional representation (PR) in Scotland and Wales. To code *Electoral Safety* across these systems, I followed the approach developed by Heitshusen *et al.* (2005), which ranks and divides the seats into three in each parliament (for single-member districts (SMDs)) or in each district

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[4]This excludes other e-mail subscriptions that MPs use, for example, the ones for new updates on their website.

(for multi-member districts): it is coded as 0 for marginal, 1 for competitive or 2 for safe seats.[5] For SMDs, *Majority* is the difference between the vote shares of the incumbents and the runner-up candidates in each district.

Seniority is a continuous variable based on the number of years that MPs have had served as parliamentary representatives in 2014. *National Parliament* is a binary variable coded as 1 for MPs from the House of Commons or as 0 for MPs from the subnational parliaments. Finally, *Big Two Parties* denotes whether MPs are from the Labour or the Conservative party—the two parties that each had 35% of all national and subnational MPs in the UK in September 2014—(coded as 1) or not (coded as 0).[6]

4. Results

Figure 1 visualises the use of e-newsletters by parliament. Overall, the majority of MPs in the UK were offering an e-newsletter service in September 2014: out of 942 MPs serving in the four parliaments, 495 MPs (52.5%) accepted subscriptions to e-newsletters and/or had a copy on their website. However, the popularity of e-newsletters did vary among parliaments, between 21.3% in the Northern Ireland Assembly and 61.9% in the House of Commons. Comparing the latter to 2003 when only 2.9% Westminster MPs offered an e-newsletter service (Jackson, 2006), this refers to a massive increase in just over a decade. The figure is suggestive of the hypothesis on parliamentary resources (*H4*) because all subnational parliaments rank lower than the House of Commons with regard to the use of e-newsletters. In fact, their order is parallel to the amount of allowance that MPs receive for office and staff in each parliament (see footnote 3).

Based on whether MPs had an e-newsletter service (1) or not (0), I run two logistic regression models, both yielding similar results. In addition to the variables of interest as defined above, the models have controls for MPs' age (in years) and gender as female (1/0), and whether they held a ministerial position (1/0) in September 2014. Table 2 presents the results.

Model 1 includes all of the MPs from the four parliaments. With regard to the effect of different voting systems in use, the results provide a partial support for the hypothesis on party- versus candidate-based systems (*H1*): compared to the MPs on closed party lists, MPs elected under STV were just as likely to have e-newsletters whereas FPTP appears to have a significantly positive effect. To be

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[5]See the Appendix for further details on the coding of this key variable.

[6]Despite their overall domination of all parliamentary seats in the country, the Labour and the Conservative party were not the largest two parties in subnational parliaments. However, this coding scheme is consistent with the fact that the same party templates were used by both their national and subnational members.
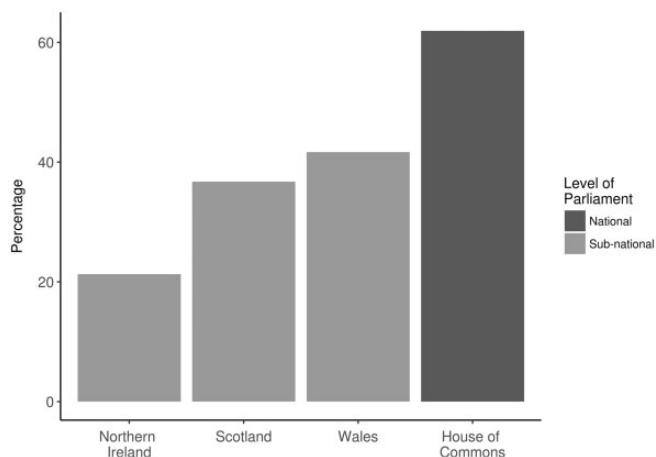
Figure 1. The popularity of e-newsletters by parliament.

Table 2 Logistic regression models

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	All MPs		**SMD MPs**	
	Coefficient	**SE**	**Coefficient**	**SE**
Voting system				
STV	0.003	0.392	—	—
FPTP	0.732*	0.330	—	—
Electoral safety				
Competitive	−0.208	0.192	—	—
Safe	−0.234	0.189	—	—
Majority			−0.015*	0.007
Seniority	−0.048***	0.012	−0.043***	0.012
National parliament	0.810***	0.233	0.877***	0.237
Big two parties	0.610**	0.197	0.467*	0.213
Age	−0.018*	0.009	−0.023*	0.010
Female	0.395*	0.173	0.409*	0.194
Minister	0.269	0.198	0.365	0.210
Constant	0.084	0.499	1.186*	0.548
N	928		756	

Notes: The dependent variable is whether MPs provide e-newsletters (1) or not (0). Both models are estimated via logistic regression. *PR* is the excluded category of *Voting System* and *Marginal* is the excluded category of *Electoral Safety*. *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.
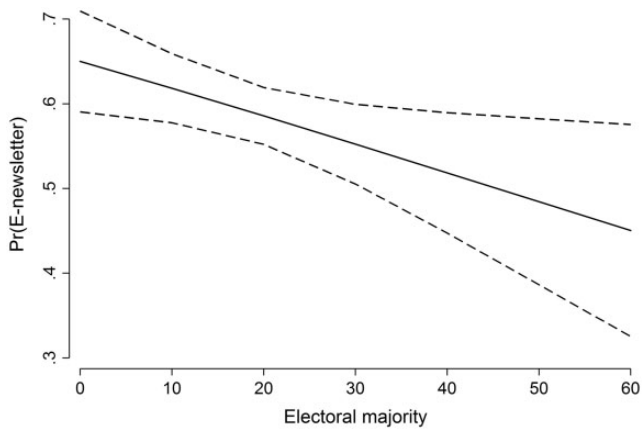
Figure 2. Predicted probability of having e-newsletters decreases with increasing electoral safety.
Notes: The figure is based on Model 2. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Other variables set to observed values.

precise, MPs representing SMDs are 16 percentage points more likely to use e-newsletters for parliamentary communication than MPs elected under closed-list PR.[7]

If we categorize how electorally safe MPs are into three, as does *Electoral Safety* in Model 1, the results show that MPs in safe or competitive seats are not significantly less likely to provide an e-newsletter service than MPs in marginal seats. This coding scheme allows for the comparison of electoral safety across voting systems, but it is a less sensitive measure than electoral marginality. Indeed, if we measure electoral safety as the incumbents' winning margin, as does *Majority* in Model 2 for MPs representing SMDs, the results show a negative and statistically significant relationship. Figure 2 plots this relationship, demonstrating an effect of 20 percentage points between the minimum and maximum levels of the electoral majority: those with next to no majority have a 65% probability of having an e-newsletter service, which decreases to 45% for the MPs with the largest electoral majority.

Seniority provides further evidence for the electoral connection of MPs' strategic approach to communication channels. Everything else—including their age—being equal, senior MPs are less likely to adopt e-newsletters. In fact, its effect is even larger than that of *Voting System* or *Majority*. Newest MPs have—just like the MPs in the most marginal seats—a 65% probability of providing an e-newsletter service. However, as Figure 3 demonstrates, it decreases much more sharply

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[7]All predicted probabilities are based on Model 1; except for *Majority* from Model 2. Other variables in the respective models are held at their observed values.
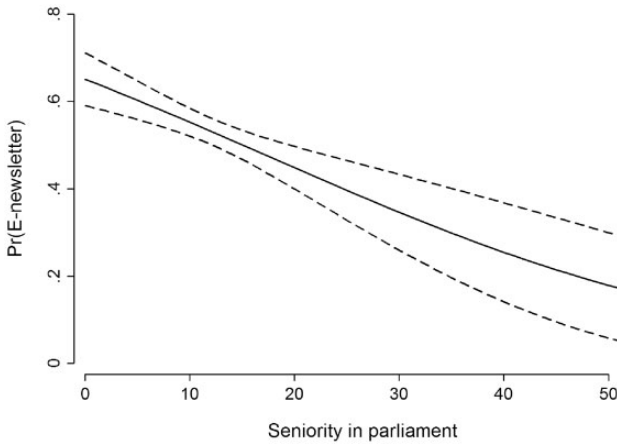
Figure 3. Predicted probability of having e-newsletters decreases with increasing seniority in parliament.
Notes: The figure is based on Model 1. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Other variables set to observed values.

with *Seniority*, and the most senior MPs have only a 16% probability. This suggests that the popularity of e-newsletters as a parliamentary communication channel is likely to increase in the future as the newer MPs will replace the seniors.

Turning to the two binary variables concerning the resources available to MPs (*H4–H5*), the results show that being a member of a resourceful parliament or party are both significant predictors of embracing e-newsletters. Model 1 predicts MPs at the national level to be 18 percentage points more likely to invest in e-newsletters than MPs in subnational parliaments. Large parties have a comparable effect. Labour and Conservative MPs are 13 percentage points more likely to offer e-newsletters than MPs in any other party.

These results are robust to the inclusion of the typical controls on legislative behaviour. Among the three control variables, MPs' age and gender seem to be somewhat relevant to the decision to use e-newsletters. Given that younger MPs adapt better to the new information communication technologies (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Cormack, 2016*a*), it is not surprising that MPs' age negatively correlates with having e-newsletters. Besides, age is also the single most important factor behind not seeking re-election (Byrne and Theakston, 2016), and older MPs might be less likely to worry about the votes that they might be potentially losing by not providing e-newsletters. With regard to gender, I find that female MPs are more likely to have e-newsletters—a result that mirrors their early adoption of other communication channels such as Twitter (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011). One could argue that e-newsletters are another tool for female MPs to deal with the

gender bias in the mainstream media (Graham *et al.*, 2013) or in the elections (Lawless and Pearson, 2008). Finally, holding a ministerial office has no statistically significant effect although ministers might have different incentives, focus or resources than backbenchers.

5. Conclusion

This article extended the empirical evidence on the use of e-newsletters for legislative communication in parliamentary democracies. Drawing on the national and subnational parliaments in the UK, it found that more than half of the all MPs now have e-newsletters. Why are so many MPs 'happy' to add another channel of communication to their increasing number of ways to communicate with their constituents? The multivariate analysis provided some insights into this question, largely confirming the expectations based on electoral incentives and institutional resources.

With regard to the electoral incentives, MPs elected under FPTP are significantly more likely to embrace e-newsletters compared to their counterparts elected on closed lists. There is no such effect of STV although it is also a candidate-centred system. Even for MPs elected under the same electoral system, incentives to provide e-newsletters can differ due to their individual electoral safety. Indeed, results show that MPs with smaller margins of electoral victory are more likely to use e-newsletters, at least in plurality systems where it is easier to measure the electoral safety. Finally, years spent in parliament decreases the likelihood of adopting e-newsletters, and this mirrors the decreasing effect of electoral incentives on senior MPs. These results are in line with evidence from other communication channels used by legislators in the UK or elsewhere, where the re-election motivation looms large. Alongside the new evidence from e-newsletters in the House of Commons, the contribution of this study comes from broadening our understanding to subnational legislatures with a variety of electoral systems. As the results suggest, this variation has a significant effect on the legislative behaviour of communication—an important finding for the rational choice studies, but one that is impossible to detect with single case studies that dominate the literature on legislative communication channels.

With regard to institutional resources, both parliaments and parties make a difference. All parliaments in the UK provide support for their members in the form of allowances, but members of the House of Commons benefit from higher levels of support. E-newsletters reflect this difference as well, and MPs from subnational parliaments are less likely to use them. Similarly, Labour and Conservative MPs, who receive templates for online communication among other benefits of being a member of the big two parties in the country, are more likely to use e-newsletters. These results provide a number of important insights into legislative

communication. For parliaments seeking to engage with the public (see, e.g. House of Commons, 2004), the results suggest that they can help their cause by providing resources to parliamentarians. Indeed, this would be consistent with one of the reasons why the Internet initially caused widespread optimism for representative democracy. For political parties—seeking policy, office and votes—the results suggest an electoral disadvantage for small parties. If MPs from large parties receive more partisan resources to communicate with their constituents, then smaller parties will have difficulty in getting their message across to their voters not only on the media but also through their members' personal channels.

Elections and communication are the two main ways that MPs and the citizens connect in parliamentary systems. While the former are rather static and happen once in every so many years, communication is, at least can be, continuous. This is one reason why recent theoretical developments in representation underline the importance of communication between MPs and their constituents, arguing that communicative accountability is as important as electoral accountability. The results presented in this article, however, show that these two forms of accountability are interrelated.

Legislative communication depends on elections due to the fact that the activities that MPs undertake to win elections—advertising, crediting and positioning—all require communication. That is to say, MPs communicate with their constituents not only because it builds trust and creates legitimacy, but also because it helps them get re-elected. However, in addition to the incentives to be re-elected, MPs also need resources to communicate, even on seemingly free communication channels such as with e-newsletters.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Coding *Electoral Safety*

Electoral Safety is an ordinal variable measuring the safety of parliamentary seats for MPs, coded as 0 for *Marginal*, 1 for *Competitive* or 2 for *Safe* seats, after ranking and dividing them into three in each parliament (for SMDs) or in each district (for multi-member districts) according to the results from the most recent elections: 2010 for the House of Commons and 2011 for the rest of the parliaments, unless there were by-elections for individual seats. This three-category, ordinal coding of the election results as *Electoral Safety* is based on the coding scheme developed by Heitshusen *et al.* (2005).

For the seats in SMDs (all seats in the House of Commons; constituency seats in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales), the coding is based on the difference between the vote shares of the incumbent and the candidate who came second. The seats are coded as *Marginal* if this difference is smaller than 10%, *Competitive* if it is between 10% and 20% and *Safe* if it is higher than 20%.

For the seats in closed-list, proportional representation districts (regional seats in the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales), the coding is based on relative list placement of incumbent MPs; that is, whether they are at the bottom (*Marginal*), top (*Safe*) or in between (*Competitive*) the two on their elected party list.

For the seats in districts with a single-transferable vote (all seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly), the coding in based on the first-preference votes of the incumbents. They are coded as *Marginal* if their first-preference vote is less than 60% of the district's quota, *Competitive* if it is between 60% and 120% and *Safe* if it is higher than 120%.