

Digital Constituent Outreach and Engagement in Linguistically Divided Societies: Making Sense of the Canadian Case

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Abstract

Uses of digital communication tools - including social media - for constituent outreach and engagement by formal political players have received significant academic attention in Canada and internationally in recent years. These media tools have emerged as important communication channels between members of the Canadian public and their politicians. However, little to no research has been done on the role and effects of language on different aspects of constituent communication. This paper explores this dynamic by taking interest in provincial politicians' uses of languages for digital constituent outreach and mobilization. Questions of language are especially relevant in Canada as this country is recognized by law as bilingual. Because provincial laws do not provide for politicians' digital communication to be multilingual, let alone bilingual, uses of languages can be seen as strategic aspect to political communication designed to garner support in a linguistically fragmented society. First, this paper examines to what degree provincial politicians and parties provide bilingual content in their digital communication infrastructures (official websites and select social media channels). Second, this paper identifies factors that could affect politicians' decision to opt for bilingualism when reaching out to constituents online. Specifically, it tests correlations between politicians' demographic and political profile (e.g. age, preferred language, jurisdiction, political party) and use of bilingualism online. Finally, this paper considers how politicians' lack of bilingualism in the digital mediascape can limit linguistic minorities' ability to be informed politically and, by extension, take part in the political process.

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Overview

The last decade has been marked by the emergence of a large body of scholarly work focusing on uses of digital media for politicking in Canada, whether it is by established political and media elites or members of civil society. These tools, which emerged as the “dominant political communications method in Canadian party system” in 1993¹ (Small 2007: 642), have impacted different facets of Canadian politics. On one hand, they have altered “how representative institutions [and other formal political players] communicate and respond to citizens” (Small, Jensen et al. 2014: 9) in and out of elections. On the other hand, they have contributed to reshape how and to what extent more informal - or peripheral - political players (e.g. advocacy groups, grassroots movements, activist networks, ordinary citizens) can be informed about, understand, take part in and, in some cases, influence the political process (Vissers and Stolle 2014; Vissers, Hooghe et al. 2011).

More importantly in the case of this paper, there is growing interest among academics in the rise and increasing utilization of social media for disseminating and acquiring political information, mobilizing support, generating, promoting, and coordinating mobilization initiatives and, in some cases, fostering political change (e.g. Small, Jensen et al. 2014; Moscato 2016; Giasson, Jensen et al. 2014; Francoli 2014). In fact, these user-generated communication channels have become fixtures of the Canadian political mediascape since 2006 when blogs became integral components of many candidates and political parties’ e-electioneering toolkit during the federal election (Raynauld 2015).²

Social media are likely to gain more traction in all spheres of Canadian political life over the next decade. Wigand (2010: 162) notes that since early 2004, government agencies and, to some degree, individuals at the federal government have started experimenting and, in some cases, integrating social media in their digital communication toolbox. More recently, Small, Jensen et al. (2014) found that 80 percent of federal Members of Parliament (MPs) had at least one account on the micro-communication service Twitter that they used for various constituent communication activities in 2014. Other scholars have explored how individuals and

¹ It should be noted that “the U.S. Congress adopted the Internet for internal and external communication” in the mid-1990s (Taylor and Kent 2004).

² It should be noted that *Globe and Mail* reporter Bill Curry labelled the 2011 Canadian federal election as “Canada’s first social media election” (see Francoli 2014: 133).

organizations situated more at the edges of the traditional political arena are leveraging social media's distinct capabilities to be active politically and civically. For example, citizens are increasingly turning to these tools to stay informed about politics. According to a 2014 survey, 13 percent of Canadians reported visiting a political party or politician website to get political information, while 6.3 percent friended at least one political player on Facebook and 3.9 percent followed at least one on Twitter (Small, Jansen et al. 2014). Other studies have demonstrated quantitatively and qualitatively how these media channels have been instrumental in fueling grassroots-intensive socio-political protest action in recent years (e.g. Haggart 2013; Poell 2014; Raynauld, Lalancette et al. 2016).³

This paper unpacks uses of digital media media - including social media - by members of established political elites for citizen outreach and mobilization in Canada. This area of research has received significant academic attention in recent years (e.g. Francoli and Ward 2008; Patten 2013; Raynauld and Greenberg 2014; Giasson, Le Bars et al. 2013). A closer look at this body of work allows for the identification of three main research trends. First, a significant portion of the research has focused on social media-based politicking in the context of elections or other more intense periods of political activity. Much less work has been done on Web 2.0-based citizen outreach and engagement outside critical moments of the political process (see Francoli and Ward 2008; Small 2008; 2012; Koop and Marland 2012; Raynauld and Richez 2015).

Second, while dynamics of social media and politicking at the federal level have been the object of large volumes of scholarly work in Canada, those at community, municipal, and provincial levels have remained under-explored for the most part. Of interest are works by Lalancette, Blanchard et al. (2014), Giasson, Le Bars et al. (2013), and Lalancette (2013) who have studied Quebec political parties and candidates' campaigning activities in the social mediascape during the 2012 provincial elections, Smith and Chen (2010) who took a look at social media's role in the electoral process in Alberta as well as Dumitrica (2014) and Hagar (2014) who explored how social media impacted candidates' e-electioneering activities during the 2010 Calgary municipal elections and the 2010 Niagara municipal elections respectively. As noted by Small (2012: 642), regionalism constitutes "a central trait of Canadian political life." Much more attention should be

³ Of interest are works on the Facebook-based Fair Copyright movement in 2007 (Haggart 2013), the Toronto G20 demonstrations in 2012 (Poell 2014), or the 2012 Quebec student strike against higher tuition fees (Raynauld, Lalancette et al. 2016).

given to this area of research. Finally, while English-language patterns of political communication, mobilization, and organizing in Canada have been studied extensively, few investigations have been done on uses of French and other non-official languages for politicking (Raynald and Greenberg 2014; Raynald and Richez 2015)). More importantly, few studies have analyzed politicians' choices of languages in the context of constituent outreach and, to a much lesser extent, engagement (Raynald and Greenberg 2014; Raynald and Richez 2015).

This paper addresses the previously identified gaps in the academic literature by characterizing quantitatively how politicians in five Canadian provinces - British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec - are turning to English, French, and other languages for constituent outreach. The first section of this paper addresses issues of languages and politics in Canada by mapping the steadily changing linguistic makeup of the Canadian public. It also discusses linguistic rights when it comes to public access to and delivery of information and services to citizens at the provincial level. The second section offers an overview of recent scholarly work dealing with digital constituent communication strategies in Canada. Third, we define the methodological approach that was developed for the study of provincial elected officials' presence in Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 media environments. The fourth section of this paper provides an in-depth quantitative analysis of provincial elected officials' uses of language in institutional websites and third-party social networking services (SNSs), such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We wrap up this paper by exploring some of the implications of the findings of this study for linguistic minorities' awareness of and opportunities to be part of formal political processes in Canada.

Issues of Language in Canada

Issues of language, political communication, and digital media are particularly salient in Canada as the country is recognized by law as officially bilingual (French and English). Moreover, it encompasses linguistic minorities that are present in all provinces and territories and that have grown in size and diversity over the last four decades (Statistics Canada 2011). In 2006, a Statistics Canada report (2006) noted that "the number of people in Canada whose mother tongue is neither English nor French has increased substantially since the mid-1980s." More recently, Canadians reported speaking more than 200 different languages at home in 2011 (Statistics

Canada 2011). As of 2011, approximately 58 percent of the Canadian public, or 19.1 million individuals, reported English as their mother tongue compared to 7.2 million persons, or 22 percent of the Canadian population, for French. As for languages most spoken at home, 66 percent of respondents reported speaking English compared to 21 percent for French (Statistics Canada 2011). Still close to 98 percent of Canadians reported being able to take part in a conversation in French or English (Statistics Canada 2011).

Critically, languages other than French and English have gained significant traction among the Canadian public, especially in large urban centers such as Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, and Montreal (Statistics Canada 2011). For example, 20 percent of Canadians spoke most frequently a language other than English or French (including Aboriginal languages) when at home in 2011. Non-official languages that have gained popularity in home use between 2006 and 2011 include Tagalog (+64 percent), “Mandarin (+51%), 4 Arabic (+47%), Hindi (+44%), Creoles (+42%), Bengali (+40%), Persian (+33%) and Spanish (+32%)” (Statistics Canada 2011).

Scholars have studied issues relating to uses and effects of languages in different spheres of social, economic, and political activity in Canada. Some of them have conducted work on the production and delivery of news and commentary through offline mass media platforms by legacy media organizations in Canada (Conway 2006; De Bonville and Vermette 1994; Raynauld 2012). Other fields of activity investigated include education and academic knowledge production and dissemination (e.g. Arnott 2015; Gentil and Séror 2014), culture and ethnicity (e.g. Haque 2012; Han 2012), governance (e.g. Cardinal, Gaspard et al. 2015), and health communication (e.g. Gulati, Watt et al. 2012; Lebrun 2012). However, few studies have focused on the impact of languages on the political communication realm in Canada.

Characterizing and analyzing politicians’ uses of languages for digital constituent outreach and engagement is particularly important. As Parkin and Zlotnick (2011) explain, knowledge of language can impact members of the public’s familiarity with political and policy issues as well as processes. More importantly, it can affect the intensity, scope, and depth of their engagement in political and civic life. In Canada, legal provisions - both statutory and constitutional - guarantee language rights, which may impact citizen’s knowledge of and engagement with political issues. Though the Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes “English and French are the

official languages of Canada and have equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all institutions of the Parliament and government of Canada” (s 16(1)), there are variations in types of language rights protected in each province.

British Columbia is the only Canadian province without a legislative or policy framework for providing services to its linguistic minority (Hudon, 2016), though it is constitutionally required like all other provinces to provide minority language education (Constitution Act, 1982: s 23). Until recently, Newfoundland and Labrador had not enacted a policy “ensur[ing] a more consistent and coordinated approach to service delivery in French” to its Acadian community (Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015: 1). Alberta and Saskatchewan have statutory guarantees for use of French and English in their legislatures and certain courts (Languages Act, 2000; Language Act, 2001), but only Saskatchewan has a French language service policy (Government of Saskatchewan, 2003). In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the Acadian minority is offered services in French based on needs (French-Language Services Act, 2004; French Language Services Act, 2013), but French has no special status in their legislative assemblies. As for Ontario, it recognizes the use of French and English in its legislature and offers extended services to its Francophone minority (French Language Services Act, 1990).

Only three Canadian provinces are constitutionally required to guarantee certain rights to their linguistic minority. While Quebec is officially French, it offers a wide range of services to its Anglophone minority (Charter of the French Language). Since Confederation, the use French and English is constitutionally protected in Quebec’s National Assembly and courts (Constitution Act, 1867: s 133). Manitoba joined the Canadian federation in 1870 on the condition of recognizing an equal status to French and English in its legislature and courts (Manitoba Act, 1870 : s 23), and a bill pertaining to the provision of government services to Franco-Manitobains is currently being debated in the legislature (Bill 6 - The Francophone Community Enhancement and Support Act, 2016). As for New Brunswick, it is the only province that has constitutionally adopted official bilingualism to the same extent as the federal government (Constitution Act, 1982: ss 16-20).

In all Canadian provinces, neither the statutory provisions nor constitutional guarantees discussed provide for legislators’ online communications to be bilingual. Even in New

Brunswick where the *Official Languages Act* provides that “[i]nstitutions shall publish all postings, publications and documents intended for the general public in both official languages” (s 29), members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) as individuals and not institutions may express themselves in the language(s) of their choice when engaging with the public on and off the Internet. It should be noted that New Brunswick ministers’ digital communications remain an area of contention. According to Canada’s Official Languages Commissioner Graham Fraser, federal ministers should use both French and English when communicating content of “governmental nature” to the public online, as required by the *Official Languages Act* (Marquis 2015). Since the New Brunswick *Official Languages Act* and the federal *Official Languages Act* have similar provisions regarding governmental communications, it is to be expected that the same obligation applies to Cabinet members in New Brunswick.

Digital Media and Constituent Communication

The process of constituent communication in liberal democracies can be viewed as intrinsically twofold. On one hand, it encompasses public members’ ability and efforts to reach out to as well as connect and interact with politicians representing them at local, regional, or national levels to share questions, concerns, wishes, or requests based on their personal interests and objectives. In doing so, they attempt to gain information about and better understand formal political processes as well as influence the type, scope, depth, or intensity of representation they receive from politicians (Broockman 2014; Cormack 2013). Studies have indeed shown that politicians tend to act following constituents’ feedback, even if “in their natural state they often know surprisingly little about what their constituents prefer” (Broockman 2014: 307; see also: Broockman and Skovron 2014; Butler and Nickerson 2011). Politicians rely heavily on information received from constituents sharing their preferences, interests, and priorities to tailor their decision making in the context of their work (Broockman and Ryan 2015; Miler 2010).

On the other hand, constituent communication comprises all operations conducted by politicians to mass disseminate information among and, to a lesser extent, interact with constituents “and other interested parties” to keep them aware of and, in some cases, involved in different facets of the formal political process (Glassman, Straus et al. 2013: 60; Cormack 2013). Authors have isolated three categories of constituent communication activities that are highly strategic in

nature as politicians are constantly cultivating support and, by extension, maximizing their prospects of reelection: credit claiming, position taking, and advertising (Cormack 2013; Grimmer, Messing et al. 2012; Grimmer 2013a).

First, credit claiming can be defined as the transfer of often strategically selected and packaged information designed to promote “particularized benefits to constituents” (Cormack 2013; see also Grimmer 2013). Second, position taking can be described as an activity through which candidates share their views on policy issues as well as ideological matters. In some cases, they also provide details about the efforts they deploy to achieve their goals, such as by revealing “specific vote associated with a position” (“vote revelation”) (Cormack 2013; see also Butler, Karpowitz et al. 2012). Finally, advertising refers to the ensemble of tactics used by politicians to gain attention from members of the public in order to boost their name recognition and, by extension, credibility and trustworthiness (Cormack 2013; Straus, Williams et al. 2014). From a broader perspective, all constituent communication-oriented operations are used by politicians more “to promote themselves [and their activities] [...] than to engage their opponents or their constituents” in a meaningful way (Hemphill, Otterbacher et al. 2013: 878).

Research had shown that constituent communication activities have three broad implications. First, they fulfill a fundamentally democratic role as they allow for the dissemination of basic information about public policy issues and governmental activities that can be of interest to members of civic society who can be affected - directly or indirectly - by them (Glassman, Straus et al. 2013). Furthermore, they can have positive effects on member of the public’s scope and intensity of engagement in different facets of the formal political process, stimulate political deliberation, and increase awareness and understanding of political and policy matters, as well as reduce distance between members of the public and political elites. In other words, it can help enhance the structure and functioning of democracy (Taylor and Kent 2004).

Second, constituent communication constitutes an integral component of the responsibilities of politicians that represent members of the public who voted for them during elections. It allows for politicians to be in contact with constituents and provide them with representation services (e.g. information about policy debates, updates about their activities) that are tailored to their preferences, interests, or goals (Hickey 2010). In other words, it can be viewed as “fundamental

to effective democratic representation” (Esterling, Lazer et al. 2004; see also: Taylor and Kent 2004).

Third, there is a growingly strong electoral component to constituent outreach and mobilization. Politicians stay in contact with members of the public between elections to cultivate and, if possible, broaden their support base ahead of future electoral campaign. This is especially important as dynamics of political communication, mobilization, and organizing in Canada have been rapidly shifting into a mode of permanent political campaigning since 2004 (Flanagan 2012; Sampert, Trimble et al. 2014; Pétry 2014).⁴ The concept of permanent campaigning can be defined as the act of engaging members of the public on an on-going basis to gauge their evolving dispositions on political and policy matters as well as generate and maintain support (e.g. branding, fundraising) during as well as between elections (Vergeer, Hermans et al. 2013). However, some authors have noted that the positive effects of effective constituent communication and, by extension, service to members of the public on “securing electoral success is disputable at best” (Hickey 2010: 6).

Social media (e.g micro-communication channels like Twitter, user-generated content sharing services like YouTube, social networking sites like Facebook), have gained significant traction among all segments of the public over the last decade. They have become a central component of everyday constituent communication in Canada and other national contexts. Already in 2010, social media were believed to “possess the greatest potential for changes in constituent communication strategies” (Shogan 2010). In fact, Straus, Glassman et al. (2013: 61) note that “relying on conventional media outlets is not an optimal mechanism for most [politicians] to advocate their ideas or positions to a wide audience” comprising individuals with varying preferences, interests, and objectives.

While supplementing existing modes of mediated constituent communication offline (e.g. snail mail, phone, fax), the distinct properties of social media have contributed to the redefinition of the format, speed, directionality, grammar, as well as tone of exchanges between politicians and increasingly diverse and fragmented constituencies (Grimmer 2013b; Straus, Glassman et al. 2013; Straus, Williams et al. 2014; Hemphill, Otterbacher et al. 2013; Peterson 2012). For

⁴ According to Pétry (2004), patterns of permanent campaigning have been observed in the Canadian political communication landscape since 2004.

example, the low-cost, interactive nature, and relative simplicity and flexibility of these tools offer politicians more opportunities to engage in constituent outreach and engagement in different ways. Conversely, it provides members new ways to acquire updates and background information about the political process as well as stay in touch with politicians. From a broader perspective, it can be argued that these tools have led to the evolution of the representational style in many Western-style democracies (Straus, Williams et al. 2014; Peterson 2012).

Little research has been done on digital media - including social media - and constituent communication in Canada⁵ (e.g. Small, Jensen et al. 2014; Raynauld and Richez 2015). However, several studies focusing on this area of research have been conducted in the United States.⁶ Of interest are works on how politicians at all levels of government in the United States are leveraging the structural and functional properties of social media to establish a two-way communication bridge with the public as well other politicians (Straus, Williams et al 2014; Hong and Nadler 2012; Peterson 2012; Hemphill, Otterbacher et al. 2013; Glassman, Straus et al. 2013). Straus, Williams et al. (2014: 1) have focused on “the *variation of use* amongst U.S. Senators in their Twitter engagement.” They found that several variables impacted the ways in which and to what extent U.S. senators turned to Twitter for their official communication with the people they represent, including their political ideology, the socio-economic status of their constituency, their familiarity with social media capabilities, or their closeness in age to retirement (Straus, Williams et al. 2014).

Another study by Peterson (2012) took interest in the determinants influencing members of U.S. Congress to adopt the micro-communication site Twitter and integrate it in their constituent communication strategy. He concluded that wide-ranging factors influenced the decision of members of U.S. Congress to be active on Twitter in the context of their official functions, including uses of social media by their constituents and their strategic needs ahead of election cycles. In other words, his study showed that dynamics of political communication on Twitter, both when it comes to their structure and content, are highly strategic in nature (Peterson 2012).

⁵ See overview section of this paper.

⁶ As of 2014, all sitting Senators have at least one account on the micro-communication Twitter to engage with varying levels of intensity in constituent communication (Straus, Glassman et al. 2014).

Building on this research work and seeking to fill previously identified gaps in the academic literature, this paper seeks to identify, characterize and analyze uses of languages by politicians in five Canadian provinces for digital constituent outreach and mobilization. Specifically it explores different socio-political variables that could be seen as driving politicians' uses of languages when engaging in communication activities targeting constituencies

Methods

In order to determine why and to what extent politicians are turning to digital media - including social media - to reach out to constituents in French and/or English, this paper takes a multiple case study approach. We examine from a quantitative perspective the structure of the online presence of members of legislative assemblies (MLAs) in British Columbia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. The provinces constitute adequate case studies as they share similar traits, but differ on others. On one hand, all jurisdictions selected for this study are part of the same country - Canada - and they all function under a Westminster style parliamentary system. On the other hand, they have different socio-linguistic makeups and the statuses given to French and English vary (Government of Canada, 2013; Hudon, 2016). Quebec and Ontario are home to the two largest official linguistic minorities in Canada, but it is in New Brunswick that the official language minority makes up the highest proportion of the population (Government of Canada, 2013).

Furthermore, French has no constitutional status in the government or the legislative assembly of British Columbia and Ontario. In contrast, the Quebec National Assembly, the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, and the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick are constitutionally required to function in both French and English. Yet New Brunswick is the only Canadian province where official bilingualism is recognized as mandatory in every parliamentary and governmental activities (Constitution Act 1867, s 133; Constitution Act 1982, ss 16-19). In total, we review uses of languages for digital constituent communication of 420 politicians from five provinces: British Columbia (84), New Brunswick (48), Manitoba (57), Ontario (106), and Quebec (125). Data was collected and coded for this study from May 12, 2015 to October 8, 2015.

In order to conduct this study, we collect content available on two categories of digital media platforms - institutional websites (Web 1.0) and commercially-owned SNSs (Web 2.0). Websites include legislators' profile pages on provincial legislative assemblies and on political parties websites, which are administered by these institutions. It should be noted that we add to this category of digital platforms MLAs' personal websites and blogs,⁷ for which templates are created by them or their political party.⁸ In other words, politicians can post their own content or leverage their party's content feed to add digital material to these websites.

We begin by determining which platforms are adopted by each politician for digital constituent outreach and engagement. We then qualitatively assess individual politicians' relative use of languages for each type of institutional site through an Official Bilingualism Index (OBi), which was developed specifically for this project (Table 1). When determining the OBi value of legislative assembly websites, political party websites, and personal websites, we consider content based on the structural and functional properties of each media platform. For example in the case of blogs, we take into account the content of the last 20 entries, since looking at all posts would be too onerous. We argue that considering this amount of data is sufficient to recognize patterns in MLAs' uses of language for communicating to and with constituencies. We also code for the presence of official languages on MLAs' profiles on commercially-owned SNSs: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Flickr. We attribute an OBi value for each SNS platform by looking at the content of the last 20 entries (posts, tweets, images, and video descriptions).

⁷ While politicians' blogs should be categorized as Web 2.0 platforms, they are considered as institutional websites because they are often deeply influenced by institutions.

⁸ MLAs' personal websites and blogs may be hosted on commercial servers or on institutional ones, such as those of political parties.

Table 1 - Official Bilingualism Index

Value	French-language content (percentage)	English-language content (percentage)
1	0	100
1.1	5	95
1.2	10	90
1.3	15	85
1.4	20	80
1.5	25	75
1.6	30	70
1.7	35	65
1.8	40	60
1.9	45	55
2	50	50
2.1	55	45
2.2	60	40
2.3	65	35
2.4	70	30
2.5	75	25
2.6	80	20
2.7	85	15
2.8	90	10
2.9	95	5
3	100	0

In order to characterize provincial legislators' level of bilingualism on their e-communication platforms, we construct a Global Official Bilingualism Index (GOBi). An MLA's individual GOBi represents an average of all Official Bilingualism Indexes (OBi) of the digital platforms he/she uses (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Global Official Bilingualism Index

$$\text{GOBi} = \frac{\text{OBi Platform 1} + \text{OBi Platform 2} + \text{OBi Platform 3} + \text{OBi Platform 4} + (\dots)}{\text{Number of platforms used}}$$

We seek to identify factors influencing provincial politicians' GOBis. For each MLA, we determine their socio-demographic profile (preferred language,⁹ age, gender, and visible minority status) as well as their political profile (jurisdictional affiliation, party affiliation, political rank, year of first election, and percentage of vote in last election). This information is collected from provincial legislative assemblies and governmental websites. We also reached out to the offices of some MLAs when complementary information was needed. Finally, we conduct statistical tests (regressions) between provincial politicians' demographic and political profiles and their GOBis.

It is possible that in this regression model, the impact of jurisdictions and political parties on politicians' uses of languages could be inflated, since MLAs' legislative assembly and political party profile pages' OBis were included in GOBi calculations. As previously mentioned, these website are administered by legislative assemblies and political parties respectively and individual politicians have, in most cases, less control on their linguistic content. Therefore, politicians from the same province will have the same OBis for their legislative assembly webpage, and politicians from the same party will usually have the same OBis for their political party webpage. We thus run a second regression model in which we remove legislative assembly and political party webpages OBis from GOBi calculations. We then test if predictor variables' influence in our first model remains strong.

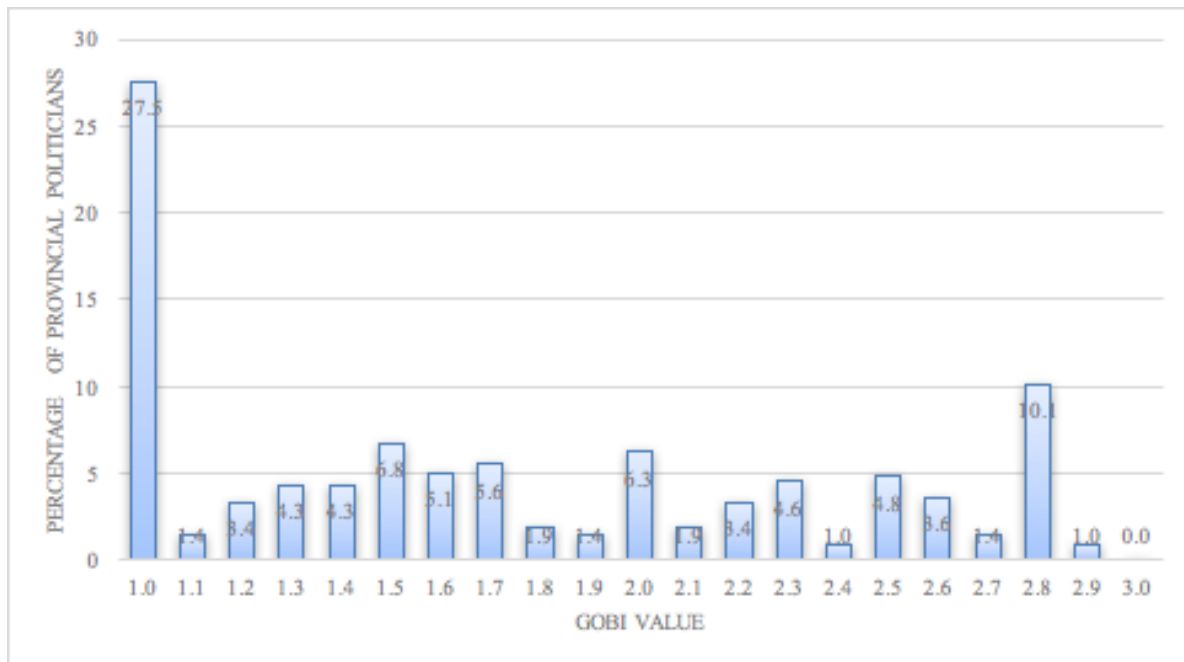
Findings

Graph 1 shows the percentage of provincial politicians per GOBi value. We round-up legislator's GOBis to one decimal point. The data shows that in the provinces under survey, MLAs range from being unilingual English (1.0) to almost unilingual French (2.9) on their digital communication infrastructures. The average GOBi of provincial politicians is 1.7 and the median is 1.5. The GOBi value with the highest headcount is 1.0. More specifically, 27.5 percent of MLAs in our sample are unilingual Anglophone. The GOBi value with the second highest

⁹ This information was obtained by contacting MLAs directly via email or phone.

headcount is 2.8. More specifically, 10.1 percent of MLAs in our sample are almost unilingual Francophone. Considering also that only 6.3 percent of provincial politicians of our dataset are perfectly bilingual, we suggest that online constituent outreach gravitates towards English and French unilingualism.

Graph 1: Percentage of provincial politicians per GOBi value



Model 1: GOBis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.921 ^a	.847	.839	.26216
a. Predictors: (Constant), % of votes in last election, political party affiliation, age, visible minority status, political rank, year first elected, gender, preferred language, jurisdictional affiliation				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	61.489	9	6.832	99.411	.000 ^b
	Residual	11.065	161	.069		
	Total	72.553	170			
a. Dependent variable: GOBi						
b. Predictors: (Constant), % of votes in last election, political party affiliation, age, visible minority status, political rank, year first elected, gender, preferred language, jurisdictional affiliation						

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.605	6.002		2.600	.010
	Preferred language	-.136	.034	-.161	-3.997	.000
	Gender	.057	.045	.041	1.278	.203
	Age	8.854E-5	.000	.071	1.969	.051
	Visible minority status	.034	.082	.013	.418	.676
	Political party affiliation	.121	.008	.869	14.631	.000
	Political rank	-.031	.011	-.092	-2.916	.004
	Jurisdictional affiliation	.239	.011	1.343	21.061	.000
	Year first elected	-.009	.003	-.091	-2.849	.005
	% of votes in last election	-.001	.002	-.012	-.372	.711
a. Dependent variable: GOBi						

Model 1 suggests the presence of a strong correlation (.92) between GOBi scores and provincial politicians' demographic profile (preferred language, gender, age, and visible minority status) and political profile (political party affiliation, political rank, jurisdictional affiliation, year first elected and percentage of votes in last election). The R-squared value indicates that 84.7 percent of the variance in GOBi scores is explained by the predictor variables and that 15.3 percent of it is due to other factors.

The consideration of predictors, whether they are statistically significant and, if so, the direction of the relationship, is of interest in the context of this project. The Beta Values measure the relative influence of predictor variables on the GOBi scores. Jurisdictional affiliation ($b=.239$, $p=.000$) is significant and is highly related to GOBi score (1.343). Thus, the jurisdictional affiliation variable is associated with higher GOBi scores. The political party affiliation variable ($b=.121$, $p=.000$) is significant and is highly related to GOBi score (.869) making political party affiliation associated with higher GOBi scores. Next, the year first elected ($b=-.009$, $p=.000$) is significant and its coefficient is negative (-.91). Preferred language ($b=-.136$, $p=.000$) is significant and its coefficient is negative (-.161). Political rank ($b=-.031$, $p=.004$) is significant and its coefficient is negative (-.161), indicating rank is slightly associated with lower GOBi scores. Finally, visible minority status ($b=-.034$) is not significant ($p=.676$), percentage of vote in last election ($b=-.001$) is not significant ($p=.711$), age is not significant ($p=.051$), gender ($b=.057$) is not significant ($p=0.203$).

Model 2: GOBis without legislative assembly and political party websites

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.917 ^a	.842	.832	.35543
a. Predictors: (Constant), % of votes in last election, political party affiliation, age, visible minority status, year first elected, political rank, gender, preferred language, jurisdictional affiliation				

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	104.696	9	11.633	92.085	.000 ^b
	Residual	19.707	156	.126		
	Total	124.403	165			
a. Dependent Variable: GOBi (without legislative assembly and political party profile pages)						
b. Predictors: (Constant), % of votes in last election, political party affiliation, age, visible minority status, year first elected, political rank, Gender, preferred language, jurisdictional affiliation						

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	20.300	8.351		2.431	.016
	Preferred language	-.285	.047	-.254	-6.089	.000
	Gender	.113	.061	.062	1.857	.065
	Age	.000	.000	.109	2.926	.004
	Visible minority status	.072	.111	.021	.649	.518
	Political affiliation	.158	.011	.840	13.826	.000
	Political rank	-.044	.015	-.099	-2.992	.003
	Jurisdictional affiliation	.297	.015	1.259	19.217	.000
	Year first elected	-.011	.004	-.090	-2.746	.007
	% of votes in last election	.005	.003	.060	1.760	.080
a. Dependent Variable: GOBi (without legislative assembly and political party profile pages)						

In the second regression model, legislative assembly and political party webpages OBIs are removed from the calculation of the GOBi. We test if the influence of jurisdictions and political parties remains strong. Our second model shows a strong correlation (.92) between GOBi scores and provincial politicians' demographic profile and political profile. The R-squared value indicates that 84.2 percent of the variance in GOBi scores is explained by the predictor variables and that 15.8 percent of it is due to other factors. Even when with legislative assembly and political party profile pages data removed from the GOBi calculations, the influence of jurisdictions and political parties remains strong. Jurisdictional affiliation ($b=.297$, $p=.000$) is significant and is highly related to GOBi score (1.259). Political party affiliation ($b=.158$, $p=.000$) is also significant and is highly related to GOBi score (.840).

That institutions, such as jurisdictions and political parties, explain variance in GOBis the most is theoretically significant. It suggest that institutional traditions, culture, and ideologies permeate provincial politicians choices' of language when reaching out to constituents online. As Table 1 shows, some provinces exhibit a greater institutional culture of bilingualism than others. For example, levels of bilingualism were higher among MLAs from New Brunswick (1.77), a province where bilingualism is recognized constitutionally, than among those in British Columbia (1.01) where there exist no constitutional, let alone statutory provisions, for use of the French language within parliamentary and governmental activities. Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec, which are required constitutionally or by statute to give equal status to French and English in their respective legislatures, are characterized by higher levels of bilingualism for politicians than in British Columbia. However, when legislative assembly and political party websites are taken out of the equation, average GOBis for Manitoba (1.13), Ontario (1.17), and Quebec (2.76) indicate the legislators of these provinces gravitate towards only English or only French.

Table 1: Average GOBi of politicians per province

Province	Average GOBi of politicians	Average GOBi of politicians without legislative assembly and political party websites
British Columbia	1.01	1.02
Manitoba	1.48	1.13
New Brunswick	1.77	1.50
Ontario	1.40	1.17
Quebec	2.38	2.76

Table 2 reveals that some political parties exhibit a greater institutional culture of bilingualism than others. In British Columbia, differences are almost non-existent between the average GOBi of each political party; all parties are unilingual Anglophone. When the legislative assembly website is taken out of the equation in Manitoba, we see the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party have similar average GOBis (1.00 and 1.04) despite their ideological differences. However, party ideology seems to play a greater role in GOBi variance in New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec. MLAs from political parties with a conservative ideology - the Progressive Conservative Parties of New Brunswick and Ontario, and the Coalition Avenir Québec - tend to be less bilingual than other political parties in their respective province.

It is harder to distinguish trends among centrist and left-leaning parties. In New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec, the Liberal Party was the most bilingual,¹⁰ but in Manitoba, it was the New Democratic Party. Lastly, the sovereignist-federalist divide between political parties in Quebec does not have a clear impact on language choices. The Liberal Party of Quebec for whom “ties to Canada” is a founding value (Ryan, 2004) is on average the most bilingual party. However, the sovereignist Parti Québécois - a political party seeking to make Quebec a sovereign country where the French language would be protected (Parti Québécois, 2008) - is more bilingual than the Coalition Avenir Québec, which defines itself as nationalist but not separatist (Coalition Avenir Québec, 2015).

¹⁰ In New Brunswick, the Green Party and the Liberal Party have the same average GOBi, but when we remove legislative assembly profile pages from the equation, the Green Party becomes more bilingual than the Liberal Party. It should be noted however that the Green Party of New Brunswick only has one MLA.

Table 2: Average GOBi of politicians per political party

Political Party	Average GOBi of politicians	Average GOBi of politicians without legislative assembly website
British Columbia		
Liberal Party of British Columbia	1.00	1.00
New Democratic Party of British Columbia	1.02	1.03
Independent	1.01	1.01
Manitoba		
New Democratic Party of Manitoba	1.59	1.21
Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba	1.29	1.04
Liberal Party of Manitoba	1.20	1.00
New Brunswick		
Liberal Party of New Brunswick	1.90	1.72
Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick	1.59	1.21
Green Party of New Brunswick	1.90	1.90
Ontario		
Ontario Liberal Party	1.51	1.28
New Democratic Party of Ontario	1.36	1.06
Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario	1.19	1.02
Quebec		
Liberal Party of Quebec	2.37	2.63
Parti Québécois	2.73	2.86
Coalition Avenir Quebec	2.75	2.97
Québec Solidaire	2.7	3.0

Conclusion

In this paper, we determine to what extent and why provincial politicians use bilingualism for constituent outreach and engagement in the digital mediascape. First, we observe that MLAs are for the most part unilingual French or English on their Internet-based communication platforms. As suggested by the literature, this lack of bilingualism in the digital mediascape can limit linguistic minorities' ability to be informed politically and, by extension, take part in the political process. Conversely, it limits provincial politician's ability to connect with some of their constituents in view of gaining or cultivating their support. Second, we found a strong correlation between legislators' GOBis and the predictor variables included in our two models. We noticed that institutions played a significant role in politician's use of bilingualism. Jurisdictional affiliation was the most important factor, followed by political party affiliation.

Though these findings are interesting, we identify potential biases in our methodology. MLAs' jurisdictional affiliation and preferred language may be correlated with the linguistic makeup of their ridings. Legislators might be more inclined to cater to constituents' linguistic needs than be strictly influenced by the political culture of their province or prone to communicate in a language in which they are proficient. In our future research, we intend to control for the linguistic makeup of MLA's ridings in order to ascertain the role provinces as institutions and preferred language play on patterns of communication.

Finally, more research is required to better understand what motivates individual politicians in their language choices online. In the context of future studies, interviews should be conducted with politicians to question them on their rationale when making choices of languages for constituent communication. Perhaps other factors not captured by the model developed for this project could come into play, such as moral duty, time, money, or literacy constraints. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if the structural and functional properties of some digital platforms are more conducive to multilingualism than others. Additionally, it would be relevant to see if the conclusions made in this paper can be extended to other levels of government, such as the municipal and federal government, as well as other linguistically divided societies.

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