

Institution: University of Hull
Unit of Assessment: C21: Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: The Impact of the Internet on Parliamentary Public Engagement
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study focuses on the impact of the UoA's research on parliamentary public engagement, particularly the body of research on the use of internet-based tools by parliaments, produced by Leston-Bandeira within the Centre for Legislative Studies. This research has been disseminated through national and international 'insider' practitioner networks, with the research having both direct and indirect impacts on the way certain parliaments have used these tools to communicate and engage with citizens. This body of research has led parliaments to amend their policies and practice relating to the management and support of web-based tools.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The advent of the internet has led to a boom in research on new media and its impact on politics, as well as of research on participatory democracy and transparency. Some of this literature has taken the parliamentary institution as its object of research; however, few if any studies analyse the specifics of this institution. The UoA's body of research has produced such notable impact because it contains some of very few assessments of the potential and challenges offered by internet-based tools, focusing specifically on parliamentary institutions. The relevant body of research began to be created in the mid-2000s when Leston-Bandeira started to focus on parliamentary reform, particularly as that affects relationships between parliaments and citizens. At the time, the research concentrated on how the Portuguese parliament could enhance the individual mandate of MPs so as to promote more effective relationships between parliament and citizens. The research had considerable impact on the Portuguese parliament, with the 2007 reform of their parliamentary procedures drawing heavily on this research. Since then Leston-Bandeira's research has centred increasingly on the use of internet-based tools to facilitate parliaments' engagement with the public. This led to the publication of her 2007 article on 'The Impact of the Internet on Parliament' in the journal <i>Parliamentary Affairs</i>, which added a comparative angle to the body of research, rather than focusing solely on the Portuguese case. Since RAE2008, the UoA's body of research has continued to develop around issues of how many other parliaments utilise the internet to support their engagement with the public. Its main contribution has been to show that parliaments have specific characteristics which distinguish them significantly from other political institutions, especially in relation to their use of the internet. The research has also shown that, whilst pressures have increased to make parliaments more open and transparent, the new possibilities created for parliaments by the growth of the internet have also increased those parliaments' vulnerability in numerous significant ways. The research developed through the UoA's Economic and Social Research Council-funded project, <i>Managing Parliament's Image</i>. This project consisted primarily of empirical research into the ways parliaments use internet-based tools to communicate with the public. It gave the UoA access to important practitioners' networks, through which the body of research has impacted directly on parliaments' policies relating to the definition and use of websites and social media in their relationship with citizens. Besides this direct impact, other recent publications have been very well received by various practitioners (as well as academics), not least an edited double issue of <i>The Journal of Legislative Studies</i> on Parliaments and Citizens, and Leston-Bandeira's article 'The Pursuit of Legitimacy as a Key Driver for Public Engagement', in <i>Parliamentary Affairs</i>.</p> <p>The most salient results of the body of research include the following. The research identifies clearly which factors distinguish parliamentary institutions from other political institutions such as government and political parties, in terms of its ability to communicate with the public through internet-based tools. For example, a parliament does not have a single voice; it encompasses many different groups, which often have different if not opposing agendas; it is a collective institution. Furthermore, it is the most visible institution in a democratic political system. Besides this, parliament as an institution needs to maintain a non-biased position at all times when communicating with the public; that is, it needs to be politically-engaging, whilst not demonstrating any political leaning. All of these characteristics tend to hinder a parliament's ability to communicate effectively using internet-based tools. This research shows that, although</p>

parliaments are often the most visible of our political institutions, they are also the ones for whom it is most difficult to engage in effective communication with the public. Furthermore, parliaments are complex and relatively stagnant institutions; this creates difficulties when it comes to utilising internet-based tools, as technology tends to change quickly. Moreover, this body of research highlights the importance of systemic variables such as electoral system or democratic development in determining the opportunities internet-based tools create for parliaments; in short, it shows that off-line variables are key to the effectiveness of these tools.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

The following constituting the most relevant elements of body of research to date:

- *Parliaments and Citizens* (Editor), London, Routledge, 2013 (originally published as a double special issue for *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, vol.18, 3/4, 2012).
- 'The Pursuit of Legitimacy as a Key Driver for Public Engagement: the case of the European Parliament', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 2012 - doi: 10.1093/pa/gss050.
- 'Towards a Trustee Model? Parliamentary Representation in the Internet Era: The Portuguese Case' *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 65, 2, 2012, pp. 425-47.
- 'Parliamentary Functions Portrayed on European Parliaments' Websites', *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, vol. 17, 34, 2009, pp. 13-27.
- *Parliaments in the Digital Age*, (edited with S. Ward), Oxford Internet Institute (OII) Forum Discussion Paper No.13, Oxford, OII, 2008.
- 'The Impact of the Internet on Parliaments: a Legislative Studies Framework', *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 60, 4, 2007, pp. 655-674.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact of this body of research falls within the general area of parliamentary public engagement, and specifically the ways parliaments utilise internet-based tools to communicate and engage with the public. The impact has been two-fold: 1. It has raised awareness of the contextual variables of each parliament that have significant relevance to their use internet-based tools; and 2. It has helped to develop and disseminate an understanding of how the internet can be used to communicate and engage citizens most effectively, whilst accepting the challenges this creates for parliaments. In a context where parliaments have been criticised heavily for being needlessly distant from citizens, and often identified as key causes of political disengagement, the significance of this research is particularly great. It provides a framework through which to better understand the role played by parliaments, as well as the tools available to address this issue. This impact has been both direct, through advice and evidence given, and indirect through publications, and spans several countries thereby having considerable reach. Institutionally, the impact grew out of a 2007 British Academy and ESRC-funded workshop Leston-Bandeira co-coordinated with the Oxford Internet Institute. One of the primary aims of this event was to bring together the academic and the practitioner communities, and included the participation of parliamentary officials from six parliaments. This was the first occasion on which there had been discussions between academics and parliamentary officials regarding the latter's practice in this area. It led to the publication online of *Parliaments in the Digital Age*, which identified some of the challenges facing parliaments in the utilisation of internet-based tools. The body of research of which this publication was a part became even more visible to the practitioner community during the months of preparation for the Second World e-Parliament Conference, Brussels, November 2008. Leston-Bandeira was invited to represent the academic community at this key practitioners' gathering, and to present the findings of the UoA's research into parliamentary use of the internet. The 2008 World e-Parliament expanded those contacts, not least by building a closer rapport with practitioners in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, something that has grown significantly since that conference. Hence, the Coordinator of the Brazilian Parliament's e-Democracia Program describes the body of research's impact as 'fundamental to the formulation and implementation of the e-Democracia website' (see section 5, below) This tool is recognised by practitioners and academics across the world as the most complex and effective participative tool developed by a parliament. The close collaboration with this parliament has led more recently to Leston-Bandeira being invited to deliver a guest lecture and lead a number of meetings with Chamber staff on participation, parliaments and citizens, with a strong focus on the internet's role.

At the time of the 2008 World e-Parliament Conference, the *Guidelines on Parliamentary Websites*, issued by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, were under review. Having presented aspects of the body of research at a session dedicated to this exercise, the coordinators asked Leston-

Bandeira to submit evidence to this review. The recognition of the value of the UoA's research on parliamentary use of the internet led to further involvement with the review network, which resulted in turn in an invitation to give a keynote lecture on parliamentary websites at the Fourth World e-Parliament Conference, Johannesburg, South Africa, October 2010. The conference was attended by over 400 representatives from more than 80 different countries. This presentation was very important in cementing contacts with parliamentary officials from a wide range of countries both in Europe and beyond. The presentation focused on her research into the challenges that websites present to parliaments, and how to best overcome these challenges. The lecture and research was commended as one of the best presentations in the conference and led many parliamentary officials, including the Speaker of the Lesotho parliament, to contact her to discuss their own cases.

As a direct consequence of this presentation, two specific parliaments (Israeli and Belgian) contacted Leston-Bandeira regarding their policies on new media. At the time, the Israeli parliament was undertaking a comprehensive review of its website and associated new media tools. As part of this exercise, the Knesset wished to apply to its own case the insights gained from the UoA's research. Together with the main leading members of his ICT team, the Director General of the Knesset travelled to Hull for an extensive meeting with Leston-Bandeira to discuss their policies. These discussions continued by email, and had direct impact not merely on the renewal of the Knesset website, but also on their decisions regarding both the use of social media and the processes underpinning the management of these tools. In particular, it led directly to the Knesset's current focus on the idea of communicating politics issues in non-partisan ways to the public, rather than merely 'informing' the public. This approach is evident not merely in their new website and social media, but also in the re-organisation of their services. This team from the Israeli parliament showcased their changes at the recent Fifth World e-Parliament Conference in Rome, September 2012, with Leston-Bandeira in attendance. This impact is acknowledged in a letter from the Director General (cited below, in section 5): for example, 'I am confident that, like other parliaments around the world, the products of your invaluable academic work will continue to have either a direct or an indirect impact on our activities here at the Knesset.'

Similarly, the Belgian parliament examined social media with a view to deciding whether or not to develop its use, and if so, in what way. Leston-Bandeira had several face-to-face and email discussions with the leaders of Belgian parliament's ICT team, regarding the UoA's research. In May 2011, as hosts of a workshop on *Parliaments and the Net* for the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (the main network for parliamentary officials in Europe), the Belgian parliament asked Leston-Bandeira to present the conclusions of the body of research as the keynote Guest Opening Talk on 'Parliament and Public Engagement'. Leston-Bandeira was the only academic allowed to participate in this conference, which was attended by over 80 parliamentary officials from 16 European countries. Besides extending the research's impact to the Dutch, Finnish and French parliaments among others, this conference also reinforced of the UoA's contacts with the UK Houses of Parliament. This impacted on the way they started to use social media to engage with the public, not least through the creation of the Parliamentary tweeter account, and, quoting the adviser to the IT Department of the Belgium Parliament (see section 5), 'the decision *not* to take part in any other social media activities'.

The Special Projects Manager for the UK Parliament's Outreach Service describes the UoA's research as 'an absolutely vital foundation for me to develop our programme', a view reinforced by numerous reports and select committee proceedings of the UK Parliament (see section 5 below). This impact stems from a number of activities:

- In July 2011 Leston-Bandeira submitted written evidence to the Administration Committee on their enquiry into the planned new Visitors Centre, identifying practice in other parliaments in the area of parliamentary engagement; In 2012, she was invited to be the only academic in a practitioners panel on public engagement at the Study of Parliament Group, to talk about the implications of her research for the specific constraints that shape parliaments' public engagement; In 2012 she drew on the research when submitting invited written evidence to the Liaison Committee for their enquiry into Select Committee Powers and Effectiveness;
- In March 2012, she was invited as one out of three academics to a private meeting between the Backbench Business Committee and the Hansard Society to discuss the new e-petitions system. This meeting, and particularly the advice drawn from the research

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referred to here, resulted in the Hansard Society report *What next for e-petitions?*, which included recommendations to address some of the current weaknesses of the e-petitions system;

- She was commissioned to develop a project, from April 2012 to January 2013, funded by the Higher Education Academy, in partnership with the Houses of Parliament's Outreach Service examining ways in which web-based parliamentary resources can be used more effectively to support University teaching and research. This has altered the Service's use of the website.

Further recognition of the impact of Leston-Bandeira's research at international level is also evident in the fact that she was invited as an academic member of the Senior Advisory Committee of the AGORA – Portal for Parliamentary Development – an online platform with a membership spanning parliaments worldwide that supports the exchange of information and advice on issues relating to parliamentary assistance, with a strong focus on the relationship with citizens. She has also provided direct advice to *Global Partners & Associates* (GPA), which supports parliamentary strengthening in developing parliaments. This included advice and research for the *Global Report on Parliamentary Representation* published in June 2012 on the main issues affecting today's relationship between parliaments and citizens, which GPA produced for the Inter-Parliamentary Union (the main international organisation with representation of all national parliaments).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 'Parliament and Public Engagement: two sides of the same coin', *Study of Parliament Group Newsletter*, Summer issue, 2011;
- Written evidence to the **Administration Committee** on their *Inquiry on Visitor Access and Facilities in the House of Commons*, July 2011 (Administration Committee, *Visitor Access and Facilities*, 23 May 2012, HC 13 2011-12);
- Written evidence to the **Liaison Committee** on their *Inquiry into Select Committee Powers and Effectiveness*, February 2012 (Liaison Committee, *Select Committee Powers and Effectiveness*, 8 November 2012, HC 697 2010-12);
- *What next for e-petitions?*, May 2012, Hansard Society, available at: http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blogs/press_releases/archive/2012/05/18/parliament-must-take-over-e-petitions-says-hansard-society.aspx);
- Letter from Secretary General of the Socialist Party and former Chair of the Parliamentary Reform Committee, Portuguese Parliament.
- Letter from Director General of the Israeli Parliament, The Knesset
- Letter from Coordinator of the e-Democracy Programme of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, Brazilian Parliament
- Letter from Special Projects Manager, Parliament's Outreach Service, Houses of Parliament, UK Parliament
- Letter from Parliamentary Official in IT Department, the Chamber of Representatives, Belgium Parliament