Political Science and Political Economy Working Paper

Department of Government

London School of Economics

No. 9/2012

Crime and Punishment the British Way: Accountability Channels Following the MPs' Expenses Scandal

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November 2012

Abstract

The scandal that erupted in the UK in May 2009 - concerning MPs' abuses of the expenses allowance system – constitutes an ideal setting to study mechanisms of democratic accountability, since credible *ceteris paribus* comparisons between MPs can be made and because a monetary measure of malfeasance is available (the amount due back by each MP according to the Legg report). We collect an extensive dataset of press coverage of the scandal and analyse it in conjunction with both survey-data and aggregate electoral data. We show that scandal-related press coverage significantly increased the probability of an MP to retire, reduced vote shares of standing MPs but did not decrease their re-election probability. We also show that punishment was personal, i.e. directed to individual MPs involved in the scandal rather than their parties. The monetary measure of malfeasance contributes to explain press coverage but has no independent effect on MPs' retirement or vote shares. We then use British Election Study data to show that voters perceive co-partisan MPs to be less involved than other MPs. Survey data also show that there is a substantial degree of heterogeneity in how voters living in the same constituency perceive how involved in the scandal was their MP: this can be mostly related to education and trust, and only weakly to media exposure. Finally we analyse coverage of the scandal by seven national newspapers and conclude that it was focussed on the government and on frontbenchers of the main opposition party and that it was only marginally affected by ideological leanings. We provide evidence that female MPs have been more vulnerable during the scandal: *ceteris paribus*, they received more media attention and, for the same level of media attention, they were more likely to stand down.

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1. Introduction

An important function of democratic systems is to make public officials accountable to citizens.[2] This control works through the incumbents' fear of the next election and by offering voters the opportunity to "throw out the rascals". A substantial theoretical literature has used the principal-agent model to formally investigate these ideas in an attempt to clarify what makes officials accountable and, ultimately, how officials' behaviour can be aligned with citizens' interests.[3]

Although several studies have been conducted on the determinants of corruption, much less is known on the empirical processes that might lead voters to "throw out the rascals". Political punishment of corrupt politicians involves many actors in practice, and calls into question the functioning of party organizations, the information available from mass media, voters' awareness of political matters and their eventual response in the ballot box. Voters' choices are in turn mediated by their perceptions of events and by partisanship: when choosing whether or not to punish corrupt politicians, voters may trade off valence issues with ideological considerations.

The scandal that erupted in the United Kingdom in May 2009 concerning MPs' abuse of expenses allowances constitutes an ideal setting to study accountability channels in some detail and to identify some of the causal links at play. First, the scandal involves a well-defined set of political actors, namely the members of parliament who were in office in May 2009, who all faced the same rules and constraints regarding their expenses. Second, the scandal erupted within a very short time frame for all MPs involved and focused on the same issue for all MPs, namely abusing the allowance system. These two features make scandal involvement comparable across MPs and provide a marked identification advantage compared to either cross-country studies or studies that, even within a country, compare scandals which occurred in different periods, concerning different sorts of political actors and different types of wrongdoing. Moreover, the scandal was salient in public debate for several months and it was followed by an election only one year after it began.

Following the scandal, an investigation was held that led to an accurate reconstruction of the amount misappropriated by each MP in the February 2010 'Review of past ACA payments' (hereafter 'the Legg report'). This provides another characteristic of the scandal that makes it particularly

[2] According to William Riker, for example, "the function of voting is to control officials (Riker,1982, p.9).

[3] For a synthesis of this literature, see Besley (2006).

suitable for empirical study: the availability of an objective, accurately defined measure of monetary wrongdoing. Finally, it is reasonable to assume that MPs could not have anticipated the level of detail at which information on their expenses was eventually offered to the public. Although aggregate expenses were already publicly available since 2004 because of the Freedom of Information Act (2000), each individual claim became public after May 2009: this information was leaked to the *Daily Telegraph* by a 'mole' in Whitehall in exchange for a payment of 110,000 pounds. The House of Commons even appealed for a criminal investigation about the leak. Hence, it would have been hard to forecast the events of May 2009, which makes them a genuine shock that can be used for identification purposes. Moreover, if the scandal was hard to forecast, then revelations on individual MPs' usage of their allowance provides accurate information about politicians' type and how likely they are to be corrupt in the future, which is what matters if voters are prospective.

Although most theories tend to study accountability mechanisms by focussing on a simplified voter-politician relationship, democratic processes rely on a number of actors who often play a crucial role in the process of "throwing out the rascals" in practice. Our empirical analysis takes the complexity of the accountability process into account and studies the scandal from a variety of angles. Figure 1 illustrates our theoretical framework. Starting from the abuse of the expenses allowance system by some MPs, media outlets decide how much coverage to devote to the event and specifically to each MP. Since, unlike in other dimensions of a politician's activity, it is very difficult for citizens to directly observe corruption, it is therefore only if and when abuses are reported by the media that they may become known to citizens. When receiving information on the possible wrongdoing of their MPs, however, citizens are not simply passively absorbing the news and updating their beliefs on politician's honesty. Voter's perception of their MPs' involvement in wrongdoing is mediated by a number of individual variables, and notably by partisanship. Finally, perceptions of wrongdoing should turn into punishment. First, voters can punish politicians they perceive as corrupt in the ballot box. Second, punishment can predate the actual voting stage if an MPs involved in the scandal decides to stand down and not face the voters; in alternative, party leaders can decide to deselect involved MPs. Once again, we expect the media to play an important role since standing down or de-selection, when caused by scandal involvement, are likely to be the consequences of an anticipation of punishment in the ballot box.

To simplify, we have three key links in our accountability framework: 1) a link from malfeasance to news, with respect to which we will ask questions about possible media bias and the role performed by media outlets as watchdogs of power; 2) a link from news to perception, with respect to which we ask how partisanship and other individual characteristics affect the way news are processed and incorporated into perceptions about MPs; 3) a link from perceptions to action, whereby voters punish corrupt politicians in the ballot box, or expected punishment induces politicians to stand down (or political parties to deselect corrupt MPs).

This paper analyses these links in reverse order, starting from the final outcomes and moving back to media coverage, and tries to quantify their relevance in the accountability process. A constant theme in our analysis is the contrast between media reporting and the actual monetary damage to taxpayers as gauged by the Legg report. Our conclusion is that what matters for voters' punishment is only the former, although media coverage is also partially explained by the amount of money misappropriated.

We find that an MP's scandal involvement, when measured by media coverage, led to a higher probability to leave Parliament in 2010. On the other hand, the monetary measure of wrongdoing appears to predict the probability to remain in Parliament after the 2010 election very poorly. Scandal-related media coverage both compelled the most involved MPs to stand down and reduced the voting share of standing MPs. We run placebo regressions to show that post-scandal media coverage does not predict pre-scandal retirements and does not predict 2001-05 changes in vote shares. We also find that voters' punishment was directed at individual MPs rather than their parties: while the incumbent party was punished when a sitting MP was involved in the scandal their party was not punished in constituencies where MPs decided to stand down. Punishment of corrupt politicians in the ballot box, in any event, was not overwhelming and did not reduce their chances to be re-elected. Our conclusion is that what drives the accountability process is media coverage of the scandal rather than the amounts actually misappropriated by individual MPs.

We then use the British Election Study 2010 panel to gain some understanding of what drives voters' perception of wrongdoing and how perceived involvement relates to actual voting behaviour. The perceived involvement of an MP turns out to be well explained by actual wrongdoing (as measured by the Legg report), but also by a few individual characteristics of the respondents:

education and trust in other people, for example are both negatively associated with MP's perceived involvement, even when we restrict our attention to within-constituency variation. Punishment in the ballot box (in the form of a changed vote between 2010 and 2005) is directed to MPs who are perceived by their constituents to be involved in wrongdoing. We show, however, that partisanship plays a particularly important role in the accountability chain: perceived involvement of an MP is reduced, *ceteris paribus*, when the MP belongs to the political party the respondent feels closer to.

Regarding the link between malfeasance and media coverage, we find that the British press acted mostly as a watchdog during the scandal. Controlling for the pre-scandal media coverage of each MP, we find that MPs who were later recognized by the Legg report as more heavily involved were also more heavily covered by the press on average. *Ceteris paribus*, government members and frontbenchers of the main opposition party were more likely to be covered (in relation to the scandal) than backbenchers. We find no detectable partisan coverage, in the sense that patterns of coverage of specific newspapers do not appear to be influenced by their political leaning. Other variables turn out to be more important: for example, female MPs have, *ceteris paribus*, received more scrutiny than their male colleagues.

MPs' personal characteristics did not matter in general, with the exception of gender: *ceteris paribus*, punishment has been heavier for female MPs. Hence, along with our findings on media coverage, we uncover a consistent pattern showing that female MPs were generally more vulnerable subjects during and after the scandal.

In the next section, we provide some background information on the scandal and on Westminster's allowance system. In Section 3 we present and discuss the data. Section 4 presents our results on the key outputs of the accountability process: the effects of the scandal on decisions to stand down and on the voting returns of MPs involved in the scandal. Section 5 presents survey-based evidence from the British Election Study on individual perceptions of the scandal and on the relationship between perception and voting behaviour. Section 6 analyses press coverage, asking questions about possible partisan bias in the amount of news provided about each MP. Section 7 provides an overall assessment of the accountability process and attempts to quantify chains of causality. Section 8 discusses our findings, relates them to existing literature, and illustrates how they

contribute to our understanding of the role played by elections and the press in keeping public officials accountable.

2. The MPs' Expenses Scandal: background information

2.1 Brief description of the MPs Expenses Allowance system

The annual salary for an MP at the time the scandal erupted was £64,766.[4] In addition to annual salaries, Members are also able to claim expenses in a number of different ways. Members from constituencies outside London would be able to claim the Additional Costs Allowance (ACA), which would be compensation for staying away from their primary residence to conduct business related to their Parliamentary duties. The ACA was £24,006 at the time of the scandal.[5] The Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP) could be used to meet the costs related to running offices or surgeries, including: accommodation; equipment; and communications. The IEP was £22,193. Members received a separate Staffing Allowance of £90,854. The IEP can also be used to offset certain costs related to staffing, and 10% of the Staffing Allowance can be channelled into the IEP if Members run a constituency office. Members received a Communications Allowance of £10,400 that could draw funds from the ACA, but not *vice versa*. MPs also received a number of benefits through travel allowances.[6]

[4] 'Members' pay, pensions and allowances' (Factsheet M5, revised), House of Commons Information Office, July 2011.

[5] Members from Inner London constituencies were eligible for a London Supplement, instead of the ACA. The Supplement was paid with the MP monthly salary, and was subject to tax and National Insurance, and could not be used to contribute to the Member's pension. Outer London MPs could choose to either claim an ACA or London Supplement. The London Supplement was £2,916.

[6]Rail and air travel between Westminster and the constituency for Parliamentary business would be paid, as well as claims for mileage. There was a similar category for travel allowances to places in the UK on Parliamentary business that were outside the constituency. Furthermore, MPs received travel and subsistence costs for up to three visits per year to EU institutions, EU agencies, the national parliaments of EU member states, European Free Trade Association states, or candidate countries. Immediate family members of the MP and MP staff were also covered by the travel allowances.

2.2 Background information on the expenses scandal

The publication of detailed MP expenses and the public scandal that followed represents the culmination of a political process that was driven by two predominant factors: the slow implementation and political resistance to the Freedom of Information Act (2000) [FOIA]; and the non-transparent allowances system that relied on Members of Parliament to regulate their own claims.

The Parliament ratified FOIA in November 2000, with provisions of the legislation gradually coming into force, with full implementation on 1 January 2005. It contained far-reaching measures for freedom of information legislation that would apply to all public bodies, not only covering the two Houses of Parliament and devolved governmental bodies in Scotland and Wales, but also local authorities, the NHS, Armed Forces, education institutions, public broadcasters, and quasi-NGOs.[7]

In a test of the newly-implemented FOIA, some journalists made a number of requests to Parliament to disclose Member expense claims, but these requests were rejected. After an appeal, the Information Commissioner ordered the House of Commons to provide detailed ACA claims with receipt. Despite the ruling, MPs continued attempts to block detailed disclosure of MP expenses. Speaker Michael Martin (whose expenses were under scrutiny) and a number of senior MPs appealed to the High Court in May 2008 to overturn the Information Commissioner's decision, but the Court ruled against the House of Commons appeal.). The Government finally proposed a statement on reforming MP expenses claims, including the full disclosure of receipts from 1 July 2009. However, The Telegraph published detailed expenses leaked to the newspaper by a 'mole' in Whitehall. According to the Assistant Editor of *The Telegraph*, the insider had been given a one-off payment of £110,000 for the data, which the newspaper felt was worthwhile on public interest grounds (Winnett and Rayner 2009). The House of Commons appealed to the Metropolitan Police to start a criminal investigation about the leak, but the police refused to do so, since it would not serve the public interest.

The details of MP expenses shocked and angered the public, and forced leaders from all three major political parties to react immediately. Some of the claims became symbolic of political

[7] The White Paper was written before the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive.

corruption and greed[8]. To restore confidence in MPs and the system of expenses, Sir Thomas Legg was commissioned to audit all MP expenses made under the ACA between 2004 and 2008. During the review, Sir Legg contacted certain MPs to request to justify the claims and asked some for repayment. The report into the ACA claims 2004-8 was published in February 2010.

The detailed expenses claims published by *The Telegraph* also illustrated systematic exploitation of the allowances system that carried on without transparency and oversight. There were a number of "tricks of the trade" that MPs used to maximise the benefits of their allowances (see Rayner 2009). Some of the MP activities were examined more closely as potential criminal cases. There were six Members of Parliament who were under police investigation before the 2010 general election: Lord Taylor and Lord Hanningfield from the House of Lords; and David Chaytor, Jim Devine, Eric Illsley, and Elliot Morley from the House of Commons. All six were eventually found guilty of charges related to expenses and sent to prison.

3. The data

Our study brings together a number of existing sources, and merges it with data collected and updated for the 646 MPs who were in office when the *Daily Telegraph* first leaked detailed expenses on 8 May 2009. Summary statistics for all constituency-level variables are available in Table A1 in the Appendix.

Our main explanatory variable is the media salience of the coverage of the scandal for each individual MP. Data about media coverage of MPs were gathered using a series of searches on the Nexis database of UK newspapers. The research compiled data from seven UK newspapers (including the Sunday editions): the *Daily Telegraph, The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, and the *Scotsman*. The sample of newspapers was selected to include widely read national

[8]Among these "Douglas Hogg included with his expenses claims the cost of having the moat cleared, piano tuned and stable lights fixed at his country manor house."; and "Sir Peter Viggers included with his expense claims the £1,645 cost of a floating duck house in the garden pond at his Hampshire home".
http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5297606/MPs-expenses-Full-list-of-MPs-investigated-by-the-Telegraph.html

broadsheets and widely read national tabloids, along with an important regional newspaper (the Scotsman), as well as in order to have sufficient ideological variety.[9]

Two indicators were used to gauge the media salience of each individual MP's involvement in the expenses scandal. First, we use the number of articles in which an MP's name appears alongside the word 'expenses' in the period from 8th May 2009 to 7th August 2009 (i.e. for three months after the *Telegraph* revelations). However, since some MPs naturally had a higher profile, and therefore attracted more coverage, whether related to scandal or not, we also count the number of articles in which the MP's name appears during the three-months period preceding the scandal. To facilitate the interpretation of our coefficients we use the natural log of both variables[10] and call them respectively *news-post* and *news-pre*.

The other key explanatory variable is represented by an objective measure of wrongdoing expressed in monetary terms. We use figures from the Legg Report (2010), namely data on amounts owed, reduced by appeal, paid, and outstanding balance as recommended by Sir Legg in his review. We acknowledge that the seriousness of each individual misappropriation cannot be entirely captured by its monetary value. There were many symbolic cases that attracted attention independently of the intrinsic monetary value of the abuse. At the same time, the amount of money misappropriated is an important dimension of the scandal and it should be of concern for voters. From a practical point of view, this indicator represents the only objective (to the extent that the review was conducted in an appropriate way) measure of malfeasance available. Also for this variable we use natural logarithms and call it *Legg-money*.[11]

Our analysis includes control variables for individual MPs:[12] party, front or backbench status[13] at various dates, incumbency status in 2005, gender, age, university degree (and in particular whether

[9] Readership of UK newspapers for 2009-10 is summarised in Table A2 (online appendix) using National Readership Survey (NRS) estimated data.

[10] Indicating with N the number of articles related to an MP, our variable is then log(N+1).

[11] The amount of money reduced on appeal is subtracted from the amount recommended by the Legg Report.

[12] Information about individual MP roles, voting behaviour, and dates of office were extracted from the PublicWhip database.

[13] The PublicWhip profiles for each MP were used to identify which Members were on the front bench for Labour, Conservatives, or Liberal Democrats by compiling data on whether individuals had roles containing the following words: Minister of State; Foreign Secretary; Home Secretary; Chancellor; and Prime Minister. This

an Oxford or Cambridge graduate), seniority (using the year in which the MP was first elected to Parliament), distance in miles from the MP constituency office to Westminster. To run placebo regressions we collect analogous information for the 2001-05 parliament.[14]Also, the 2010 general election was distinctive from earlier polls due to the high number of incumbent MPs that either stood down or were deselected. Data were collected on the date that Members stood down or were deselected, using a number of online sources and local newspapers. The data collection exercise identified 152 MPs from the 2005-10 Parliament who were retiring before the general election. Of those retiring, 65 announced they would stand down before 8 May 2009, whilst the rest retired or were deselected after the publication of detailed expenses by the *Daily Telegraph*. Finally we exploit information of MPs' parliamentary voting patterns. For each MP, votes cast in parliament were categorised as 'loyal' when the MP voted along with her/his party, 'rebel' when she/he did not, and 'absent' when the MP missed a vote. The frequencies for loyal, rebel, and missed votes were collected for each MP for two periods: the year prior to the Telegraph details on expenses (8 May 2008-7 May 2009); and the time from the start of the MP expenses scandal to the dissolution of Parliament (8 May 2009-12 April 2010).

To allow a difference-in-difference analysis of electoral impact between the 2005 and 2010 general elections, we collected information on the MPs who were elected in the 2005 general election (and in 2001 for the placebo regressions) and identified individuals who have run in the same constituencies in both general elections.[15]

To make reliable conclusions about differences in electoral returns between the 2005 and 2010 polls we include information from Rallings and Thrasher (2007). There was a wholesale adjustment of

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would also include Shadow equivalents, such as "Leader of the Opposition" and "Shadow Chancellor". The lists of front bench members for the three main political parties were compiled for three dates: 5 April 2005 (the date the 2001-5 Parliament was dissolved); 7 May 2009 (the date before *The Telegraph* publication of detailed MP expenses); and 12 April 2010 (the date that the 2005-10 Parliament was dissolved).

[14] We updated the data of Besley and Larcinese (2011), which were collected for MPs who were elected at the 2001 general election. The distances to the constituency offices were measured using a number of queries on Google Maps between the relevant address and the postcode of the Houses of Parliament (SW1A 0AA).

[15] The elected MPs in 2005 can be found here: www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2005/rp05-033.pdf. We control for incumbency status at the time of the 2005 general election. This information was extracted using the PublicWhip list of MPs during the 2001-5 Parliament.

constituency boundaries in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland between general elections.[16] The notional boundary changes developed by Rallings and Thrasher (2007) were used to identify constituencies in which there were minor adjustments and would thus provide more reliable estimates of changing electoral behaviour. Our baseline estimates refer to constituencies whose boundaries changed by 10% or less. We conduct several robustness checks by varying maximum boundary changes allowed up to 0 (only constituencies that did not change). [17]

We omitted a number of MPs from our analysis. The party leaders for the three main political parties at the time of the expenses scandal (Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg) and Speaker Michael Martin were excluded, since they were mentioned frequently in newspaper reports independently of their own expenses. We also omit the four aforementioned MPs from the House of Commons who were under police investigation at the time of the Legg Report, since their claims were not audited by agreement with the police.

For our constituency-level regressions, our dataset has been merged with electoral results data compiled by Pippa Norris.[18] Her database also includes the notional party vote shares from the 2005 election from Rallings and Thrasher (2007).

For our individual level (survey-based) regressions, our data were merged with the 2010 British Election Survey (BES) internet panel data, which records the electoral constituency of each respondent.[19] Robustness checks have been conducted by using the BES 2005-10 panel data, which

[16]The constituency boundaries in Scotland were unchanged between the two elections.

[17] Percentages refers to the voters, not the physical boundaries of the constituencies. The extent of boundary change by constituency from Rallings and Thrasher (2007) is also found on the 2010 general election results published by the Press Association (http://election.pressassociation.com/Results/general_2010.php). The web pages also indicate which sitting MPs ran in each constituency.

[18]http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/datafiles/British%20General%20Election%20May%202010/British_Parliamentary_Constituency_General_Election_2010_Version_5.xlsx

[19] This was collected in three different waves: pre-election, campaign period, and post-election. The pre-election wave surveys were completed between 29 March 2010 and 7 April 2010. The respondents were then sent requests to complete a follow-up questionnaire during the campaign, between 7 April 2010 and 5 May 2010. The post-election wave was completed between 7 and 24 May 2010. The data file used the seventh beta release version of the data (6 December 2010). Summary statistics are given in table A3 in the Appendix.

have the advantage that many questions about individual predispositions and party identification were asked before the scandal, but the disadvantage of substantial attrition and a much smaller sample size.

4. The electoral consequences of the scandal

Were politicians involved in the scandal punished by the electoral process? We begin by analysing the key outcome of the accountability process: whether scandal involvement explains the likelihood to leave parliament. We will then move to a more detailed consideration of the accountability mechanism by distinguishing between MPs who decided to stand down and MPs that stood for re-election.

4.1 Throwing out the rascals

Were MPs who abused the expenses system more likely to leave parliament? This is the key observable outcome of the accountability process, and we begin our analysis by estimating how different degrees of scandal involvement correlate with the probability of not being in parliament after the 2010 election. We estimate the following equation by OLS:

$$Left_i = \alpha + \beta Involvement_i + \boldsymbol{\delta X_i} + \varepsilon_i \qquad (1)$$

where $Left_i$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if MP *i* is not in parliament after the 2010 election. Involvement in the scandal is measured in two ways: the first is by using *news-post*, controlling for *news-pre*; the second is by using *Legg-money*. We also introduce a vector of control variables $\boldsymbol{X_i}$ to account for other factors that may determine the probability to leave parliament. Columns 1 and 2 of Table 1, where we report simple regressions without control variables, show that scandal-related news coverage is positively and significantly correlated with the probability of leaving parliament, while the amount of money misappropriated is not. In column 3, we use both indicators and again *news-post* displays a positive and statistically significant coefficient. This conclusion is not substantially altered when we control for MPs and constituency characteristics, although the magnitude of the estimated coefficient is now smaller. A 1% increase in scandal-related news coverage (controlling for pre-scandal coverage levels) leads to about 3% higher probability of leaving parliament.

The coefficients estimated in Table 1 suggest that the probability of leaving Parliament is positively related with press coverage but not related to the actual amount of money that an MP has misappropriated. These coefficients, however, do not imply that the relation between press coverage and leaving parliament is causal. We will now distinguish between standing down and retirement in the ballot box, with the aim to provide causal estimates separately for the two mechanisms

4.2 Retirement decisions

As mentioned above, an unprecedented number of MPs either retired or were deselected before the 2010 general election. Of the 152 MPs who did not run in the 2010 general election, 89 stepped down or were deselected in May 2009 or later. In this section we ask if standing down, whether due to party pressure or to avoid a likely defeat, has been one of the accountability channels that followed the scandal. In other words, did MPs involved in the scandal stand down with a higher probability? We estimate the following equation by OLS:

$$Ret_i = \alpha + \beta Involvement_i + \boldsymbol{\delta X_i} + \varepsilon_i \qquad (2)$$

where Ret_i is a dummy equal to one if the MP announces her decision to stand down after 9 May 2009. We use the MPs who announced their decision to retire before 8 May 2009, i.e. before the scandal erupted, as the control group. Hence, for each specification that uses post-scandal retirement decision, we run a placebo regression using pre-scandal retirement announcements.

Table 2 reports our baseline results. In column 1, we regress a dummy variable for the decision to stand down on scandal-related media coverage of the MP, controlling for pre-scandal coverage of each MP and including a battery of individual and constituency-level control variables.[20]. The coefficient of *news-post* is positive and statistically significant. This indicates that MPs covered more in association with the expenses scandal (and controlling for their pre-scandal popularity in the media) were more likely to retire. A 1% increase in news coverage leads to a 5% higher probability to

[20] We have first run simple regressions without control variables. The estimated coefficients of interest are remarkably stable across different specifications. We only report here our benchmark results, with a full set of control variables. Other estimates are available from the authors upon request.

stand down. In column 2, we perform a placebo regression: we repeat the estimation of column 1 but use as dependent variable a dummy for decisions to stand down announced before the scandal. The coefficient of *news-post* is now negative and significant at 10% level.

Retirement decisions are, however, much less robustly associated with the amount of money actually misappropriated by MPs, as shown in columns 3 and 4, which use *Legg-money* as an explanatory variable. We again find a positive coefficient on post-scandal retirement and a negative one on pre-scandal retirements. In this case, however, these coefficients are always far from acceptable statistical significance. In columns 5 and 6, we include both media coverage and money owed: once again the results confirm that what drives retirement is media coverage and not the amount of money misappropriated. The placebo regression displays no significant coefficients. In other words, reassuringly, there is no impact of post-scandal news on pre-scandal retirement, which makes it more likely that the positive effect found in columns 1 and 5 represent a causal effect of media coverage on the decision to retire.

The control variables we include are mostly insignificant but it is worth noting that age has a positive impact on pre-scandal retirements but no effect on post-scandal retirement, which provides further evidence of the different nature of retirements (on average) in the two periods.[21]

We then try to uncover whether retirement can be related to specific political or individual characteristics, which could provide further indications about the possible mechanisms at play. For this purpose, we use interaction terms between *news-post* and some individual and constituency-level variables. Table 3 reports the coefficients of the interaction terms only (direct effects and other control variables are always included but not reported). In columns 1 and 2, we consider interactions between *news-post* and MPs' rebellions and absences. It is reasonable to assume that these variables matter to party whips and parties. Hence, they may also decide to take a more lenient or harder line on individual cases on the basis of good citizenship in Westminster. In columns 3 and 4, we consider the marginality of an electoral constituency, in columns 5 and 6 we consider party affiliation, and finally in columns 7 and 8 we consider other individual characteristics of the MPs. Columns 9 and 10 include all the interaction terms at the same time.

[21] We also find that Conservative MPs were less likely than Labour MPs to stand down after the scandal, but not before it, while Liberal Democrat MPs were less likely to stand down than Labour before the scandal.

Our results suggest that more rebellious MPs were less likely to step down after the scandal in the face of the same amount of newspaper coverage. The interaction coefficient is significant at the 10% level in column 9, when all interactions are included. Our placebo regressions (in columns 2 and 10) show that there is no relationship between rebelliousness and pre-scandal retirements. This finding suggests that parties were not able to use the scandal as an excuse to force less palatable MPs into retirement. More rebellious MPs were also more likely to oppose a party's request to stand down. It is quite possible that MPs who are harder to remove can also afford to be more rebellious, indicating reverse causation.

Other columns show that the marginality of a constituency did not play a big role in inducing involved MPs to retire, and that Liberal Democrat MPs were generally less induced to retire from scandal news. Of the personal characteristics, the most noticeable difference between the pre- and post-scandal patterns can be found in gender: female MPs have a higher likelihood to stand down when facing news media pressure on the scandal. This result remains when we include all the other interactions, with the placebo regression indicating again that no such pattern can be found for pre-scandal retirement (compare columns 9 and 10).

To conclude, we find that media coverage increased the probability that an MP stood down after the scandal, but that the decision to stand down was not significantly influenced by the amount of money that MPs misappropriated. Party loyalty does not matter and, in fact, rebellious MPs are more likely to remain in the face of an equivalent amount of coverage, while the opposite holds for female MPs.

4.3 Punishment in the ballot box

We now want to test whether MPs who were involved in the expenses scandal but decided to run were punished by voters, and therefore saw their vote share decline compared to their 2005 performance. For the reasons outlined above, the sample was constrained by only considering constituencies where the boundary change was less than 10%, the party of the MP remains the same (i.e. MPs who become independent are omitted) and the same individual ran in the constituency in both general elections (i.e. the sitting MP was not from a by-election after 2005). With our sample restricted to constituencies that satisfied these characteristics, we use the difference in vote percentage

between the 2005 and 2010 general elections for an incumbent MP (ΔV_i) as the dependent variable and estimate equations of this sort:

$$\Delta V_i = \alpha + \beta Involvement_i + \boldsymbol{\delta X_i} + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

where, as before, *Involvement* is captured either by *news-post* (controlling for *news-pre*) or by *Legg-money*, and **X** is a vector with the usual covariates. Table 4 shows that news coverage had a negative impact on electoral returns, indicating that implicated MPs have been, on average, punished by the voters. This result is robust across the various specifications in which we incrementally include control variables. Our estimates indicate that a 1% increase in news decreased the electoral return of the incumbent party (compared to its 2005 returns) by about 0.7 %. *Legg-money* has instead no effect on the change in the MP vote-share. Column 7 includes both *news-post* and *Legg-money* (with all the controls) and shows the same pattern: no effect of money misappropriated and a remarkably stable effect of the amount of news coverage.

We also find that electoral punishment was related to individual MPs and their involvement in the expenses scandal, and not the party to which they belonged. In other words, there is evidence that voters in the 2010 general election cast a "personal vote". Table 5 shows results differentiating changes in vote-share for seats in which the same individual ran in 2005 and 2010 and seats where the victorious MP in 2005 had stood down. From columns 1 and 2, it emerges that voters' punishment was personal: in constituencies where the incumbent MP is not standing, the vote share of the incumbent party is unaffected by the amount of scandal-related news coverage. The effect we found in Table 4 appears instead to be entirely driven by constituencies where the incumbent MP is standing again. The result is confirmed by column 3 where we use instead an interaction term between news coverage and a dummy for whether the incumbent MP is standing. In our benchmark specification with 10% boundary change, a 1% increase in *news-post* (controlling for *news-pre*) leads to a loss of 0.78% of the votes for incumbent MPs.

Models were tested for different thresholds of boundary changes – no change, less than 10% change, and less than 25% change. The same pattern emerges independently of our sample choice, although magnitudes and statistical significance varies when we use our most restricted sample

(compare columns 3, 4 and 5). In columns 6-10 we repeat the same exercise by using a binary re-election dummy as dependent variable. Coefficients of *news-post* are never remotely significant across the various specifications, showing that, in spite of some vote loss, MPs involved in the scandal and standing for re-election did not suffer a decreased probability of re-election..

In Table 6 we report the results of placebo regressions where the dependent variable is the vote change between 2001 and 2005. If the scandal caused a decrease in vote share of involved MPs, rather than being driven by pre-existing trends, then media coverage of the scandal should have no effect on vote change at the previous election, i.e. between 2001 and 2005. Our results show that pre-scandal media coverage is positively associated with a vote increase in 2005 compared to 2001 (which can be due to a number of reasons) but that scandal-related coverage is not. Legg money is also associated with an increase in votes between 2001 and 2005. When control variables are included, however, neither pre-scandal media coverage nor Legg money are statistically significant. When we restrict our sample to candidates who are also sitting MPs in 2010, no statistically significant coefficient is found. There is no specification in which the scandal-related media coverage displays any impact on 2001-05 vote changes.

We conclude that scandal-related media coverage had some impact on vote returns of involved MPs but the amount of money actually misappropriated did not. We find that voters' punishment is personally directed to involved MPs rather than to their party, probably a consequence of the fact that the scandal involved all parties in Westminster more or less equally. In any event, patterns of representation of standing MPs cannot be expected to have been substantially altered by the scandal, as shown by the nil effect of re-election probabilities.

We also run regressions using turnout rates as dependent variable to see whether punishment was driven by abstention rather than voting for a different party. We found no significant effect of expenses scandal variables on turnout (results are not reported in the interest of space but are available from the authors).

5. Perception, punishment and partisanship

Having established that voters, on average, punished MPs with higher levels of press coverage in relation to the scandal, we now turn to a more detailed analysis of voters' perceptions regarding

their MPs. We use individual survey data from the British Election Study 2010 (BES), which contains questions regarding the scandal. In particular, to gauge the perceived level of MP malfeasance by individual voters, the BES dataset contained two questions, from which we construct a binary and a continuous measure of perceived involvement.

The binary measure was the individual response to the following question *(AAQ142):* 'Now, thinking about the MP in your local constituency, has he or she claimed expense money to which they are not entitled?' [1=Yes, 2=No, 3=Don't Know]. Respondents who did not know were omitted. The continuous measure was derived from the following question *(AAQ143*): 'On a scale that runs from 0 to 10, where 0 means a very small amount, and 10 means a very large amount, how much expense money do you think the MP in your local constituency has claimed that he or she was not entitled to?' [12=Don't Know]. As above, respondents who did not know were omitted. The continuous measure for perceived wrongdoing was then calculated as: *log(1+AAQ142+AAQ143).*

5.1 Correlates of voters' perception of malfeasance

What determines perceived involvement of an MP in the expenses scandal? In Table 7, we report OLS estimates when the dependent variable is the continuous perceived involvement variable (similar results can be obtained if we use the binary indicator) and explanatory variables consists of respondents' characteristics and attitudes as well as of constituency characteristics. The monetary measure of wrongdoing and indicators of press coverage are again the key explanatory variables. Column 1 shows that perceived involvement of an MP is positively related to the actual amount of money misappropriated. A 1% increase in *Legg-money* leads to an increase of about 0.07% in the perceived involvement of an MP. Perception of involvement is also positively related to the amount of media coverage. In column 2, we include constituency fixed effects and therefore remove all constituency-specific and MP-specific variables (only constituencies with at least four respondents were included). This helps us focus our attention on the respondents' characteristics. Respondents that have more trust in other people (not necessarily in politicians) perceive a lower level of involvement in the scandal by their MP as compared to respondents who generally distrust others. Respondents who are more dissatisfied with democracy also perceive a higher involvement (the causation is clearly not obvious). More educated respondents tend to perceive lower involvement. This effect is particularly

strong and statistically significant for respondents with a university degree. Other individual characteristics do not appear to have statistically significant effects.

In column 3, we include the response to the question "most MPs are corrupt" (with the possible answers being "agree" or "disagree") and show that perception of corruption of own MP is positively related to perceived corruption of all MPs. Although this is probably a spurious correlation, it provides evidence of the existence of some form of generalization, whereby a respondent perceiving that her MP is corrupt may be led to generalize this perception to all MPs, or conversely, a general distrust of MPs may lead to perceive that the local MP is corrupt. These results are derived from within constituency variation and cannot therefore depend on the identity of the MP, on her behaviour, or on any other event that might have happened at the constituency level.

An important question is whether perception of involvement may have been influenced by media exposure. For this purpose, we construct various indicators of exposure to television, the press or the internet. *Ceteris paribus* (in particular, we control for education levels), respondents that declare to make a big deal of internet usage to gather political information have generally a more positive view of their MP's involvement in the scandal, while television viewers are more negative (column 4).[22]

In all specifications partisanship appears to be particularly important. The partisan-match dummy variable is equal to 1 if the MP belongs to the political party indicated as closest by the respondent (and zero otherwise) and it appears to have a strong negative effect on perceived involvement in the scandal, even when constituency fixed effects are introduced and therefore perception cannot depend on any characteristic of the MP or of the constituency. An important concern is that partisanship, which is measured before the 2010 election but after the scandal, could depend itself on the perceived involvement of the local MP and therefore be an endogenous regressor. To address this concern we use the 2005-2010 BES panel data. In column 5, partisanship is measured

[22] However, interaction terms between media exposure and media coverage of the scandal are statistically insignificant. Interaction terms between indicators of media exposure and *Legg-money* are equally insignificant. This is equally true whether we use newspaper readership, television exposure, or internet usage. In other words, the responsiveness of perceived involvement to either press coverage of the scandal or money owed does not appear to be affected by media exposure. In the interest of space we omit the table with these results but they available from the authors upon request.

in 2005, well before the expenses scandal. Despite a much reduced sample size, the partisan match coefficient remains statistically significant, negative and its size is actually larger than in other columns. In column 6 we include an interaction effect between the partisan match dummy and Legg-money. The negative and statistically significant coefficient of the interaction term indicates that the elasticity of perceived involvement to actual wrongdoing is much reduced for co-partisan MPs.[23] Our results show that perception of wrongdoing is significantly affected by partisanship. Further investigation is necessary to understand the reason of this partisan bias, which could be due to cognitive dissonance or to media exposure. Our results on media coverage of the scandal (see section 6) let us presume that the first explanation is more plausible.

5.2 Voting behaviour

Does perceived involvement in the scandal relate to citizens' decisions to vote or not for an incumbent MP? Whether in the binary or the continuous form, we find that perceived malfeasance of an incumbent MP decreased the likelihood of voting for the incumbent party, controlling for characteristics of the respondent, of the MP, and of the constituency. The results are summarized in Table 8. In this case, the result holds both when we include only constituencies with standing MPs and when we include all constituencies (provided the boundary change was within the 10% limit). These results are robust across specifications and change only marginally if we include constituency fixed effects, therefore focussing on within constituency variation in scandal involvement perception. Such variation cannot be due to constituency characteristics and therefore can be due neither to MPs involvement nor to overall media coverage (although individual media exposure may vary).

6. Media coverage of the scandal

Our results suggest that media coverage of the scandal played a key role in determining punishment patterns. In this section we analyse media coverage in more detail, and we ask in particular how it relates to monetary wrongdoing and whether it is possible to detect any partisan bias

[23] This result holds when we use the 2005-10 panel, measuring partisanship in 2005, but do not include constituency fixed effects. The negative sign of the interaction term remains but its statistical significance drops considerably if we include constituency fixed effects in the 2005-10 panel, which is not surprising given the much reduced sample size.

in patterns of coverage. Newspapers in the UK have well-known partisan leanings. For example, the *Daily Telegraph* has endorsed the Conservative Party in every general election since 1945, whilst *The Independent* has endorsed either Labour or a Labour-Liberal Democrat pact to prevent the Conservatives from getting into power. It is then legitimate to ask whether coverage of the scandal has been partisan, i.e. if newspapers traditionally leaning left or right have underreported wrongdoings of MPs of the left or right, respectively.[24]

6.1 Aggregate coverage

A first analysis of overall patterns of coverage is given by equation (4), where the news variables refer to the total number of articles in the seven newspapers pulled together.

$$newspost_i = \alpha + \beta newspre + \gamma party_i + Leggmoney_i + \boldsymbol{\delta X_i} + \varepsilon_i \qquad (4)$$

where variable names have the usual interpretations and *i* indicates MP *i*. OLS estimates are reported in Table 9. We only include party affiliation in column 1, we control for *Legg-money* and personal characteristics in column 2, and we include constituency characteristics in column 3. Our results show no significant difference in the overall coverage of MPs from different parties. Not surprisingly, we find a significantly higher coverage for senior and front-bench MPs and a strong positive correlation between coverage and *Legg-money*. Our result on gender is less obvious: we find a significantly higher coverage of female MPs. In column 4, we restrict our sample to include only constituencies whose boundaries changed by less than 10%. Our conclusions remain unaffected and the magnitude of the female dummy is now substantially larger. We have tried to restrict our sample using other thresholds of percentage change in constituencies, and again, our conclusions remain unaffected (results are available from the authors).

Column 5 shows that coverage of Labour frontbenchers (the Government) was double the coverage of Conservative frontbenchers (the official Opposition) and both were significantly higher

[24] For a discussion of agenda-setting theories in news-reporting and a description of how these can be scrutinized empirically using quantitative information on media coverage, see Larcinese et al. (2011) and Puglisi and Snyder (2011a).

than the coverage of backbenchers. Although constituency marginality does not appear, on average, to have had any significant impact on press coverage, column 6 shows that Labour-held marginal constituencies were significantly less covered than non-marginal constituencies, while Conservative and Liberal-democratic marginal constituencies are not statistically distinguishable from non-marginals.[25] Although these coefficients could just capture some spurious correlation, we cannot completely rule out the possibility that, although Government members were not spared press coverage, the party in government was.[26]

Finally, columns 7 and 8 include interactions between *Legg-money* and party affiliation. The elasticity of coverage to actual money misappropriated turns out to be larger for the Labour and particularly for the Conservative parties. In this case the coefficient for Conservative MPs is both larger and more robust, if we consider estimates restricted to constituencies which changed by less than 10%.

6.2 An analysis of media bias

In Table 10, we perform an analysis of individual newspapers' behaviour focussing on possible differences in their coverage patterns. This means that we now estimate equation (4) separately for each newspaper. Our sample contains right-leaning newspapers (*Daily Telegraph, Times*, *Daily Mail*) left-leaning newspapers (*Guardian, Independent*), broadsheet (i.e. quality newspapers: *Daily Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Independent, Scotsman*), tabloids (entertainment and scandal-oriented newspapers: *Sun* and *Daily Mail*).

We report our results when the seven equations are estimated as a system of seemingly unrelated equations (SURE), which provides more efficient estimates than seven separate OLS regressions. The coverage of all newspapers is well explained by Legg-money. An increase of 1% in Legg-money leads to an increased coverage between 3.2% (The Guardian) and 5.6% (The Times). We then distinguish between different parties and between back-benchers and front-benchers for the two

[25] The same is true of marginal constituencies held by SNP and PC, which are classified as "Other marginal".

[26] If we believe that news coverage captures some dimension of malfeasance which is missed by *Legg-money*, then an alternative interpretation could be that the most vulnerable MPs are also those that were more disciplined by re-election perspectives. Since a swing was expected against the Labour party, Labour-held marginals were likely to be the most vulnerable seats.

main parties. The omitted group is given by Labour backbenchers. It appears that all newspapers gave a much larger coverage of Labour front-benchers compared to all other MPs. Conservative front-benchers were also more covered than Labour back-benchers. Again, although the magnitudes of coefficients vary across newspapers, they do not follow a clear partisan divide. For example, if the Conservative-leaning *Daily Mail* gives a milder coverage of Conservative front-benchers, we also have the Conservative-leaning *Times* providing the strongest coverage. The higher coefficients for coverage of Labour front-benchers come from the *Times*, but also from the left-leaning *Guardian*

The other coefficients show no significant differences across newspapers in the coverage of MPs from different parties, with the exception of a higher coverage of Liberal Democrats by the Guardian and The Daily Mail and a higher coverage of parties other than the main three by *The Guardian.* All newspapers devote more news to coverage of expenses regarding front-benchers and more senior MPs, and all, except the *Scotsman*, provide larger coverage of female MPs, although the magnitudes are decidedly higher for the *Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Sun* in this case. Again, we cannot find a clear pattern for the over-coverage of female MPs, neither according to the partisan leaning of newspapers nor according to their broadsheet-tabloid status. If an understanding of possible partisan coverage of the scandal can be inferred from the significance and magnitude of the party coefficients and our prior knowledge of each newspaper's leaning, another test is offered by the opportunity of having a separate independent and accurate measure of wrongdoing like *Legg-money* Using this information our empirical specification becomes:

$$newspost_i = \alpha + \beta newspre_i + \gamma_1 party_i + \gamma_2 Legg_i + \gamma_3 party_i * Legg_i + \boldsymbol{\delta X_i} + \varepsilon_i \qquad (5)$$

In other words, we ask whether the responsiveness of coverage to actual wrongdoing depends on the political affiliation of the MP, and whether different behaviour can be ascribed to different newspapers. We find that the interaction effect with the *Legg-money* (γ_3) is positive for Labour and Conservatives MPs: in other words, responsiveness to money owed was larger for the two main parties. We report our estimates of γ_3 for Conservative and Labour MPs in Figure 2, from which it is clear that γ_3 is larger for Conservative than for Labour MPs (although the difference between the two parties is not statistically significant). In this case, it is worth to highlight that the two most left-

oriented newspapers in our sample (the *Guardian* and *The Independent*) are those with lowest $\hat{\gamma}_3$ for Labour MPs, while the highest are those of the two tabloids, *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. Once again, however, there are no other discernible signals of partisan coverage across newspapers.

In order to take into account the possibly different levels of coverage of the scandal by different newspapers, all our regressions have been repeated using MPs' coverage share (of expenses coverage with respect to total news) rather than number of articles. Results are substantively similar to those discussed here and therefore not reported (they are available from the authors).

To conclude, we find no clear evidence of partisan coverage of the expenses scandal across newspapers. For the seven newspapers examined, a number of patterns were evident, controlling for other explanatory variables: more senior MPs, front-bench MPs from the two main parties and female MPs were mentioned more frequently. The interaction effect with the *Legg-money* (γ_3) is positive for Labour and Conservatives MPs and leads us to uncover a possible under-coverage of Labour MP by *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. In general, however, the patterns we found hold equally for all newspapers with little variation. Given the substantially higher coverage of front-benchers belonging to Labour (the party in government) and, in second place, of the frontbenchers of the main opposition party (potential government members), we can conclude that the role of the press was rather that of a watchdog placing under closer scrutiny the government and its potential replacement.

7. Quantifying the effects: an overall assessment

Do voters punish politicians they perceive to be corrupt? Our answer, for the case of the 2009 expenses scandal in the UK at least, is that they do, although perceptions can be biased by prior opinions. The path from wrongdoing to voter punishment, however, is rather complex, as we have tried to illustrate in this paper. It is useful, therefore, to synthetize our many regressions in few key quantities of interest. Figure 3 quantifies the key links in our accountability framework, by choosing in each case our benchmark estimates. From these estimates we can calculate a few quantities of interest, using the Legg report as a benchmark of malfeasance. We estimate that a 1% increase in irregularly claimed expenses leads to a 0.05% increase in reported news, and a 1 % increase in press coverage leads to 5% higher probability to step down and to a fall of 0.78% in the votes of standing MPs. Combining the effect of expenses on press coverage and the effect of

coverage on the electoral outcomes, we have that a 1% increase in irregularly claimed expenses leads to a 0.25% higher probability of resignation and to a 0.04% loss in votes. Any effect is entirely channelled through news-reporting, as there is no independent effect of *Legg-money* either on the probability to step down or on the vote share of standing MPs. Finally, any change that may have occurred in the vote share of MPs involved in the scandal and standing for re-election has led to no change in their probability to be re-elected.

Regarding voters' perception of wrongdoing, it is influenced by an increase in misappropriated money both via press coverage (+0.18%) and directly via other means (+0.07%). Our conclusion is that voters were 0.01% less likely to vote for an MP (0.25x0.04) for each 1% increase in misappropriated money.

If we consider how many factors can influence voting, the small effects that we estimate are not necessarily negligible. At the same time, punishment does not appear to be overwhelming, especially if we consider that the probability to be re-elected of a standing MP is not affected by the amount of money irregularly claimed (although the vote share is). If the final aim of the process is "to remove the rascals", then the standing down of the most involved MPs is the only mechanism which has actually led to a statistically significant change in the identity of elected representatives. This fact does not reduce the importance of elections in the accountability process in any way, since standing down (or de-selection by party leadership) is likely to be driven by fear of punishment in the ballot box.

8. Discussion

Our findings provide new evidence on a number of questions regarding the role of elections in keeping public officials accountable. The question of whether voters punish corrupt politicians has been addressed by numerous empirical works. Our findings are comparable to those of Jacobson and Dimock (1994), who study a US House scandal (Bank overdraft scandal): like us, they find that members of Congress who were more involved in the scandal were more likely to retire but, unlike in our case, conditional on standing again, they were more likely not to be re-elected.[27] Looking at

[27] Clarke et al. (1999) find that the scandal affected retirement decisions of Republican House members only.

corruption allegations during the period 1968-1978, Peters and Welch (1980) find that implicated Congressional candidates tend to be punished in terms of their electoral returns.

Our evidence provides support for theories that stress the importance of information availability for a well-functioning democracy.[28] The disclosure of information on MPs' detailed expenses items led to a wave of resignations and eventually to voters' punishment of the most involved MPs. Crucially, we find that, while information available on the press matters for resignations and electoral returns, an objective monetary measure of wrongdoing does not. Hence, our findings point to the importance of mass media as watchdogs of power, adding to the burgeoning literature on mass media bias (Groseclose and Milyo 2005; Larcinese et al 2011; Lott and Hasset 2004; Durante and Knight 2010; Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006; and Puglisi and Snyder 2011a, 2011b), which has been so far mostly focussed on the US press. We provide a rather benign view of the British press, whose coverage of the scandal appears to have been positively linked to monetary wrongdoing, focussed on government members, and only marginally affected by ideological leanings.[29]

There are three other studies that have concomitantly analysed the UK expenses scandal. Eggers and Fisher (2011) provide constituency-level evidence and show that involved MPs were more likely to stand down and, conditional on running, that they lost votes because of the scandal. Like us, they also conclude that punishment was personal rather than directed at parties. Johnston and Pattie (2012) and Vivyan et al. (2012) use BES data to conclude that there was a negative electoral impact for involved incumbents but that this impact was of modest magnitude, probably because voters were concerned with more pressing problems by the time of the 2010 general election.

Some of our results are similar to those found by these works, thus confirming the existence of an established set of "facts" regarding the scandal. Our results, however, explain why previous works find that the scandal had only a limited effect on voting behaviour. The reason is that the main channel

[28] See for example Besley and Prat (2006). For an overview of these theories, see Persson and Tabellini (2000). A fast expanding empirical literature has recently added increasingly reliable evidence of the importance of information for accountability purposes. See for example Besley and Burgess (2002), Besley, Pande and Rao (2005), Chang, Golden and Hill (2010), and Ferraz and Finan (2008). This last paper is most closely related to ours since it provides evidence on the consequences of corruption disclosure in mayoral elections in Brazil.

[29] Puglisi and Snyder (2011a) find instead that the coverage of scandals by the US press follows their partisan leaning (as measured by their electoral endorsements).

of parliamentary change has been retirement: MPs involved in the scandal are significantly less likely to be in parliament after the 2010 election but mostly because they decided to stand down. This means that the selection effect of elections cannot simply be captured by looking at election results or voting behaviour since politicians may anticipate negative electoral outcomes and decide to stand down. Our conclusion is that elections do keep public officials accountable, at least in the case we study, but that their effect is mostly displayed at the candidacy stage.

Compared to previous research on the expenses scandal our work has also a number of advantages, both for what concerns the range of questions we address and from a purely methodological point of view. Our aim is to go beyond the "facts" trying both to establish causal relations and to "unpack" the mechanisms of accountability. In particular, there are two key features that distinguish our contribution from the mentioned other studies on the scandal: an explicit focus on the role of mass media (including a study of media bias) and a study of partisanship and the way it mediates the response to the scandal (both for newspapers and voters). From a methodological point of view, our work has two important advantages: in the analysis of constituency-level data, we provide placebo regressions in support of our causal claims; in the analysis of BES data, we show that our estimates are robust to the introduction of constituency fixed effects (which is equivalent to including an MP fixed effect), which allows us to better identify the impact of personal characteristics and exposure to news sources.

There are three other pieces of evidence emerging from our paper deserving separate discussions. First, we provide evidence of a strong effect of partisanship on voters' perception of their MPs' honesty. Our evidence shows that biased perception and sticky beliefs can represent a formidable obstacle to accountability and points at the complexity of the role played by partisanship in voters' mind.[30]

[30] Our evidence is difficult to entirely square with spatial models of elections populated by rational voters and is more consistent with theories of cognitive dissonance, i.e. the idea that beliefs may be changed to achieve greater internal consistency (Festinger 1957). Other evidence of instances of voters' cognitive dissonance is provided in Beasley and Joslyn (2001) and Mullainathan and Washington (2009). Particularly relevant is the study of Dimock and Jacobson (1995), which studies the aforementioned US House banking scandal and reaches conclusions very similar to ours.

Second, the results indicate a significant gendered effect, which suggests that the discrepancy between the stereotypical "ethical female" politician and involvement in the scandal led to greater punishment – both electorally and via internal party mechanisms – compared to their male counterparts. Although perceived exploitation of the allowances rules caused public outrage nationally, the voting public was perhaps less forgiving to female MPs, since there is an underlying image of the ruthless, ambitious male politician, whilst such behaviour from female politicians would seem more "unnatural". [31] These core attitudes about the gender and morality both influence and are influenced by the media.[32] In the context of the MP expenses scandal, what is perhaps linked to the higher rate of standing down is that media representations often mention female politicians alongside their husbands, such that they are seen in terms of dependency (Murray 2010; Romaine 1998). Thus, despite powerful political roles, women are still reduced to providers of care and child-rearing in family structures. Perhaps this allows an easier escape route – that of spending more time with family – for female MPs involved in the scandal without significant loss of face for the MP, and female MPs may be seen as more expendable by party leaders.

Finally, our analysis shows that there is evidence of a "personal vote" (Cain et al. 1990), whereby MPs that have been deemed to have exploited the expenses system are punished if they stand for office in the 2010 general election, but there is no significant electoral punishment for a disgraced MP's political party if she/he stands down or resigns.[33] On one hand, the accountability mechanisms underlying the "personal vote" are straightforward: party leaders encourage misbehaving MPs to stand down (or resign), thus providing an internal means of policing ethical conduct in political office. The

[31] Prior theoretical work has posited that females have a natural ethic of care and responsibility (Gilligan 1982). This has been supported by social science research confirming that females tend to act more ethically and altruistically compared with males (Ones and Viswesvaran 1998; Eagly and Crowley 1986; Piliavin and Unger 1985; Hoffman 1977; Johnson and Aries 1983). Starting from this notion of the "ethical female", some commentators have concluded that an increase in accountability can be fostered through greater female political participation (Dollar et al. 2001; Swamy et al. 2001), although this relationship may be spurious (Sung 2002).

[32] There is extensive literature on the difference of the volume (Kahn 1994a, 1994b; Jalazai 2006) and tone (Romaine 1999; Murray 2010) of media coverage of female politicians compared to male politicians.

[33] This result is corroborated by the findings of Eggers and Fisher (2011).

party then replaces the “bad” MP with a candidate not involved in the scandal, which means that there should be no electoral punishment. On the other hand, the “personal vote” is a surprising result, since, in the throes of a global recession, the perceived exploitation of the expenses system by some MPs represented corruption carried out and condoned by all three major parties. Thus, although punishment at the polls for all three parties could be expected as a systemic electoral protest, this largely failed to materialise (for example, we find no impact of the scandal on turnout). However, as mentioned above, partisanship still mediates perceptions of wrong-doing, so that voter political party affinities still affect the likelihood of sanctioning an incumbent MP for her/his behaviour during the expenses scandal.

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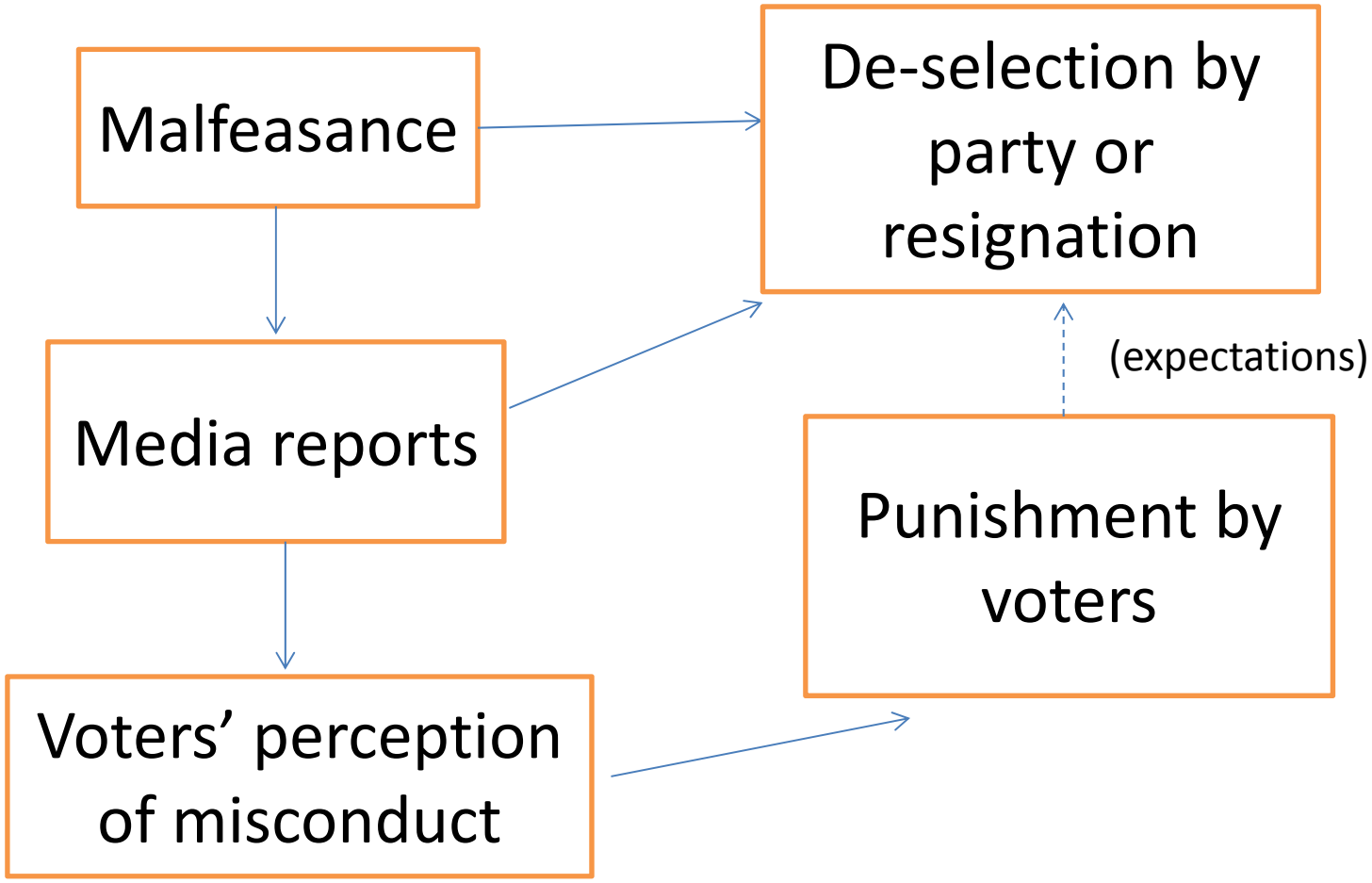
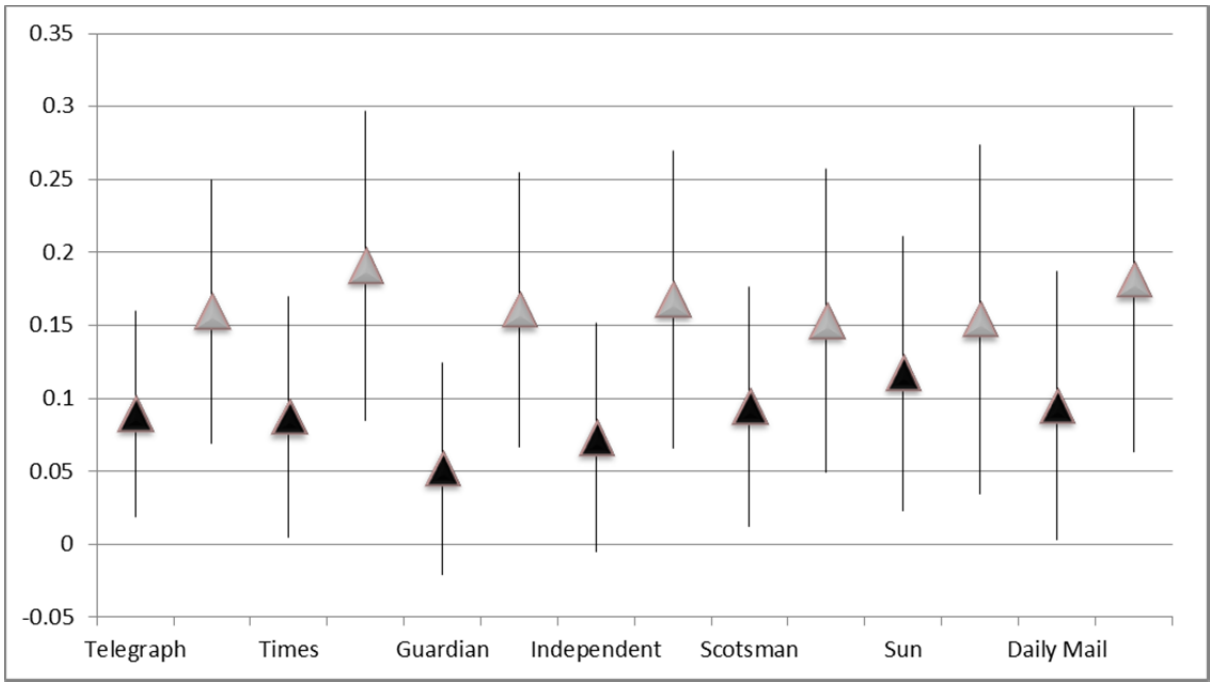


Figure 1: The accountability process

Figure 2: $\widehat{\gamma_3}$ for Conservative (grey) and Labour (black) MPs.

The lines are 5% confidence intervals



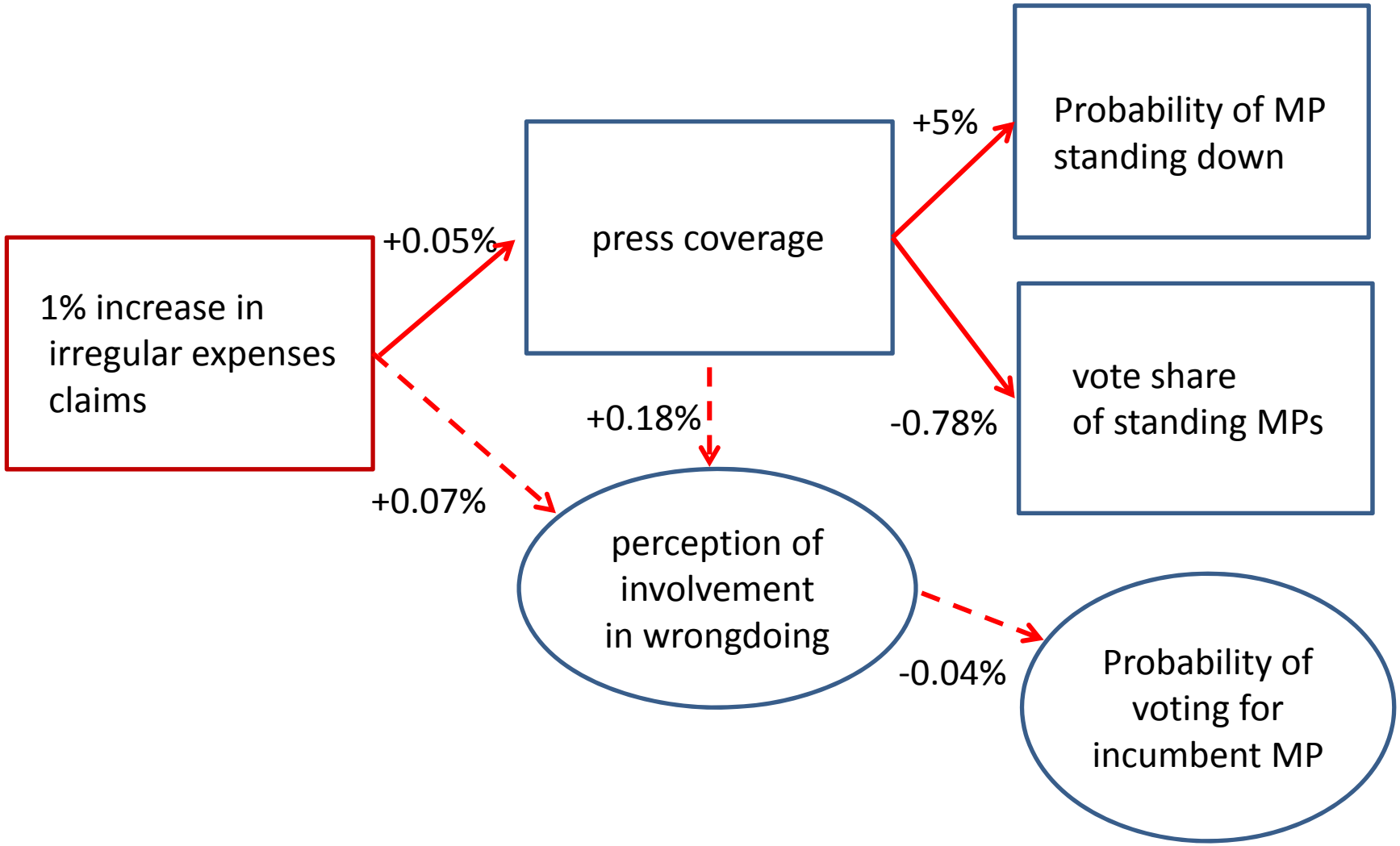


Figure 3: Estimates of the key steps in the accountability process

Note: Squares and solid arrows refer to MP-level variables, circles and dashed arrows to individual level variables (from BES). Numbers reported are approximations to the second decimal from our favourite specifications

Table 1. Probability of leaving parliament

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dep. Variable	MP left parliament					
news-post	0.0451***		0.0441**	0.0307*		0.0328**
	(0.017)		(0.017)	(0.016)		(0.016)
news-pre	-0.0541***		-0.0538***	-0.0244		-0.0246*
	(0.016)		(0.016)	(0.015)		(0.015)
Legg-money		0.0035	0.0016		-0.0034	-0.0045
		(0.005)	(0.005)		(0.005)	(0.005)
conservative				-0.2147***	-0.2087***	-0.2108***
				(0.049)	(0.050)	(0.050)
libdem				-0.1219*	-0.1288*	-0.1254*
				(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.070)
other				0.1596	0.1594	0.1607
				(0.133)	(0.133)	(0.131)
age				0.0064**	0.0069**	0.0065**
				(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
seniority				0.0036	0.0042	0.0035
				(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Δfrontbench				-0.0565	-0.0659	-0.0569
				(0.047)	(0.046)	(0.047)
frontbench				-0.0743	-0.0673	-0.0724
				(0.061)	(0.057)	(0.061)
incumbent in 2005				0.1887***	0.1866***	0.1945***
				(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.051)
degree				-0.0557	-0.0513	-0.0561
				(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)
oxbridge educated				0.0858**	0.0797*	0.0857**
				(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.044)
female				0.1258***	0.1421***	0.1275***
				(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)
marginality 2005				0.2952***	0.2935***	0.2969***
				(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.042)
Constant	0.3516***	0.3172***	0.3473***	-0.2091	-0.2198	-0.2080
	(0.039)	(0.027)	(0.042)	(0.170)	(0.165)	(0.170)
Observations	588	588	588	588	588	588
R-squared	0.0214	0.0008	0.0215	0.2433	0.2384	0.2444

Note: columns 4-5-6 also include dummy variables for UK regional standard regions.

Estimation by OLS. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2. Scandal involvement and standing down

Dep. variable: standing down dummy (pre or post scandal)	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
news-post	0.0502***	-0.0216*			0.0499***	-0.0193
	(0.018)	(0.013)			(0.018)	(0.013)
news-pre	-0.0131	0.0042			-0.0130	0.0037
	(0.016)	(0.011)			(0.016)	(0.011)
Legg-money			0.0032	-0.0045	0.0004	-0.0034
			(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.004)
conservative	-0.1078**	-0.0380	-0.1125**	-0.0319	-0.1083**	-0.0335
	(0.051)	(0.040)	(0.052)	(0.039)	(0.052)	(0.040)
libdem	-0.0856	-0.0548**	-0.0905*	-0.0552**	-0.0853	-0.0575**
	(0.055)	(0.027)	(0.054)	(0.028)	(0.055)	(0.027)
other	0.0899	0.0052	0.1092	-0.0027	0.0899	0.0051
	(0.130)	(0.085)	(0.132)	(0.083)	(0.130)	(0.084)
age	0.0012	0.0049**	0.0009	0.0052**	0.0011	0.0050**
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
seniority	0.0041	0.0049	0.0060*	0.0039	0.0041	0.0047
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Δfront (el2010-el2005)	-0.0122	-0.0149	-0.0403	-0.0029	-0.0122	-0.0146
	(0.055)	(0.031)	(0.054)	(0.030)	(0.055)	(0.031)
frontbench	-0.0289	-0.0165	0.0289	-0.0405	-0.0291	-0.0154
	(0.073)	(0.038)	(0.068)	(0.028)	(0.073)	(0.038)
incumbent in 2005	0.0280	-0.0253	0.0169	-0.0160	0.0274	-0.0199
	(0.050)	(0.036)	(0.051)	(0.035)	(0.051)	(0.035)
degree	-0.0168	-0.0226	-0.0063	-0.0282	-0.0166	-0.0245
	(0.051)	(0.040)	(0.050)	(0.040)	(0.051)	(0.040)
oxbridge educated	0.0478	0.0237	0.0518	0.0212	0.0479	0.0231
	(0.044)	(0.034)	(0.044)	(0.033)	(0.044)	(0.034)
female	0.0333	0.0366	0.0581	0.0271	0.0333	0.0364
	(0.051)	(0.040)	(0.055)	(0.040)	(0.051)	(0.040)
marginality 2005	0.0041	-0.0145	-0.0062	-0.0076	0.0038	-0.0115
	(0.044)	(0.031)	(0.043)	(0.031)	(0.043)	(0.031)
Constant	-0.0465	-0.2642**	0.0067	-0.2926***	-0.0461	-0.2672**
	(0.184)	(0.111)	(0.177)	(0.110)	(0.185)	(0.110)
Observations	359	359	359	359	359	359
R-squared	0.1239	0.1537	0.1029	0.1500	0.1240	0.1557

Table 3. Scandal involvement and standing down (interactions with news-post)

Dep. variable: standing down dummy (pre or post scandal)	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
rebellions	-0.0202	0.0051							-0.0441*	0.0111
	(0.021)	(0.016)							(0.025)	(0.017)
absences	-0.0007	0.0032							-0.0041	0.0040
	(0.005)	(0.003)							(0.004)	(0.003)
marginality			-0.0304	0.0318					-0.0185	0.0391
			(0.039)	(0.026)					(0.039)	(0.029)
conservative					-0.0436	-0.0363			-0.0566	0.1397
					(0.066)	(0.072)			(0.133)	(0.086)
labour					-0.0553	-0.0738			-0.0971	0.1375
					(0.064)	(0.073)			(0.139)	(0.084)
libdem					-0.1497**	-0.0782			-0.1568	0.1049
					(0.064)	(0.072)			(0.124)	(0.082)
front-bench							-0.0379	-0.0400*	-0.0202	-0.0280
							(0.040)	(0.022)	(0.048)	(0.025)
age							0.0032	-0.0050***	0.0026	-0.0046**
							(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
female							0.1745***	-0.0158	0.1795***	-0.0034
							(0.040)	(0.029)	(0.041)	(0.034)
seniority							0.0008	0.0028	0.0017	0.0028
							(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.003)
oxgridge educated							-0.0050	0.0168	-0.0276	0.0193
							(0.037)	(0.024)	(0.040)	(0.027)
Observations	359	359	359	359	359	359	359	359	359	359
R-squared	0.1445	0.1927	0.1331	0.1769	0.1649	0.1951	0.1832	0.1946	0.2283	0.2290

All the variables included in Table 2 have been included in all regressions. Columns 1 and 2 also include the main effect of rebellion and absences. Each coefficient refers to the interaction term between the variable in question and news-post. The dependent variable is a dummy equal to 1 if the MP announced decision to stand down at the next election. In the -pre- columns the announcement was made before May 8, 2009, in the -post- columns the announcement was made after May 8, 2009. Region dummies are included (referred to the 11 standard UK regions). Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, **

Table 4. 2010-2005 difference in vote percentage for incumbent party

Dep. Variable	(1) Δvote	(2) Δvote	(3) Δvote	(4) Δvote	(5) Δvote	(6) Δvote	(7) Δvote
news-post	-0.9159**		-0.7119***		-0.6445**		-0.6458**
	(0.358)		(0.263)		(0.256)		(0.262)
news-pre	0.8556***		0.3152		0.3256		0.3258
	(0.313)		(0.246)		(0.260)		(0.259)
Legg-money		-0.0623		-0.0578		-0.0312	0.0020
		(0.103)		(0.075)		(0.074)	(0.075)
conservative			9.9324***	10.0204***	9.4089***	9.4717***	9.4062***
			(0.699)	(0.689)	(0.796)	(0.799)	(0.800)
libdem			3.2794**	3.2967**	2.5812*	2.6288*	2.5827*
			(1.374)	(1.419)	(1.375)	(1.396)	(1.380)
other			1.3316	1.1926	0.9708	0.7909	0.9711
			(2.257)	(2.231)	(2.314)	(2.254)	(2.317)
age					0.0597	0.0565	0.0596
					(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.040)
seniority					-0.0155	-0.0342	-0.0154
					(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Δfront (el2010-el2005)					0.2380	0.5132	0.2377
					(0.765)	(0.774)	(0.768)
frontbench					0.7731	0.3202	0.7726
					(1.221)	(1.066)	(1.218)
incumbent in 2005					-2.9338***	-2.7665***	-2.9370***
					(0.811)	(0.837)	(0.835)
degree					0.7731	0.6132	0.7742
					(0.716)	(0.707)	(0.717)
oxbridge educated					-0.1394	-0.1429	-0.1390
					(0.694)	(0.692)	(0.694)
female					-1.0845*	-1.4424**	-1.0843*
					(0.627)	(0.639)	(0.628)
marginality 2005					0.4715	0.5998	0.4697
					(0.655)	(0.666)	(0.660)
Constant	-1.6610**	-1.4904***	-6.0227***	-6.7644***	-7.3164***	-7.4377***	-7.3146***
	(0.773)	(0.539)	(1.163)	(1.101)	(2.406)	(2.325)	(2.406)
Region dummies	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Observations	356	356	356	356	356	356	356
R-squared	0.0273	0.0010	0.5342	0.5235	0.5594	0.5515	0.5594

Note: region dummies are the 11 UK standard regions. Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 5. The personal punishment: sitting MPs vs open seats

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Dep. Variable	Δvote	Δvote	Δvote	Δvote	Δvote	re-election probability	re-election probability	re-election probability	re-election probability	re-election probability
news-post	0.0491	-0.7867**	0.3823	-0.5859	0.3857	0.0396	-0.0083	0.0476	-0.0233	0.0416
	(0.515)	(0.314)	(0.433)	(1.177)	(0.319)	(0.053)	(0.018)	(0.038)	(0.077)	(0.030)
news-pre	-1.0560*	0.6887**	-0.9780*	-0.1414	-0.7803*	-0.0487	0.0102	-0.0198	0.0070	-0.0043
	(0.604)	(0.298)	(0.538)	(1.175)	(0.450)	(0.032)	(0.014)	(0.032)	(0.047)	(0.027)
sitting MP			1.6146	-0.1282	2.3650**			0.1390	0.1143	0.1839**
			(1.349)	(3.468)	(1.085)			(0.089)	(0.105)	(0.083)
sitting MP x lognews			-1.2679**	-0.3255	-1.4038***			-0.0614	0.0015	-0.0504
			(0.541)	(1.262)	(0.443)			(0.040)	(0.082)	(0.034)
sitting MP x lognews pre-scandal			1.6377***	0.4119	1.4754***			0.0293	-0.0352	0.0124
			(0.608)	(1.266)	(0.517)			(0.034)	(0.052)	(0.030)
Control variables	All controls, regional dumimies and a constant are included									
Sample	open seats	sitting mp	all	all	all	open seats	sitting mp	all	all	all
max % boundary change	10	10	10	0	25	10	10	10	0	25
Observations	75	281	356	121	458	75	284	359	122	461
R-squared	0.7503	0.5682	0.5866	0.5721	0.5779	0.6231	0.4916	0.4909	0.6207	0.4207

Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: Voting returns: placebo regressions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Dep. Variable	Δvote (2001-05)	Δvote (2001-05)	Δvote (2001-05)	Δvote (2001-05)	Δvote (2001-05)	Δvote (2001-05)
news-post	0.1325	0.0326	0.0112	0.0726	0.0626	0.1471
	(0.259)	(0.261)	(0.194)	(0.243)	(0.518)	(0.205)
news-pre	0.4379*	0.4766*	0.1273	0.0436	-0.0678	0.0402
	(0.250)	(0.249)	(0.178)	(0.199)	(0.387)	(0.168)
Legg-money		0.1453*	0.0128	0.0260	0.0098	0.0553
		(0.085)	(0.062)	(0.075)	(0.160)	(0.065)
Constant	-4.6912***	-5.0798***	-9.7208***	-10.4112***	-14.0841***	-9.0576***
	(0.594)	(0.635)	(2.300)	(2.616)	(5.216)	(2.169)
Control variables	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sample	all	all	all	sitting mps 2010	sitting mps 2010	sitting mps 2010
Max boundary change (%)	10	10	10	10	0	25
Observations	352	352	352	277	98	349
R-squared	0.0172	0.0249	0.5400	0.5322	0.6022	0.5405

Note: control variables are those included in column 7 of Table 9. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7. Correlates of involvement perception (British Election Study)

Dep. Variable	perceived involvement					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Legg-money	0.0648***					
	(0.0043)					
news-post	0.1771***					
	(0.0143)					
news-pre	-0.0630***					
	(0.0134)					
partisan match	-0.1873***	-0.1773***	-0.1710***	-0.1805***	-0.2705**	-0.1251**
	(0.0495)	(0.0440)	(0.0434)	(0.0436)	(0.1098)	(0.0495)
Most MPs corrupt			0.1485***	0.1454***	0.0687*	0.1449***
			(0.0129)	(0.0131)	(0.038)	(0.013)
press usage				0.0151	-0.0164	0.0154
				(0.0107)	(0.0267)	(0.0106)
television usage				0.0261**	0.0343	0.0253*
				(0.0131)	(0.0305)	(0.0131)
internet usage				-0.0535**	-0.0246	-0.0563***
				(0.0211)	(0.0562)	(0.0212)
partisan match x Legg-money						-0.0172**
						(0.0074)
voted for the MP in 2005	-0.1498***	-0.1122***	-0.1107***	-0.1036***	-0.113	-0.1005***
	(0.0446)	(0.0397)	(0.0392)	(0.0392)	(0.1016)	(0.0391)
trust others	-0.0261***	-0.0215***	-0.0056	-0.0056	0.0113	-0.0047
	(0.0073)	(0.0071)	(0.0071)	(0.0071)	(0.0206)	(0.0071)
attention to politics	-0.0013	0.0008	0.0122	0.0105	0.0215	0.0108
	(0.0076)	(0.0079)	(0.0078)	(0.0085)	(0.0222)	(0.0085)
fairly satisfied with democracy	-0.0137	0.0764	0.0511	0.0495	0.1753	0.0483
	(0.0652)	(0.0598)	(0.0606)	(0.0606)	(0.1963)	(0.0603)
a little dissatisfied with democracy	0.1106	0.1699***	0.1178*	0.1184*	0.2094	0.1117*
	(0.0675)	(0.0617)	(0.0612)	(0.0613)	(0.2016)	(0.0613)
very dissatisfied with democracy	0.1526**	0.2408***	0.1344*	0.1415**	0.335	0.1425**
	(0.0735)	(0.0680)	(0.0693)	(0.0696)	(0.2161)	(0.0694)
finished full time education 16	0.0318	-0.0674	-0.0402	-0.0333	-0.1021	-0.0330
	(0.0538)	(0.0499)	(0.0485)	(0.0484)	(0.1218)	(0.0482)
finished full time education 17	-0.0956	-0.1407**	-0.0923	-0.0858	-0.1799	-0.0883
	(0.0660)	(0.0632)	(0.0628)	(0.0628)	(0.1574)	(0.0624)
finished full time education 18	-0.1388**	-0.1975***	-0.1428**	-0.1334**	-0.2521	-0.1331**
	(0.0612)	(0.0639)	(0.0623)	(0.0633)	(0.1392)	(0.633)
finished ft educ. 19 or still at school	-0.1157*	-0.1729***	-0.0974*	-0.0851	-0.2657	-0.0882
	(0.0609)	(0.0591)	(0.0574)	(0.0582)	(0.1371)	(0.058)
university degree	-0.1478**	-0.2090***	-0.1218**	-0.1056*	0.0237	-0.1054*
	(0.0601)	(0.0618)	(0.0608)	(0.0619)	(0.1341)	(0.0616)
postgraduate	-0.1687***	-0.2477***	-0.1505**	-0.1291**	-0.1167	-0.1333**
	(0.0634)	(0.0672)	(0.0639)	(0.0641)	(0.1314)	(0.0638)
date partisanship measured	2010	2010	2010	2010	2005	2010
Always included: constant, respondent's party id, income, gender, age and age squared						
Fixed effects	Region	Const	Const	Const	Const	Const
Observations	3247	3115	3013	3097	596	3097
R-squared	0.2080	0.0614 (w)	0.1039 (w)	0.1086 (w)	0.1318	0.1101

Note: R-squared referred to within variation when constituency fixed effects are included. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. In column 1 (specification without constituency fixed effects) we also include all constituency-level variables and cluster the standard errors at the constituency level

Table 8. Involvement perception and voting behaviour (British Election Study)

Dep. Variable	voted for the party of the incumbent MP							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
perceived involvement (continuous)	-0.0386***		-0.0372***		-0.0452***		-0.0401***	
	(0.0071)		(0.0082)		(0.0088)		(0.0100)	
perceived involvement (binary)		-0.0656***		-0.0610***		-0.0758***		-0.0685***
		(0.0138)		(0.0157)		(0.0167)		(0.0191)
voted for current MP in previous election	0.2835***	0.2841***	0.3002***	0.3012***	0.2818***	0.2823***	0.3020***	0.3025***
	(0.0231)	(0.0232)	(0.0262)	(0.0262)	(0.0240)	(0.0241)	(0.0271)	(0.0272)
partisan match	0.4863***	0.4887***	0.4783***	0.4797***	0.4902***	0.4928***	0.4814***	0.4829***
	(0.0250)	(0.0251)	(0.0267)	(0.0268)	(0.0258)	(0.0259)	(0.0273)	(0.0273)
constituency and MP control variables	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
individual control variables	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
fixed effects	region	region	region	region	const	const	const	const
sample includes constituencies where incumbent MP is not standing	yes	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
Observations	3169	3169	2526	2526	3044	3044	2429	2429
R-squared	0.5163	0.5154	0.5223	0.5214	0.5082 (within)	0.5074 (within)	0.5146 (within)	0.5141 (within)

Note. All regressions contain a constant and constituency and individual control variables (see table 13 for a complete list). In regressions with constituency fixed effects (columns 5-8) only constituencies with at least four observations are kept. There are 316 constituency fixed effects in columns 5 and 6 and 252 in columns 7 and 8. Region fixed effects consists of the 11 UK standard regions. Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1. In specifications without constituency fixed effects, standard errors are clustered at the constituency level.

Table 9. Total expenses news reporting

dependent variable:	scandal-related news coverage 8 May - 8 August 2009							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
news-pre	0.5223***	0.4729***	0.4731***	0.4550***	0.4518***	0.4580***	0.4685***	0.4517***
	(0.0306)	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.048)	(0.039)	(0.047)	(0.039)	(0.048)
Legg-money	0.0638	0.0480***	0.0479***	0.0519***	0.0469***	0.0535***		
	(0.0126)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.016)		
conservative MP		0.0703	0.0520	-0.0686	0.1191	-0.3254	-0.0591	-0.2590
		(0.119)	(0.134)	(0.169)	(0.138)	(0.205)	(0.158)	(0.210)
libdem MP		-0.1336	-0.1476	-0.0334	0.0378	-0.1976	-0.1198	-0.0715
		(0.152)	(0.158)	(0.197)	(0.148)	(0.288)	(0.188)	(0.258)
other MP		0.2673	0.2222	0.3091	0.2633	0.4845**	0.1908	0.1242
		(0.192)	(0.200)	(0.207)	(0.197)	(0.214)	(0.279)	(0.290)
female		0.3916***	0.4103***	0.5544***	0.4157***	0.5788***	0.4073***	0.5485***
		(0.107)	(0.110)	(0.154)	(0.109)	(0.156)	(0.109)	(0.153)
age		0.0016	0.0026	0.0034	0.0039	0.0049	0.0027	0.0037
		(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.009)
seniority		0.0288***	0.0265***	0.0286***	0.0255***	0.0306***	0.0259***	0.0275***
		(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)
degree		0.1467	0.1469	0.2651**	0.1382	0.2918**	0.1395	0.2482*
		(0.107)	(0.107)	(0.129)	(0.106)	(0.133)	(0.107)	(0.132)
oxbridge		-0.0555	-0.0554	0.0234	-0.0295	0.0103	-0.0571	0.0321
		(0.114)	(0.114)	(0.148)	(0.114)	(0.148)	(0.115)	(0.150)
marginal in 2005			-0.1410	-0.1990	-0.1480		-0.1438	-0.1784
			(0.116)	(0.140)	(0.116)		(0.115)	(0.139)
turnout in 2005			-0.0003	0.0076	-0.0008	0.0129	-0.0008	0.0063
			(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.009)	(0.013)
distance from Westm.			0.0011	0.0000	0.0012	-0.0001	0.0011	-0.0000
			(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
front-bench		0.5589***	0.5545***	0.4902**		0.5244**	0.5598***	0.4975**
		(0.178)	(0.179)	(0.244)		(0.245)	(0.18)	(0.2480)
conserv frontbench					0.4414*			
					(0.259)			
labour frontbench					0.9641***			
					(0.239)			
labour marginal						-0.4794**		
						(0.194)		
conservative marginal						0.2753		
						(0.235)		
libdem marginal						-0.0097		
						(0.337)		
other marginal						-0.7656**		
						(0.355)		
Legg money x Lab							0.0397***	0.0325
							(0.015)	(0.020)
Legg money x Con							0.0681***	0.0830***
							(0.025)	(0.029)
Legg money x Libdem							0.0248	0.0395
							(0.038)	(0.047)
Legg money x Other							0.0481	0.0873
							(0.056)	(0.059)
Constant	0.8177	0.2950	0.2042	-0.3207	0.1617	-0.6603	0.2895	-0.1381
	(0.0833)	(0.397)	(0.682)	(0.900)	(0.678)	(0.910)	(0.697)	(0.928)
Sample	All	All	All	Restricted	All	Restricted	All	Restricted
Observations	600	600	600	370	600	370	600	370
R-squared	0.3702	0.4375	0.4408	0.4608	0.4527	0.4733	0.4423	0.4650

Note: Data do not include MPs from Northern Ireland and other MPs (details in the text). The restricted sample only includes MPs whose constituency boundaries changed by less than 10% according to Ralling and Thrusher (2007). Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 10. Coverage of the scandal by newspaper (SURE estimates)

variable	natural log of total expenses news (May 2009-May2010)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
newspaper	telegraph	times	guardian	indep.	scotsman	sun	daily mail
news-pre	0.1159***	0.1680***	0.2317***	0.1761***	0.1681***	0.1799***	0.1706***
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.024)
Legg-money	0.0341***	0.0560***	0.0321***	0.0351***	0.0325***	0.0383***	0.0395***
	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)
cons. backbench	0.1455	0.0912	0.1719	0.0570	0.0905	0.1593	0.0943
	(0.090)	(0.123)	(0.108)	(0.095)	(0.089)	(0.102)	(0.092)
cons. frontbench	0.4849***	0.7184***	0.4337*	0.4892**	0.5416***	0.4798**	0.3317*
	(0.185)	(0.251)	(0.221)	(0.194)	(0.181)	(0.209)	(0.188)
labour frontbench	1.1262***	1.3965***	1.3074***	1.1852***	0.9176***	0.9648***	1.1651***
	(0.128)	(0.173)	(0.152)	(0.133)	(0.123)	(0.143)	(0.130)
libdem	0.1803	0.0972	0.3060**	0.0700	0.1550	-0.0605	0.2130*
	(0.114)	(0.155)	(0.136)	(0.120)	(0.112)	(0.128)	(0.116)
other	-0.1323	0.2004	0.4475**	0.1845	0.2535	-0.0217	0.0377
	(0.173)	(0.236)	(0.207)	(0.182)	(0.171)	(0.196)	(0.177)
female	0.1569**	0.2560**	0.2604***	0.1634**	0.1196	0.2440***	0.1683**
	(0.077)	(0.105)	(0.092)	(0.081)	(0.076)	(0.087)	(0.079)
age	0.0020	-0.0040	-0.0034	-0.0060	-0.0079*	0.0027	0.0029
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
seniority	0.0168***	0.0314***	0.0295***	0.0248***	0.0225***	0.0145**	0.0101*
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
degree	0.0753	0.0942	0.1048	0.0166	0.0814	0.1453	0.0510
	(0.080)	(0.108)	(0.095)	(0.084)	(0.078)	(0.090)	(0.081)
oxbridge	0.1293*	0.1452	0.0547	0.1330*	0.0933	0.0391	0.0598
	(0.073)	(0.100)	(0.088)	(0.077)	(0.072)	(0.083)	(0.075)
marginal in 2005	-0.0456	-0.1309	-0.1449	-0.0899	-0.0621	-0.0891	-0.1691**
	(0.075)	(0.102)	(0.089)	(0.079)	(0.073)	(0.084)	(0.076)
turnout in 2005	-0.0061	0.0003	-0.0023	-0.0036	-0.0022	0.0044	-0.0035
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)
distance from parl.	0.0012*	0.0006	-0.0002	0.0006	0.0007	0.0011	0.0005
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Constant	0.6365	0.0777	0.2717	0.5378	0.3144	-0.7470	0.2578
	(0.455)	(0.619)	(0.546)	(0.478)	(0.448)	(0.515)	(0.465)
Observations	600	600	600	600	600	600	600
R-squared	0.3248	0.3507	0.3803	0.3562	0.3558	0.3522	0.3452

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A1: Description of variables and summary statistics

	n	Mean	s.d.	min	max
Indicators of involvement in the scandal					
Total mentions of MP name+expenses, 8 May 2009 - 7 Aug 201(	359	27.03	59.35	0	563
Total mentions of MP name, 8 Feb - 7 May 200	359	38.94	113.43	0	1387
Money owed according to Legg Report minus amount reduced in appe	359	1568.94	4375.44	0	42458.21
MP voting behaviour					
Number of loyal votes between 1 June 2008 and 7 May 2009 [loyal_before	359	164.70	39.57	0	238
Number of vote rebellions between 1 June 2008 and 7 May 2009 [rebel_before	359	4.41	5.83	0	52
Number of missed votes between 1 June 2008 and 7 May 2009 [absent_before	359	81.73	37.54	10	252
Number of loyal votes between 8 May 2009 and 1 May 2010 [loyal_after	359	173.03	47.40	0	256
Number of vote rebellions between 8 May 2009 and 1 May 2010 [rebel_after	359	1.51	5.02	0	57
Number of missed votes between 8 May 2009 and 1 May 2010 [absent_after	359	92.86	44.75	5	269
Media coverage					
Mentions of MP name in The Daily Telegraph - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [telegraph0	359	4.09	13.38	0	171
Mentions of MP name in The Times - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [times0	359	10.33	30.29	0	307
Mentions of MP name in The Independent - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [independent(	359	3.78	11.69	0	126
Mentions of MP name in The Guardian - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [guardian0	359	5.49	15.74	0	192
Mentions of MP name in The Scotsman - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [scotsman(	359	3.60	18.72	0	312
Mentions of MP name in The Sun - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [sun0	359	6.81	24.13	0	328
Mentions of MP name in The Daily Mail - 8 Feb 2009 to 7 May 2009 [dailymail0	359	4.84	14.31	0	210
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Daily Telegraph - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [telegraph	359	4.12	8.41	0	80
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Times - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [times	359	6.62	15.39	0	139
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Independent - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [independen	359	3.14	6.93	0	55
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Guardian - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [guardian	359	4.43	10.15	0	86
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Scotsman - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [scotsma	359	2.49	5.73	0	54
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Sun - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [sun	359	3.35	8.46	0	94
Mentions of MP name + EXPENSES in The Daily Mail - 8 May 2009 to 7 August 2009 [dailymail	359	2.88	7.73	0	87
Individual charecteristics of MPs					
Age in years in 2009 [age]	359	54.91	9.28	29	79
Years in Parliament in 2009 [seniority]	359	13.30	8.12	4	45
Variables referred to electoral constituency					
Difference of party vote-share between 2005 and 2010 [dparty	356	-1.72	7.12	-18.63	16.84
Winning majority % in the 2005 general election [maj05	359	17.82	11.86	0.03	58.39
Distance from constituency office to Parliament [distanc	359	161.26	143.10	0	702
Voter turnout in MP constituency in 2005 election [turn05	359	61.71	5.77	37.62	76.43
% boundary change since 2005 election	359	2.93	3.17	0	10
Binary variables	**0 (no)**	**1 (yes)**			
Labour MP [lab]	193	166			
Conservative MP [con]	242	117			
Liberal Democrat MP [libdem]	320	39			
MP from other party [other]	349	10			
Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat front bench on 7 May 2009 [front07052009	313	46			
Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat front bench on 11 April 2005 [front11042005	319	40			
Labour, Conservative or Liberal Democrat front bench on 12 April 2010 [front12042010	312	47			
MP stood down, resigned or was deselected between May 2009 and the 2010 general election [ret_affecte	310	49			
MP stood down, resigned or was deselected before May 2009 [ret_notaf	332	27			
Female MP	294	65			
MP has university degree	75	284			
MP graduated from Oxford or Cambridg	256	103			
Constituency with < 10% majority in 2005 election (marginal	253	106			
Constituency boundary change since 2005 electio	122	237			

Note. The number of observations (n) refers to the sample most commonly used in our regressions. We exclude abolished constituencies, constituencies where retiring MPs were replaced by sitting MPs for the 2010 election, Northern Ireland constituencies and constituencies with a boundary change greater than 10%.

Table A2: Newspaper Readership (2009-2010)

National daily newspapers	Total copies (thousands)	Share
The Sun	7700	15.5
Daily Mail	4739	9.5
Daily Mirror/Record	4004	8
The Daily Telegraph	1751	3.5
The Times	1613	3.2
Daily Star	1551	3.1
Daily Express	1423	2.9
The Guardian	1130	2.3
The Independent	556	1.1
Financial Times	391	0.8
Regional daily newspapers (outside London)		
Press & Jnl-Ab'deen	207	0.4
Yorkshire Post	177	0.4
Cour & Adtsr-Dundee	168	0.3
The Herald-Scotland	145	0.3
The Scotsman	131	0.3
Evening Times-Glasgw	151	0.3
Sunday newspapers		
News of the World	7628	15.3
The Mail on Sunday	4974	10
Sunday Mirror	3816	7.7
The Sunday Times	3050	6.1
Sunday Express	1518	3
The Sunday Telegraph	1518	3
The People	1291	2.6
Sunday Mail	1109	2.2
The Observer	1078	2.2
Daily Star Sunday	941	1.9
The Sunday Post	799	1.6
The Independent on Sunday	594	1.2
Scotland on Sunday	191	0.4
Sunday Herald-Scot	142	0.3

Source: National Readership Survey

Table A3: Description of variables and summary statistics (British Election Study)

Variable	n	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
perceived involvement (continuous)	3247	2.439	3.381	0	11
perceived involvement (binary)	3247	0.425	0.494	0	1
voted for the party of incumbent MP	3169	0.441	0.497	0	1
voted for the MP in 2005	3247	0.484	0.5	0	1
income	3247	7.261	3.666	1	16
gender (male)	3247	0.567	0.496	0	1
trust others	3247	5.895	2.17	0	10
attention to politics	3247	7.107	2.064	0	10
age	3247	53.978	13.094	21	90
partisan match	3247	0.394	0.489	0	1
Respondent thinks most MPs are corrupt	3097	2.221	1.208	0	4
press usage	3097	3.343	1.472	1	5
television usage	3097	3.331	1.106	1	5
internet usage	3097	2.158	0.761	1	3
	n	%			
education					
finished full time education 15 or younger	421	13.52			
finished full time education 16	687	22.05			
finished full time education 17	306	9.82			
finished full time education 18	382	12.26			
finished ft educ. 19 or still at school	408	13.1			
university degree	519	16.66			
postgraduate	392	12.58			
party identification					
Labour	995	31.94			
Conservative	926	29.73			
Liberal Democratic	406	13.03			
Other	376	12.07			
None	412	13.23			
democracy satisfaction					
very satisfied	171	5.49			
fairly satisfied	1,248	40.06			
little dissatisfied	1,053	33.8			
very dissatisfied	643	20.64			

Note: the sample size (n) refers to the largest number of observations used for a specific variable among the various specifications