

# Parliamentary activity of MPs is affected by their place in corporate networks

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New research from experts based at The University of Manchester and Edinburgh Napier University has found evidence that suggests that MPs who are heavily embedded in corporate networks outside Westminster

may be too busy to effectively perform their parliamentary duties.

The [research](#) looked at the business connections of all current sitting MPs using data from Companies House. Once MPs were studied in the context of wider [corporate networks](#), it was found that their position in these networks affected their parliamentary activity in different ways.

- MPs who are heavily embedded in corporate networks—i.e., those who work with lots of well-connected companies—are less likely to be active in parliament
- On the other hand, those who sit in "brokerage" roles—i.e., bringing together otherwise unconnected companies—are more likely to be active

While more research is needed to explain this, initial interpretations suggest that heavily embedded MPs may be too busy to serve their constituents, while MPs in brokerage roles may have extra motivations to be active in parliament.

The findings bring into question the important parliamentary principle that an MP "should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organizations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties."

The research also shows that Conservative MPs are more heavily embedded in corporate networks. Conservative and Labor MPs are actually equally likely to be a company director, but Conservative MPs hold many more directorships.

In both parties, the vast majority of these [company](#) directorships are for companies outside of the MP's constituency, suggesting that these roles are not justified by their responsibilities to their constituents.

"There is a growing debate about whether MPs should have roles beyond Parliament," said The University of Manchester's Dr. Jack Newman, co-author of the research. "They all sign up to a set of principles that say they shouldn't be influenced by outside interests. Our paper is an important piece of evidence that this principle may not be realized in reality."

"In an age of declining trust in politics, it is so important that politicians focus on their day job and don't get distracted by commitments to other organizations. This is an important first step in understanding the impact of MP's outside interest on their capacity to serve," said Edinburgh Napier University's Dr. Matthew Smith, another co-author of the research. "However, further work is needed to understand if these corporate directorships shapes different behaviors within Parliament, such as what MPs say on key issues and their voting record."

**More information:** Matthew Smith et al, MPS, Outside Interests, and Corporate Boards: Too Busy to Serve?, *Parliamentary Affairs* (2023).  
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