Political Participation and E-Petitioning:
An Analysis of the Policy-Making Impact of the
Scottish Parliament's E-Petition System

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ABSTRACT: Worldwide, representative democracies have experienced declining levels of voter turnout, lower membership levels in political parties, and apathy towards their respective political systems. E-democracy, specifically e-petitioning, has been touted as a possible solution to this problem by scholars of electoral systems. In 1999, the Scottish Parliament reconvened for the first time in nearly three hundred years, and set out to innovate Scottish politics by launching the world's first online e-petition system. The Scottish Parliament's e-petition system serves as a litmus test to see whether it offers an effective medium for increasing public political participation, and whether it can be replicated in other democratic countries. This study collected data from the Scottish Parliament's e-petitioning website, which hosts the e-petitions and details of who signed them, each e-petition's path through Parliament, and other important information. The success of an e-petition is highly subjective due to the original petitioner's desired goals; therefore, a data analysis and two case studies are utilized to evaluate the system. Results suggest that the Scottish Parliament's e-petition system has engaged Scots in the political process, giving them a medium to participate in policy formulation and to produce tangible changes in policy through their e-petitions.

KEYWORDS: Scottish, Parliament, e-petition, e-democracy, Scotland

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary representative democracies are experiencing declining levels of voter turnouts for elections, political participation, and membership in political parties.[1] In response, many democratically elected governments are searching for ways to increase the democratic legitimacy of their political systems (Gronlund). E-democracy, which is defined as the use of information and communication technologies to support the democratic decision-making process (Malina, Macintosh, & Davenport), promises to solve this perceived decline in democratic legitimacy. An early innovator in e-democracy, and specifically e-petitioning, has been the Scottish Parliament (Caldow). The Parliament was founded in 1998, and was designed not to replicate the adversarial Westminster system employed in the United Kingdom, but to emphasize a new style of politics, characterized by a unicameral chamber and an electoral system to facilitate multiparty representation in the parliament. Specifically, the Parliament utilizes a combination of first-past-the-post and proportional electoral systems (Norton, 279). The operational rules of the new Parliament were formulated in "Shaping Scotland's Parliament" (The Scottish Office, 1998), which notes five guiding principles for the Parliament to conduct its work: power sharing, accountability, access, participation, and equal opportunities. The Consultative Steering Group, which authored "Shaping Scotland's Parliament," believed petitions would help deliver these principles for Scots. To that end, they ensured that the submission of petitions had clear, simple rules, specified how petitions would be handled, and committed to keeping all petitions and the Parliament's responses in the public domain (The Scottish Office, 1998). The document states, "It will also be important to develop a culture of genuine consultation and participation if people in Scotland, particularly those who do not currently engage in the political process, are to be encouraged to participate" (McMahon, 236). This new style of politics was promoted based upon a desire to transform the political process in Scotland to make it more open, transparent, inclusive, consultative, and participatory (Bonney, 459).

The fact that the Parliament was established in 1999, well into the age of the Internet, has given it an advantage in incorporating these new technologies into its procedures (Seaton, 333). However, understanding the extent to which these efforts translated into an increase in political participation is critical in assessing the success of the Scottish e-petition system. This article evaluates the system through a data analysis and two case studies, and assesses how and why it succeeds in allowing Scots meaningful political participation with their parliament.

THE SCOTTISH E-PETITION SYSTEM

The Scottish Parliament, in partnership with the International Teledemocracy Centre at Napier University and BT Scotland, developed the web-based e-petitioner, a tool to encourage public participation in governance through the use of online electronic petitioning (Mactintosh, Malina, & Whyte, 271). The e-petitioner tool allows users to create a petition, to view/sign a petition, to add background information, to join an integrated discussion forum, and to submit a petition (Beddie, Macintosh, & Malina, 700-01). Anyone is able to file an e-petition on any issue within the Scottish Parliament's remit, and only one signature is required for an e-petition to be filed with the Parliament's Public Petitions Committee. The committee has nine members of the Scottish Parliament with the power to decide the admissibility of a petition, to determine what action should be taken upon an admissible public petition, and to review the operation of the petitions system (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2010). The committee provides an avenue for individuals, communities, interest groups, and other organizations to participate fully in the democratic process in Scotland by raising issues of public concern with the Parliament (McMahon, 236). The Public Petitions Committee also maintains a staff whose sole purpose is to assist petitioners, to give advice about the process, and to assist in wording the petition itself. No age limit is required for an individual filing an e-petition, and they can be submitted in any language and any format (The Scottish Parliament, 2010). Petitioners, however, cannot resubmit an e-petition on the same or "substantially similar" issue within a year after their petition was closed (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2006).

The Public Petitions Committee lists every e-petition filed with the committee on the Scottish Parliament's website, which are searchable by their respective identification numbers. The e-petition summary page

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[1]According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, voter participation levels have dropped in Canada, Germany, the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, France, and Switzerland from the 1940s to the present (2009).

includes all the relevant information pertaining to the petition: who filed the petition, whether it was filed on behalf of a group or organization, the number of signatures the petition received, the date it was lodged with the Parliament, and the petitioner's statement outlining its aims. Below this information is the petition summary page, which is updated by the Public Petitions Committee and details each time the petition is discussed and the actions taken by the committee. Links are provided to access relevant information, committee meetings, reports, written questions, and other events pertaining to the e-petitions.

The first task of the nine members of the Scottish Parliament who sit on the Public Petitions Committee is to review whether the Scottish Parliament has the power to deal with the issues brought up in an e-petition. For instance, if the subject of an e-petition deals with foreign policy, the Scottish Parliament has no power to hear the petition because this power resides with the British Parliament. In addition, the Public Petitions Committee cannot rule out a petition on the grounds that they do not believe it to be a good idea or disagree with its aims. One signature is all that is required for an e-petition to be lodged with the Scottish Parliament. This policy eliminates barriers restricting the issues a petition may raise, and allows virtually anyone to file an e-petition with the Scottish Parliament. There is no uniform duration for an e-petition, and while the Public Petitions Committee is reviewing it, an e-petition is known as open. The Public Petitions Committee categorizes each e-petition into a corresponding issue, which makes the process more expedient. In addition, the committee communicates with the petitioner during the process and updates them on the progress of the petition; in some cases, the committee invites them to provide evidence or to argue the petition's merits to the committee at the Parliament. Once a decision has been reached about the issues raised in the petition, the e-petition is closed and the petitioner is notified of the reasons.

The final outcome of e-petitions are important to examine, and I have categorized the outcomes of closed e-petitions as follows: closed after initial Public Petitions Committee consideration, closed after initiating Committee report or inquiry, closed after contributing to Committee report or inquiry, referred to other Committee and closed, closed on basis of Executive response, closed and considered under planned legislation, closed on basis of other Committee response, closed on basis of other Public Body response, closed on basis of Scottish Government response, closed due to parliamentary activity or outside activity, closed due to petitioner response or request, e-petition withdrawn, closed due to issues raised in e-petition implemented, and closed due to petitioner non-response. The categories chosen are representative of the multitude of outcomes possible for closed e-petitions, and indicate how the Public Petitions Committee, other entities within the parliament, or non-governmental organizations responded to each e-petition. In turn, an understanding can be drawn about the reasons why a specific e-petition was closed. The data analysis in the next section examines the body of e-petition data provided by the parliament. Important questions, such as which groups most utilize the system, the corresponding policy issues most filed about, the most frequent outcomes of closed e-petitions, and the breakdown of e-petitions filed per year are examined. Additionally, the data analysis illuminates how the e-petition system has proven itself to be a viable medium for Scots to express their grievances, as well as to participate in policy formulation.

DATA ANALYSIS

From 2000 to 2011, during three sessions of the Scottish Parliament, 385 e-petitions were lodged with the Public Petitions Committee. These e-petitions dealt with a wide range of issues, were submitted by different individuals and groups, and had different policy impacts. As a result, it is important to analyze the e-petition data provided by the Public Petitions Committee to determine whether the system has fulfilled its mission. This analysis will provide evidence of the extent to which it has allowed for public participation in policy formulation. The e-petition system was designed to allow ordinary people, not affiliated with any group or organization, to voice their concerns and to participate in policy formulation in Scotland. However, a troubling concern was the possibility that e-petitions would open a new avenue for interest groups and powerful organizations to lobby the Parliament, abusing a system designed to give political voice to non-participative citizens (Silcock, 2001). Another worry pertaining to the e-petition system was whether individuals who had never used the system before would file them, or if a group of experienced petitioners would utilize the system repeatedly to achieve their policy goals (Silcock, 2001). Would a system designed to improve democratic participation actually stifle it?
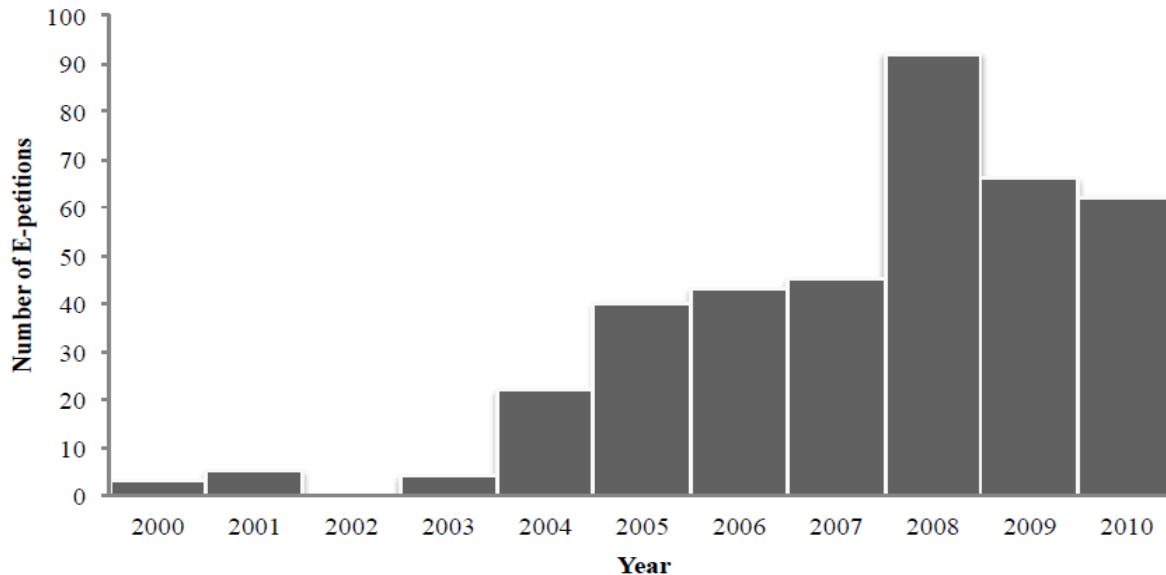
Figure 1: E-petitions Lodged with the Scottish Parliament, 2000-2010

The first e-petition was filed with the Scottish Parliament in 2000, and in 2004 the e-petition system was officially launched by the Parliament. The number of e-petitions filed grew almost every year until 2008, peaking at 92. After 2008, this number dropped to 66 in 2009 and 62 in 2010. In 2002 no e-petitions were filed with the Parliament. On average, 38.5 e-petitions were lodged each year from 2000 to 2010. The average e-petition received 955 signatures. The most signatures a single e-petition received was 23,144. Over 56% of e-petitions received more than 100 signatures, almost 20% received more than 1,000 signatures, and 2.1% received more than 10,000 signatures. E-petitions garnering only a single signature made up 14.5% of all filed. The amount of signatures an e-petition receives serves as a barometer for the public support of issues raised in an e-petition, as well as a direct representation of use of the system. In addition, as an e-petition gathers signatures, Scots are registering their support for a proposed policy issue, and engaging in political participation with their fellow citizens. Figure 2 shows the policy areas assigned by the Parliament to e-petitions. The largest e-petition policy area concerns Health and Community Care, making up 21.3% of e-petitions filed, while Justice and Home Affairs consisted of 14.3% of e-petitions filed, and Transport and Arts, Culture, and Sport as the next highest, both sharing 8.1% respectively.

An e-petition must be submitted by an individual; however, whether the petitioner files it on behalf of a larger group or organization is an important indicator of who is utilizing the e-petition system. Figure 3 shows the entities that raised e-petitions with the parliament. Individuals not affiliated with any group or organization filed 55.3% of all e-petitions. 14.3% of e-petitions were filed by community organizations, and only 22.9% were filed on behalf of interest groups. Repeat petitioners constituted 11.4% of individuals filing e-petitions, while one-time petitioners made up 88.6%. The most e-petitions a single individual has filed is five, indicating this arena has not yet become a new political opportunity structure. This is an encouraging sign, as citizens with no prior experience with the e-petition process are navigating the system successfully and participating in policy formulation with few repeat players.
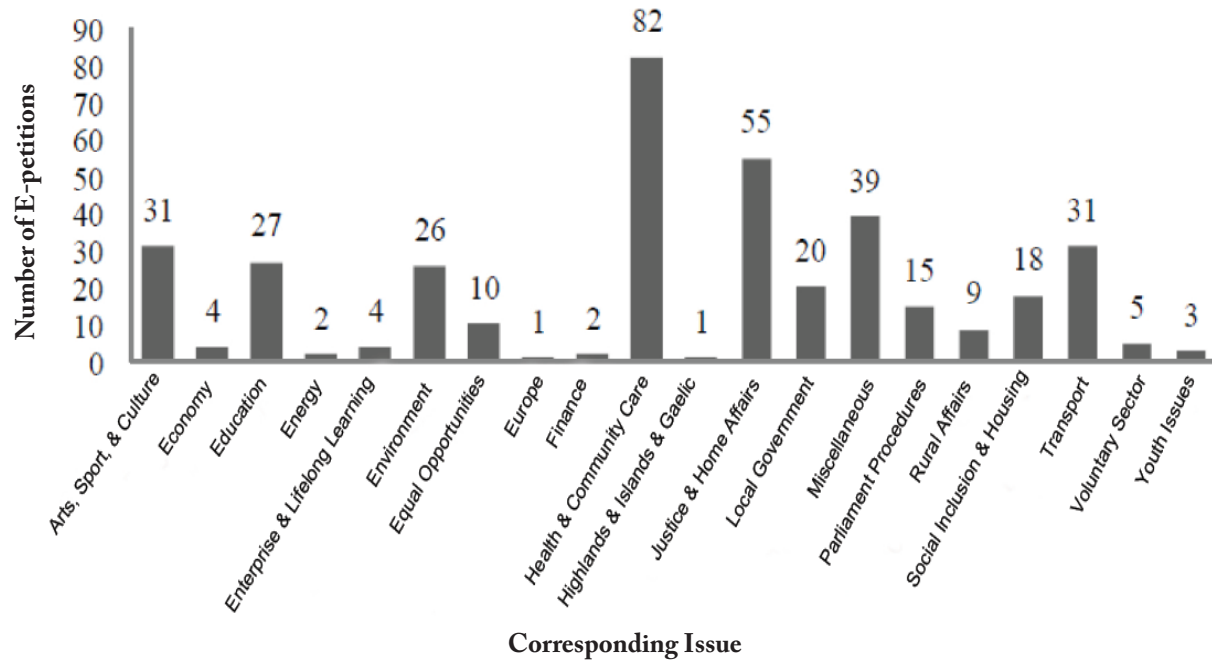
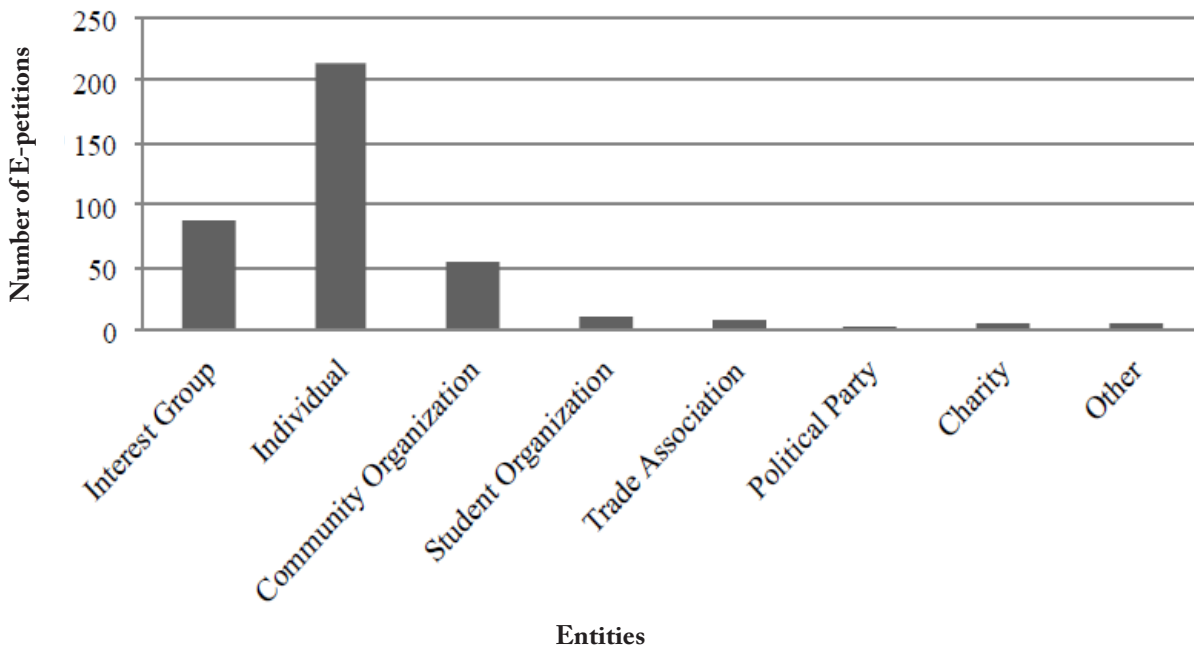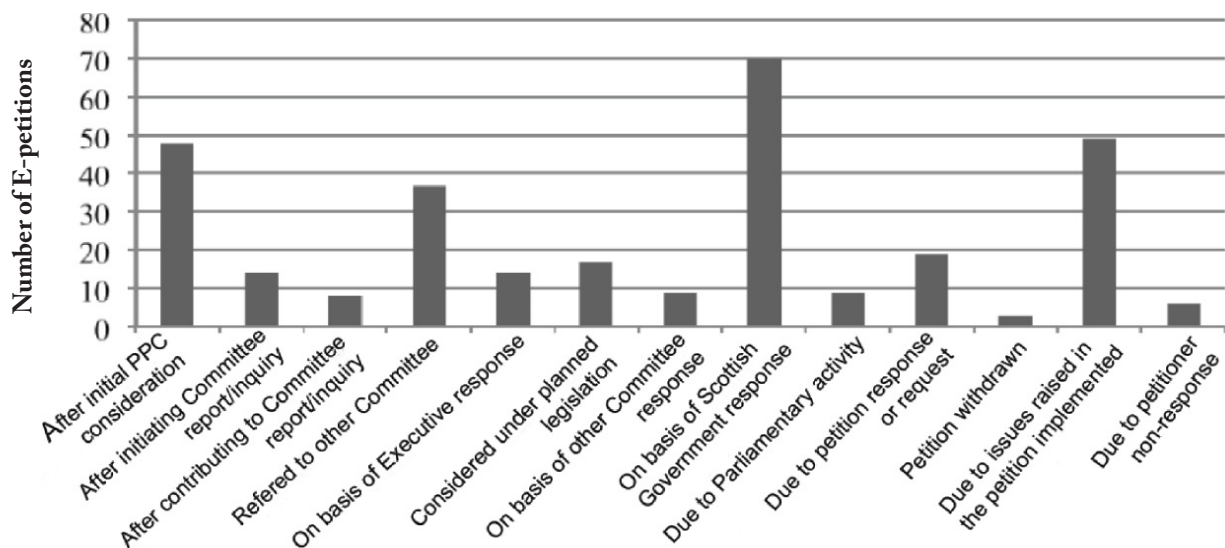**Figure 2: Corresponding Issue Assigned to E-petitions**

Figure 3: Entities E-petitions Filed on Behalf Of

Outcomes of Closed E-petitions
Figure 4: E-petition Outcomes

Figure 4 illustrates the outcomes of closed e-petitions. The most frequent outcome for e-petitions (18.2%) was for them to be closed on the basis of the Scottish Government's response. This can be understood as the Scottish Government informing the petitioner that after careful consideration, they have no plans to implement the issues raised. E-petitions that were closed after initial Public Petitions Committee consideration made up 12.7%. E-petitions in this category did not fall under the Scottish Parliament's powers, and were subsequently closed. 4.4% of e-petitions were closed and considered under planned legislation, usually resulting in the issues raised being addressed through legislation in the Parliament. E-petitions that were closed due to the issues raised in the petition being implemented constituted 12.7%. Taken as a whole, 84.9% of e-petitions fell under the Scottish Parliament's powers, were reviewed by government committees, bodies, or outside organizations, and entered the political discussion. While only 12.7% of e-petitions were closed as a result of the issues raised being implemented, the data indicates that e-petitions affect policy formulation, that the Scottish Parliament take e-petitions seriously, and that e-petitions have the ability to become or change laws. This is a positive sign because someone who is considering submitting an e-petition, yet is skeptical of its potential to achieve results, could view this statistic and be encouraged to submit it. Individuals who were not affiliated with any group or organization submitted 55.3% of all e-petitions. This is a positive indicator that regular citizens are utilizing the system to achieve the changes in policy they seek. Also, with interest groups filing 22.9% of e-petitions, fears that they would use the system to lobby the Parliament and increase their power seem unfounded. First-time petitioners, who had no prior experience with the system, filed 88.6% of e-petitions. This signifies that the e-petitions process is accessible and not intimidating for citizens to use. Overall, the data indicates that over three sessions of the Scottish Parliament, the e-petition system has helped increase access, transparency, and participation. Scots began to involve themselves in the political process through e-petitioning, and it has proved itself to be a viable medium for Scots to express their grievances and to participate in policy formulation. However, the data tells us little about specific e-petitions and what they have accomplished. To remedy this, the next section features two case studies, which will add context to the e-petition process.

E-PETITION CASE STUDIES

To add context to the e-petitions process, it is important to examine individual e-petitions to get a better idea of how the system works, and the multitude of outcomes that e-petitions may generate. Petitioners had specific grievances or changes in policy in mind when filing their respective e-petitions, yet their idea of whether it succeeded is extremely subjective and varies from petitioner to petitioner. To one petitioner, success may hinge on whether their proposed policy change was implemented. To another, success could have been that the subject of the e-petition entered into the political discussion, and whether it was implemented is of less importance. Thus an examination of representative e-petitions should shed light on the success and/or failure of petitions. I selected two e-petitions to examine here, PE1108 and PE1238, that represent different outcomes, thus to highlight the actions taken by the Public Petitions Committee. The case studies also exemplify the different entities that can file e-petitions, as well as the corresponding policy issues assigned to them. Not all e-petitions' outcomes are as successful in affecting policy as PE1108, as PE1238 will show. PE1108 is an example of an e-petition that was closed because the issues raised were implemented by the Parliament, as it was successful in affecting health care policy in Scotland. It was a case directly involving the affairs of one individual, but was broader in its impact. In addition, it demonstrates that a citizen can achieve specific policy results by submitting an e-petition. PE1238 is an example of an e-petition that was not within the Scottish Parliament's powers, yet was discussed and considered for its merits. The Scottish Government shut it down, but the petition entered the political conversation of the Parliament, which is important unto itself. Ultimately, these case studies give a better idea about how the e-petitions process functions.

PE1108

PE1108 was submitted by Tina McGeever and lodged with the Scottish Parliament on January 7, 2008. Mike Gray, Tina McGeever's husband, was diagnosed with bowel cancer and was receiving chemotherapy. However, the cancer spread to Gray's liver, and he was informed by his oncologist that no further treatments were available from the National Health Service (NHS) in Scotland; consequently, he had only a few months to live (The Scottish Parliament, 2008). However, the drug cetuximab was available, but only in Scotland privately.

In September 2005, the Scottish Medicines Consortium decided that cetuximab should not be recommended for treating bowel cancer. In England and Wales, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence ruled in 2007 that cetuximab should not be used for treatment of bowel cancer, but stated that, "Consultants should not stop prescribing…cetuximab for people who were already taking it when the guidance was issued. These patients should be able to carry on taking…cetuximab until they and their consultants decide that it is the right time to stop treatment" (The Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 2007). The Scottish equivalent of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the National Health Service Quality Improvement Scotland endorsed the National Institute of Clinical Excellence ruling in January 2007. However, the guidelines established by these bodies can be bypassed, as it is ultimately up to the respective clinician to decide whether a drug should be used to treat a patient. However, the clinician must still receive approval from the National Health Service, which decides whether to fund the treatment (The Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 2007). McGeever's husband was prescribed cetuximab, but the National Health Service Grampian Health Board refused to fund it on the basis that it was too expensive. As a result, McGeever filed an e-petition on behalf of her husband, "calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to consider the provision, on the National Health Service, of cancer treatment drugs, in particular cetuximab, to ensure equity across National Health Service Boards on the appropriateness, effectiveness, and availability of such treatments" (The Scottish Parliament, 2008). The e-petition received 632 signatures, and was subsequently lodged with the Scottish Parliament.

The Public Petition Committee's first step was to invite Tina McGeever and Mike Gray to the Parliament to argue the petition's merits to the committee. This opportunity allowed McGeever to explain the heavy financial burden they were incurring to fund the cetuximab treatments, £3,400 every two weeks. In addition, Gray stated, "In a sense, we are here to talk about the wider issue, which is that 400 people annually face the same issue in Scotland. They do not have the means or the money to provide the National Health Service with evidence" (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, January 2008).

On February 8, 2008, during the third meeting of the Public Petitions Committee for 2008, the committee's Convener Frank McAveety stated:

> This petition came from the powerful case, which was presented to the committee, of an individual who was seeking drug treatment from the NHS. His determination, and that of his family, was the critical factor in their success, but I would like to think that, in some small way, the Public Petitions Committee assisted with the necessary public debate involving the decision makers at health board level. For us, the petition threw up a national issue that we need to focus on, which is about what happens if a particular health board indicates that a drug is not available on the NHS, the rights of appeal that cancer sufferers have and the mechanisms that they must go through, which—given that they face potentially fatal illnesses—could jeopardise their survival. (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, February 2008)

Endorsing McAveety's recommendation, the committee launched an inquiry gathering relevant evidence from the Scottish Government and all National Health Service Boards pertaining to the availability of cancer drugs for patients. The inquiry culminated in the Scottish Government's report, "Better Cancer Care: An Action Plan." The issues raised by the petition and the subsequent report were debated within the Scottish Parliament on October 1, 2008. In addition, the committee proceeded to question and receive responses from the Scottish Government, the Health and Sport Committee, the Scottish Medicines Consortium, Bowel Cancer UK, NHS Grampian, and NHS Lothian throughout 2009 and 2010.

On March 8, 2011, the Public Petitions Committee closed PE1108, citing the positive progress that had been made. Specifically, the committee stated that:

> The petition…had considerable effect. We have come to the end of what we, as a committee, can do, but in closing the petition we should state clearly and for the record that positive action has been taken as a result of the petition and the committee's inquiry….Without the petitioner and the energy of both individuals

directly involved, we would not be seeing the real improvements that I am sure the petition will effect throughout Scotland in respect of patients accessing newly licensed medicines, in the process for considering objectively individual patient treatment requests and in the arrangements for the combination of care that is available to patients. Finally, we should reflect on the fact that all of those real improvements for people throughout Scotland have been effected through the simple process of lodging a petition. The petitioner should take great pride in that. (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2011)

Tina McGeever's e-petition facilitated the development of new policy regarding medicines that Scots have access to, ensuring that patients in Mike Gray's situation will receive adequate treatment through public and private means for the illness afflicting them. Specifically, the petition revised guidance to NHS boards on the arrangements for NHS patients receiving health care services through private health care arrangements. A framework to support decisions concerning the possible combination of elements of NHS and private care for individual patients was also established. Also, the Scottish Government is developing guidance to NHS boards on how to process and handle individual patient treatment requests (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, 2011). Overall, the petition has helped to determine which treatments to use in treating their disease. PE1108 is an excellent example of what an individual can accomplish by filing an e-petition. The combined efforts of Tina McGeever and the late Mike Gray demonstrate that it is an effective medium to communicate grievances and propositions for policy formulation within Scotland that can deliver tangible results. PE1108 displays the Public Petition Committee's role in the e-petition process, investigating the government bodies and policies, and in effect, championing the petition's cause. This is not to say that they are on the petitioner's side, but are committed to performing their remit effectively. However, it is worth noting that the petition took a little over three years to come to a conclusion, and that during this time, Mike Gray died due to his illness. Although the process was not expedient, it delivered the results the petitioners desired, albeit too late for their own circumstances.

PE1238

PE1238 was filed by Deryck Beaumont on behalf of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign and lodged with Parliament on February 23, 2009. The e-petition received 248 signatures, and called for "the Scottish Government to urge the UK Government to expel the Israeli Ambassador from the UK until Israel shows it is prepared to accept that it is not above international law" (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, February 2009). Although the e-petition dealt with foreign policy, a power reserved to the British government at Westminster, the Public Petitions Committee agreed to seek comment from the Scottish Government. Bill Butler, a member of the Public Petitions Committee, stated:

> I do not want to shut the petition down. I wish to assure the petitioner, who sent his e-mail on Monday 16 March 2009, that none of my committee colleagues wishes to shut the petition down or to silence the petitioner or those who agree with him. It is absolutely an important issue. The petitioner has a point in the sense that, although the matter is reserved, the terms of the petition are such that it is appropriate for us to deal with it…I think that we should write to the Scottish Government, asking for its view on the thrust of the petition. (The Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee, March 2009)

The Public Petitions Committee received comment back from the Scottish Government, which responded saying that removing the Israeli ambassador would not advance the effort to make peace between Israel and Palestine. However, as the Scottish Parliament had no power to hear the petition, this was a moot point. On June 19, 2009, PE1238 was closed due to the Scottish Government's response. However, it is important to note that although the e-petition did not fall under the Scottish Parliament's power, and that the Public Petitions Committee members may not have agreed with the petition, they still believed that it was important for the merits of the petition to be discussed. The Public Petitions Committee's effort to ensure PE1238 was reviewed is evidence of its commitment to the process, and their desire to ensure that every petition is considered for its merits. In addition, Beaumont may have submitted the petition to spark debate about the Israel-Palestine issue and to score political points for the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign. The importance of the e-petition did not hinge on the issues raised being implemented, but on its ability to foster debate on the subject within the Public Petitions Committee, which in turn prompted the Scottish Government to respond and clarify its stance on the issue. The e-petition process has allowed individuals such as Tina McGeever, Deryck Beaumont, and hundreds of others to participate in policy formulation with the Scottish Parliament. It has facilitated public debate with the Parliament, and given a new outlet for citizens and groups to voice their grievances and concerns. Increasing public participation in the democratic process was one of the goals of the new Scottish Parliament, and the development and use of its e-petitioning system fulfills this function. The case studies have demonstrated the tangible changes in policy that e-petitioning can bring, and further cements its critical role in creating a participative Parliament.

CONCLUSION

The Scottish Parliament's efforts to be a modern institution that can concurrently provide public access, participation, transparency, accountability, and power sharing to its citizens has been advanced by its e-petition system. The world's first e-petition system delivers the key values of the Parliament to the populace in a technologically innovative democratic structure. The e-petition system uses the Internet to allow for a new type of public participation in policy making, which has been fruitful in providing a method for citizens to formulate policy with their government. As the data analysis and case studies demonstrate, Scots have successfully used e-petitions to participate in policy formulation with the Parliament. During three sessions of Parliament from 1999-2011, 385 e-petitions were filed with the Scottish Parliament. 12.7% of e-petitions had the issues raised implemented. Moreover, 84.9% of e-petitions that fell under the Scottish Parliament's powers were reviewed by government committees, bodies, or outside organizations, and entered into the political discussion. The case studies added context to the e-petition process, giving concrete examples of petitions filed with the Public Petitions Committee, and their outcomes. Tina McGeever, whose husband suffered from cancer and was prevented access to a potentially life saving drug by their local NHS board, submitted PE1108 to ensure equity among NHS boards on the availability of drugs. She was successful, and the Scottish Parliament took several measures to rectify this issue. Many petitioners, such as Deryck Beaumont, have submitted e-petitions that have not brought the changes desired,

but these petitioners participated in policy formulation and had a medium to raise their concerns with the Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament's e-petition system has relevance for representative democracies worldwide. As citizens living in many countries have grown apathetic towards the political process, their political participation levels have declined as well. Governments attempting to solve this dilemma have investigated different means of reengaging their citizens through technology, yet few have had the success that the Scottish Parliament is currently enjoying through its e-petition system. This political reinvigoration of a nation that, for nearly three centuries, did not have its own Parliament has caught the attention of other governments. The German Bundestag, the Welsh Assembly, the British Parliament, the United States Executive Branch, local municipal governments in Norway, and the Parliaments of Queensland and Tasmania in Australia have established e-petition systems in the years following the Scottish Parliament's founding (Linder & Riehm, 1-2). However, these e-petition systems vary in their requirements for an e-petition to be accepted, how the systems operate, and how their respective governments handle them.

In comparison, the strengths of the Scottish e-petition are numerous. For example, one signature is required for a Scottish e-petition to be admissible, which effectively eliminates any hurdles preventing a petitioner from utilizing the system. In contrast, the British Parliament requires 100,000 signatures in order for an e-petition to be considered. Similarly, the United States Executive Branch's system requires 25,000 signatures. As a result, both of the systems fall short of the inclusiveness the Scottish Parliament's provides. In Scotland, the initial point of contact when submitting an e-petition is the Clerk of the Public Petitions Committee, whose sole job is to advise and assist petitioners who are submitting petitions to the committee. In contrast, a petitioner's first point of contact in Queensland is a Member of Parliament, who must agree to sponsor the e-petition and formally present it in Parliament. The Queensland Parliament does not promote the petition in any way; it merely facilitates the petition process by hosting the petition on its website. In addition, the Queensland government is not obliged to respond to e-petitions tabled in Parliament (Palmieri, 11-12). Queensland's e-petitioning system limits who can raise a petition, what issues the petition aims to address, and leaves the petitioner little help in navigating the process. This is a departure from the Scottish system, which takes an active role in helping citizens navigate the process. Furthermore, Linder and Riehm (2009) state in international comparison, the high degree of information transparency demonstrated by the Scottish Parliament is particularly impressive. It is doubtful that other democracies can replicate the success of the Scottish model without the commitment to allowing the public to participate in meaningful policy formulation, eliminating barriers preventing certain issues from entering the political conversation, and providing the transparency that the Public Petitions Committee allows. The exercise of public political participation will amount to little more than a novelty if governments do not take the public's e-petitions seriously. However, it is an encouraging sign that governments are exploring the use of e-petitioning to reengage their citizens in the political process. E-petition systems have been exported to other nations, and active participation relationships between government and citizens are being fostered as a result.

The Scottish Parliament pioneered the use of e-petitions and continues to demonstrate that they are committed to improving the process. In 2011 the Public Petitions Committee began updating the e-petitions website. Currently, the Scottish Parliament is in its fourth session, and e-petitions have been suspended until the new site has been fully developed. Moving forward, as technology advances and Internet access increases, e-petitioning has the potential to become the standard that democratic governments use to engage citizens in the political process. Scotland has shown that e-petitioning, if conducted in the proper manner, allows citizens to participate in policy formulation with government, and it will be interesting to see if the rest of the democratic world can replicate their successes.

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