

Chapter 6

Parliamentary Monitoring



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Abstract Korthagen and Dorst introduce two digital tools which enable voters to monitor the actions of their representatives: the British [theyworkforyou.com](https://www.theyworkforyou.com) and the German [abgeordnetenwatch.de](https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de). Only the German tool is interactive; it also offers opportunities to ask questions to MPs, comment their voting behaviour and sign petitions. In their description and analysis of both cases, the authors put a strong focus on the participatory process and practical experiences of users. For a better understanding of these tools and how they are used in practice, interviews were conducted with the organisers and researchers familiar with both tools. Strengths and weaknesses are identified and possibilities for improvements explored. Although both tools are developed for the general public, they are mostly used by journalists and other professional users such as NGOs. The data of the websites therefore still reaches many people through mass media. The most important benefit of these tools is that they contribute to impartial information on political votes. However, unintended side effects are there as well, as several MPs in the UK increased the number of times they spoke just to increase their scores.

6.1 Parliamentary Monitoring in the UK: TheyWorkForYou

6.1.1 Introduction

TheyWorkForYou ([theyworkforyou.com](https://www.theyworkforyou.com)) enables voters to monitor the actions of their representatives in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament in the United Kingdom, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Visitors of the website can search information on any Member of Parliament (MP), debate or public bill committee or enter their postal code to find information on the MP

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relevant to them (Edwards et al. 2015). The available information on every MP includes facts and figures such as the number of written questions and speeches during debates, recent appearances, expenses and an extensive register of interests. For each figure, it is indicated whether this is above or below average (MySociety 2016c). The Policy Agreement Ratio is used to display MPs' voting records in gradations, such as "*consistently voted against*", "*almost always voted against*", or "*generally voted against*" regarding important policy issues (Edwards et al. 2015). Since the Brexit vote, information on how each MP campaigned concerning the European Union was added (MySociety 2016d).

The website was launched by volunteers in 2004 and became a project of MySociety in 2006. This organisation, a charity project of UK Citizens Online Democracy, aims to promote "*strong democratic accountability*" and a "*thriving civil society*" (Edwards et al. 2015: 261). It runs several other websites that aim to engage the public in politics, such as MyNextRepresentative, WhatDoTheyKnow and FixMyStreet. The organisation is not politically aligned and its projects and tools are for everyone to use to "make democracy a little more accessible" (MySociety 2016a). The main purpose is to provide neutral, non-partisan information about the actions, words and votes of MPs in a way that is understandable for everyone (Escher 2011). More specifically, the goals of the website are to create (1) value, (2) transparency and (3) engagement (Escher 2011). It aims to provide better information than official parliamentary sites do and to simplify access to this information for people who are interested. The official database of proceedings of parliamentary debates, Hansard, is "*notoriously difficult to navigate*", according to the interviewed organiser. Another aim is to allow citizens to make a fair judgement of MPs on the basis of what they do and to make MPs feel accountable (i.e. citizens acting as watchdogs). A final aim is to make sure citizens are better informed and to engage citizens in politics.

The UK Parliament is characterised as a "strong debating parliament", but Edwards et al. (2015: 261) also note that its accountability seems to be eroding, due to several dents in the representativeness of MPs, for instance, because of their representation of special interests, party donations, non-parliamentary incomes from consultancies or other services to companies and expenses. An expense scandal in the media that erupted in 2009 was a blow to public confidence in Members of Parliament (Edwards et al. 2015). TheyWorkForYou provides insight into these factors, not only for citizens but also for journalists to see, and this period indeed saw an increased usage of the website (Escher 2011).

MySociety is a not-for-profit social enterprise. It receives funding and research grants from several organisations and donations from individuals (MySociety 2016b). There is not much funding for the tool, but to maintain it costs a lot of work (interview, head of research MySociety). Setting up the website costs a few thousand pounds, with Escher (2011) indicating that with annual maintenance costs of over £20,000 it is the most expensive MySociety project. There are no resources to pay a developer to expand the website or add new functions. The tool runs on software specifically designed for TheyWorkForYou. MySociety has expanded its mission by supporting parliamentary monitoring organisations abroad. The software

code used to run TheyWorkForYou is open source and has been used to create similar websites in Ireland, New Zealand and Australia.

Relevant legal frameworks for the tool to function were, according to the interviewed organiser, the right to contact an MP and the right to access parliamentary and debate information. However, at the time TheyWorkForYou started, government information was protected under Crown copyright and therefore could, without permission, not be published elsewhere. The interviewed researcher notes that it is very likely that the release of the Open Government Licence in 2010, which works similar to the creative commons license, has been driven by TheyWorkForYou. It changed the legal landscape in the sense that government information is now more likely to be published under an open license instead of under Crown copyright.

6.1.2 Participants

The site has no specific target group; all British citizens over the age of 12 can use the tool (interview, head of research MySociety). Participation is based on self-selection, and registration is not required.

Since 2007 the website receives between 200,000 and 300,000 visits a month, with noticeable drops during summer recess and between Christmas and New Year (Escher 2011). The interviewed organiser states that the website is frequented more around election times and during political issues. In the run-up to the General Election in 2010, the website had over 230,000 visits in 1 week, making that week the busiest since its launch. In May and June 2009, a significant spike occurred as the media reported on extravagant expenses by MPs and people used the website to check on their MPs' expenditures (Escher 2011). The summer of 2016 saw another sudden increase in visitor numbers due to political upheavals such as the Brexit vote and the resignation of the Prime Minister (MySociety 2016d).

When it comes to the site's demographics there is a strong male bias, a strong participation of high-income groups and of people with a university degree (Escher 2011). TheyWorkForYou users with a high education make up the majority of the tool's users. This is a high proportion, higher even than that of FixMyStreet, another UK-based tool of MySociety (Rumbul 2015). People with full-time employment also make up the largest user group of the tool, with 41% (Rumbul 2015). When compared to the average Internet user, visitors over the age of 54 are overrepresented. The share of retired visitors of TheyWorkForYou is twice as high and sick or disabled people are also overrepresented in comparison to the online population (Escher 2011). There is insufficient data to say anything reliable about the inclusion of people with different ethnic backgrounds. However, as Escher (2011) shows, the available data suggests that white people are overrepresented compared to the average Internet user.

Making the parliamentary process more accessible for all layers of society is one of the main aims of MySociety (Escher 2011). However, respondents in Escher's survey are more politically engaged and more often participate in politics online than

the average Internet user. Compared to the general knowledge of politicians and parliamentary proceedings—Escher states not even half the population can name their MP—the users of TheyWorkForYou are quite knowledgeable: four out of five users indicate they knew the name of their MP before they used TheyWorkForYou (Escher 2011). However, three out of five visitors had never looked for information on their representatives' actions before looking up their MP on TheyWorkForYou. A significant new group of users is also reached as two out of five users have not been engaged in politics before using the tool. The most recent data of MySociety shows that over 70% of TheyWorkForYou users read political news at least once a day. One-fifth of users had previously contacted a politician, government agency or public body (Rumbul 2015).

These numbers are an indication of a high proportion of the website's users being professionals. As Edwards et al. state (2015: 262): "*Although there is no concrete evidence of this, many NGOs, campaign groups and the like use the site to gather information, in particular on how MPs are voting (source: email communication, 30–07–2015).*" The interviewed researcher also states that many of the website's users are part of the "political class", using the website professionally: campaigners, journalists and civil servants. Each week some 1500 visits, 2% of all visits, are from members of the parliament (their IP address can be traced back to parliament.uk) (Escher 2011). Another 2.5% of visits can be traced back to governmental sources (.gov.uk and .mod.uk). In 2010 the Conservative Party Central Office accounted for 0.26% of site visits up until the General Election, after which the number of visits decreased again (Escher 2011). The interviewed organiser affirms that they observe a lot of traffic from inside the Houses of Parliaments. MPs and their aides use the website, for instance, when an election is coming up and they want to show constituents their actions so far. "*It is a bit like showing your CV when you're applying for a job*" (interview with head of research MySociety). The BBC accounts for almost 0.5% of all visits in 2010. As journalists use the tool as well and sometimes credit TheyWorkForYou for the information they retrieve, the media also function as an intermediary between the website and citizens (interview with organiser).

According to Escher (2011), MySociety does not promote its websites much because of financial constraints. There were a few promotional activities over the years. With the aid of a Google grant, Google Adwords were used to advertise the website so that when someone would search for terms such as "members of parliament" or names of MPs, a sponsored add for the website would appear. In 2010, a campaign was launched in the weeks running up to the General Election, consisting of a quiz that allowed voters to compare their views to those of candidates, which resulted in a temporary increase in visits to the website (Escher 2011).

MySociety has a blog and posts news on current political developments in relation to TheyWorkForYou or on updates of the tool. There are also Facebook and Twitter accounts for TheyWorkForYou which are regularly used. A communications and marketing manager promotes all MySociety's websites, but there is not a large budget to do so. At present, MySociety is organising focus groups for young people to find out how to engage them. The interviewed organisers state they would like to find ways in which to engage those people that are not already interested in

politics, if budget permits. For this purpose, they do research on User Centred Design: What could the website do for its users if it was designed differently or had other features? A footnote here is placed by the interviewed researcher, remarking that *“ordinary people don’t get their information about democracy from these sorts of tools. I think they get them from Facebook and the media”*. The interviewed organiser also states that the tool could be improved by increasing the repackaging of information for broader audiences via forums as Twitter, Facebook or Reddit.

6.1.3 Participatory Process

Users of the tool cannot give input through the website. It is not meant to be a platform for interaction, according to the interviewed organiser. TheyWorkForYou only displays information obtained from official public sources and tries to avoid creating a narrative out of information. *“We don’t want to curate the information. We’re not political and we don’t want to appear like we’re trying to craft any kind of story out of the information. What we do, is try to simplify the information for people so it can easily be compared”* (interview with head of research MySociety).

The interviewed organiser indicates that the tool’s strong suit is that it enables citizens to participate in an informed manner. Also, they can hold their representatives accountable for the way they vote and challenge those who do not appear to represent their interests. Another MySociety tool, WriteToThem, is very closely connected with the TheyWorkForYou website. On every MP’s profile page, a button can be clicked which links to WriteToThem, to directly contact the MP. Still, it is a somewhat passive tool, which does not give much opportunity for interaction, therewith possibly stifling debate. However, the interviewed organiser states that there are no resources to moderate full two-way participation.

6.1.4 Results

According to Edwards et al. (2015), the effects of this website on parliamentary work are difficult to assess.

In 2006, *The Times* suggested that the statistics displayed on the website contributed to an increase in non-necessary interventions by MPs (Edwards et al. 2015). Head of Research at MySociety (Rumbul 2014) states: *“When it came to the attention of some MPs that citizens were monitoring how often they spoke in the chamber, as reported by The Times in 2006, several MPs increased the number of times they spoke. In most cases however, they did not speak of anything of substance, and this therefore skewed the totals for individual MPs and compromised the integrity of the information being provided to citizens.”* The tool may thus have led to *“symbolic accountability processes”* (Edwards et al. 2015). In order to

convince users of the tool to look further than these figures and to counter the consequences of a too narrow interpretation of this data. MySociety has added some “silly” data as well, such as the number of times an MP uses an alliterative phrase (e.g. “she sells seashells”). On the website, MySociety (2016a) explains: “*Simply put, we realise that data such as the number of debates spoken in means little in terms of an MP’s actual performance. MPs do lots of useful things which we don’t count yet, and some which we never could. Even when we do, a count doesn’t measure the quality of an MP’s contribution.*”

As Edwards et al. state (2015: 261): “*In the United Kingdom, the election system allows for a direct accountability relation between individual representatives and their voters, but the strict party discipline that is imposed on the representatives in the British House of Commons leaves little room for independent behaviour in parliamentary votes.*” Members of parliament are expected—not obliged—to vote with their party. One impact of the website seems to be that parliamentarians vote less in line with their party and more for their constituents, according to an impact assessment by Becky Hogge (2016: 3): “*The greatest impact of TheyWorkForYou may be on Parliamentarians themselves. MySociety suspects, and some data also confirms, that Parliamentarians have changed the way they go about their work in response to TheyWorkForYou’s vote monitoring and analysis tools, both by turning up for more votes and rebelling against their party more often.*”

When evaluating the website’s impact, Hogge (2016) points out that the possible monetised time savings for users, such as civil society groups and journalists, should be considered. If keeping up with parliamentary actions through the tool can free up time for smaller campaigning or lobby groups’ time to use for other actions, more of a level playing field is created.

Almost all respondents in Escher’s survey believe that it offers them neutral, non-partisan information (Escher 2011) and indicate they find the website well structured and easy to navigate. However, when a poll on the website asked visitors if they could find what they were looking for, 40% answered negative. Among survey respondents, this was 20%. Nine out of ten respondents indicated that the website improved their knowledge about their representatives. Rumbul (2015) found that a majority of the tool’s users felt more confident in contacting their representatives directly as a result of these types of technological platforms.

However, Edwards et al. (2015) state that transparency on the parliamentary process does not automatically translate to its legitimacy. The fact that civilians are better able to see how these processes work does not imply they accept and acknowledge them, let alone trust the politicians and political institutions that form the foundation of these processes.

The interviewed researcher also remarks that although the tool works very well, it will not change the comprehensibility of the parliamentary system. The speech of parliamentarians is reported verbatim, and thus no translative action is provided.

6.2 Parliamentary Monitoring in Germany: abgeordnetenwatch.de

6.2.1 Introduction

The German parliamentary monitoring website abgeordnetenwatch.de was first developed for the state of Hamburg in 2004. Following its success there, it was extended to the federal level. It is an online platform that German citizens can use to monitor their representatives, ask them questions and sign petitions (but not start them). The website has a blog with posts on results of their investigative research on topics concerning parliamentary transparency, citizenship and participation in politics. Visitors of the blog can react to the posts. Parliamentary profile pages show public information such as voting behaviour, questions asked and answered and ancillary functions on representatives of the Federal Parliament (Bundestag), of German members of the European Parliament and of 11 state parliaments (Parliamentwatch 2015).

Abgeordnetenwatch.de is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation. The website was launched by the campaigners of “Mehr Demokratie” (*More Democracy*) (Buzogány 2016), an organisation committed to promoting direct democracy. Political scientist Gregor Hackmack and computer scientist Boris Hekele are the main founders of the platform (Kleinstеuber and Voss 2012). Hackmack sees the website as a tool to “update” the democratic process, with the accountability of representatives and the transparency of the democratic process as important themes (Buzogány 2016: 74 and interview with researcher). In addition to performing a “watchdog” function, the platform has the goal of a more person-oriented democracy. Its main aims are to establish dialogue between voters and representatives, to make Parliament more accountable, transparent and less anonymous, and to provide a sort of archive or “memory” of what has been said and achieved by parliamentarians (Albrecht and Trénel 2010; Kleinstеuber and Voss 2012). In some instances—“concerning our core topics” (interview with fundraiser)—the organisation of abgeordnetenwatch.de will start a petition themselves, such as on transparency around lobby activities.

Users can search their representatives by entering their postal code and ask questions by clicking on the contact button at the personal pages of the Members of Parliament (MPs). Only when submitting a question a name and email address required. A moderation protocol is in place to ensure a platform free of lobbying or offensive behaviour. All questions are moderated by a group of 20 volunteers. These questions and the answers of the MPs are published on the website (Albrecht and Trénel 2010). The moderators only post contributions that are identified as requests for statements on particular issues. A user is not allowed to post more than two questions on one issue to a politician, as monitors feel that it is unlikely a clear answer will be given after two attempts (Pautz 2010). Users can appeal to the abgeordnetenwatch.de board if their questions are rejected and politicians can even be sanctioned by losing their personal page if improper use or fraud is suspected.

Abgeordnetenwatch.de worked as a non-commercial social enterprise, depending on funds, donations and volunteers. In 2014 the platform was funded by recurring

donors and individual donations (62%), donations from foundations (15%), companies (12%), premium profiles (3%) and other sources of income (8%) (Parliamentwatch 2015, 20). Transparency on funding—both where it comes from and where it goes—is important to the organisation in order to build users’ and funders’ trust (interview with fundraiser, [abgeordnetenwatch.de](#)). Later on, the organisation is professionalised with paid staff members and freelancers. In 2018 two managing directors, 15 staff members and about 20 freelancers work for [abgeordnetenwatch.de](#). The Q&A platform takes up the most resources of all different functions of [abgeordnetenwatch.de](#), due to intensive monitoring activities and technical development and maintenance (interview with fundraiser). Open source software is used as much as possible. It is difficult to say whether the platform is cost-effective, but the financially independent status of the organisation may be a marker for cost-effectiveness (interview with fundraiser).

6.2.2 Participants

Participation is based on self-selection. Any visitor can search for information on politicians and ask questions. Over 1.5 million visitors were recorded in 2016 that submitted over 193,000 questions, with a response rate of 80% (Parliamentwatch 2015). While the number of visitors per year has dropped, as there were 2.6 million visitors in 2012, the number of questions has increased in these 5 years (in 2012, 141,907 were recorded). The response rate holds consistently around 80% between 2012 and 2016 (Abgeordnetenwatch 2017, 12).

A survey into the background of its users shows that the platform attracts predominantly male visitors (81%), people with higher education (41.8%) and people with a higher than average political interest (Albrecht and Trénel 2010). The average age was 40 years. Over half of the respondents contacted their representative for the first time through this platform (Parliamentwatch 2015).

Reaching those who do not usually participate in the political process has not received specific attention of the organisation. The interviewed researcher states: *“The whole process is quite well explained on the website, but it’s still a technical process. You have to know something about the role of parliamentarians and so on, and you have to be able to read longer texts [. . .]. That might exclude some people. [. . .] I’m not sure if they tried to specifically address people who are not comfortable with the way the site is presented at the moment. [. . .] You will have to sort of adapt yourself to the process you want to interact with. That is of course a bit problematic if there’s a huge gap between the daily lives of people and the daily lives of politicians.”* The interviewed organiser (interview with fundraiser) indicates that it may also be beneficial for users of the tool to delve into the political process before participating. *“Those people do take the time and make the effort. For them, it can be a good experience.”* But he also states the platform could be made more straightforward and self-explanatory. *“If you’re in your twenties and you’re used to simple apps or Facebook or communication via those channels, then [[abgeordnetenwatch.de](#), mainly the Q&A] is not that intuitive. It takes a bit of time. [. . .] You should usually have a look: what questions did that MP already answer?”* Simplifying the

platform structure and experimenting with new ways to engage people might help to make the tool more inclusive (interview with fundraiser). An action undertaken before we interviewed the fundraiser in 2016, in the run-up to the Berlin state elections, was to enable people to ask their question through Facebook. This did not prove to be successful, however (interview with fundraiser).

Media partnerships are important for the success of *abgeordnetenwatch.de*. Over 50 news portals have a working relationship with *abgeordnetenwatch.de* and many journalists use the website to base their research on (Buzogány 2016: 75). *“In terms of data, it’s a bit of a hidden treasure. We have so many voting records. We have so many answers given by MPs. It’s all on the platform. That’s the idea: it is on the platform and it remains on the platform. [...] There is a project about to start about the extra earnings of MPs, how that might relate to their voting behaviour. We provide the data [for this].”* Moreover, the 2014 annual report states that media partners *“serve as important crowd-pullers”*, as one-third of the visitors found the platform through media (Parliamentwatch 2015). An additional attraction is the blog on which issues are researched and news is reported. There is also a weekly newsletter, featuring interesting questions and answers and recent successes. The number of newsletter subscribers is increased by campaigns that accompany petitions started or endorsed by the organisation (Parliamentwatch 2015).

6.2.3 Participatory Process

Users of the platform can (1) search information on their representatives’ voting behaviour, ancillary functions and expenses; (2) query their representatives and receive an answer, both published on the website; and (3) sign petitions.

The main functionality of the platform is to accommodate interaction between citizens and parliamentarians, not the exchange of views between citizens. Users of the website can comment on the voting behaviour of individual parliamentarians, recommend answers by parliamentarians or share them on Facebook and Twitter. The site requires some personal data from people who want to interact with politicians: a name and an email address. Privacy and security are important to both citizens asking questions and parliamentarians answering them. Here, transparency and privacy may conflict. *“We try to be really careful with the data we get. If you fill in something, whether it’s a donation or if you’re signing a petition, your data is encrypted. That is really important. You can also call us and ask to have your data deleted”* (interview with fundraiser).

Politicians’ data published on the website is publicly available via other channels as well, the interviewed researcher states, and risks of hacking are therefore minimal. *“At the moment, it has become accepted that people have the right to know more about parliamentarians than before. We [Germany] also have tougher regulations of what they can do beside their mandate, consulting or such matters. [...] I think Abgeordnetenwatch has become part of that process to make more data available. [Parliamentarians] are public persons, [and so] hacking would not make a difference, because today all the data on them is already publicly available”* (interview with researcher). Privacy of politicians is ensured through a code of conduct. *“We do not*

allow questions concerning the private lives of politicians, for instance. We believe that does not foster an open dialogue. That is why moderation is really important" (interview with fundraiser).

6.2.4 Results

The high percentage of questions asked and answered within a short time (in general a few weeks at most) show *abgeordnetenwatch.de* to be an effective platform with a strong reputation (Edwards et al. 2015). According to Albrecht and Trénel (2010), the quality of these questions and answers is also high. Pautz (2010) states that, although the possibilities of ICT have not substantially increased citizen involvement in politics, the fact that *abgeordnetenwatch.de* functions as a collective memory of the actions of representatives may at least increase politicians' accountability, at little cost to citizens.

A lack of direct impact of questions on decision-making may partly be caused by Germany's political system, where MPs often vote according to the party line, depending on the vote call. Because of this system, individual MPs can often not be held directly accountable for their voting behaviour. *Abgeordnetenwatch.de* fosters direct communication between citizens and their representatives and has impact *"on the way people care about transparency of the parliamentary process, on the personal integrity of members of parliament, and also on the debate on how much they have to be responsive to such platforms and to requests from individuals"* (interview with researcher). The interviewed organiser (interview with fundraiser) affirms that this attitudinal shift of politicians might possibly be *abgeordnetenwatch.de*'s largest achievement. The platform actively supports the current development from contractual to permanent representativeness. The initiators of *abgeordnetenwatch.de* want to *"facilitate a shift 'from a democracy made up of spectators to a democracy of participants', thus effectively reshaping the functioning of the representative system"* (Pautz 2010). Politicians are, more than they used to be, under permanent evaluation by voters. *"What we did see was, in one or two cases, that MPs, when they were asked about their voting behaviour, they actually. . . First of all, they explained it. In one or two rare cases, they later on adapted their voting behaviour. But that is obviously not only due to a question asked. I think that is part of a bigger process, like the political situation changing."* In the same interview it is stressed to value the impact of all the organisation's continuing efforts to make politicians accountable: *"I think our investigative research (the petitions, putting pressure on politicians) has a more direct impact on the political process than the dialogue platform has"* (interview with fundraiser). The success of *abgeordnetenwatch.de* contributes to the fragmentation of the parliament, as it affects the party structure by putting voters in direct contact with representatives, making the individual MPs stand out in relation to the parties (Pautz 2010).

Abgeordnetenwatch.de is a topic of discussion in the German parliament (Albrecht and Trénel 2010). On the one hand, there are those that perceive the questions asked on the website to be an extra load in an already overfull work

schedule and see the website more as a pillory than a platform for citizen consultation. On the other hand, there are MPs who use the website as a place to promote themselves, or they put up links to the questions they have answered on their own websites. However, the opportunities to contact representatives directly may raise false expectations of the influence citizens have on the political process (interview with fundraiser, interview with researcher). In the case of Germany, this is because the role of parliamentarians is not necessarily to be responsive to their own constituency, but to consider the common good whenever they decide on an issue (interview with researcher). People monitoring and asking questions to “their” representative may therefore falsely expect that this MP is supposed to answer to them directly.

At the end of each year, *abgeordnetenwatch.de* publishes a ranking based on representatives’ performance in answering questions. By using grades, the ranking shows which representative was most responsive. This ranking is reported in local and national media. Several years ago, the newspaper *Bild* found that some of the worst-scoring deputies did not only fail to answer the questions of voters but also neglected their other tasks in parliament, which has caused some representatives to resign. This increased awareness made it difficult for politicians to ignore the website (Buzogány 2016).

Another focus of *abgeordnetenwatch.de* is research into lobbies, ancillary positions and party expenses (Edwards et al. 2015; *Abgeordnetenwatch.de* 2016), which *abgeordnetenwatch.de* posts on its blog. In 2010, the speaking fees of former finance minister and member of parliament Peer Steinbrück were published on the blog, leading to the obligation of disclosing income from ancillary functions of representatives in 2013. With regard to lobbyists, *abgeordnetenwatch.de* took legal action against the Parliament, which refused to open up about their contacts. This was ruled as being unlawful. Since 2015, the Parliament has not only provided a list of all lobbyists (over 1100) but has also sharpened the rules of access to parliament members (*Abgeordnetenwatch.de* 2016). In general, the website does have impact on parliamentary processes, but it doesn’t impact decision-making on specific policy issues.

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