

Policy@Manchester:

Comparing Gender Representation in Parliamentary Select Committees with GMCA Scrutiny Committees

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Introduction

Policy@Manchester connects researchers with policy makers and influencers, helps with long-term policy engagement relationships, and seeks to enhance understanding of important policy challenges. This research adds to their work surrounding gender inequality.

Objectives

The purpose of this research was to discover if there are differences between gender representation in committees at the national level and local level of government. We aimed to find the gender of the chairs of the scrutiny/select committees, as well as the gender breakdown of the elected representatives and those invited to give evidence.

Method

The time frame was April 2018-March 2019 for GMCA and October 2018-July 2019 for Westminster, to fall in line with council and parliamentary sittings.

The following committees were chosen for comparison: GMCA's *Economy, Business Growth and Skills Committee* with Westminster's *Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee*; GMCA's *Housing, Planning and Environment Committee* with Westminster's *Housing, Communities and Local Government*; and their respective Transport Committees.

For the majority of the data collection, a Python script was used. PDFs for each meeting in the time frame were scraped and downloaded from their respective websites and converted into text files.

Code was then written to find the names within the text, using mainly NLTK (natural language toolkit) among other Python packages.

The gender of those names was then determined using the Genderize package. Excel was used to clean the data and for the further analysis, calculating the percentages of males and females for each category.

Results and Conclusions

As the three graphs show, on the whole GMCA was more gender balanced than Westminster - particularly the Economy, Business Growth and Skills Committee, which has a near perfect balance for both members and 'others'. The least gender balanced of the committees was Transport - with both GMCA and Westminster having an 80/20 'balance' in their members, as well as poor gender representation of the others present/giving evidence. Particularly interesting is the gender balance in Westminster's Transport Committee, despite having a female chair.

However, caution does need to be taken with the GMCA results, as (unlike the Westminster minutes) it is not entirely clear who is speaking. It may be the case that more women are invited, but whether they actually have a voice in that room is unknown. This is why they are referred to as 'others', because it is not clear what their role is in the meeting.

Key Skills Learnt

This internship helped me develop new software skills, in particular Python, which while difficult to get started with, has opened my eyes to more ways in which data can be collected. I've learnt how to go through the process of research; setting out objectives, gathering data, conducting an analysis, and finalising the results for presentation.

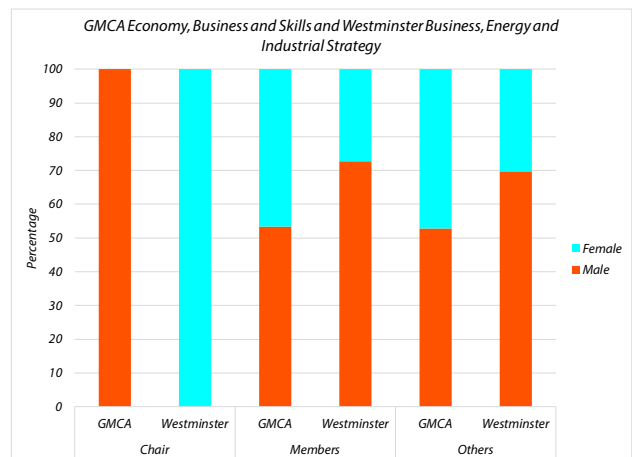


Figure 1: GMCA n=88, Westminster n=140

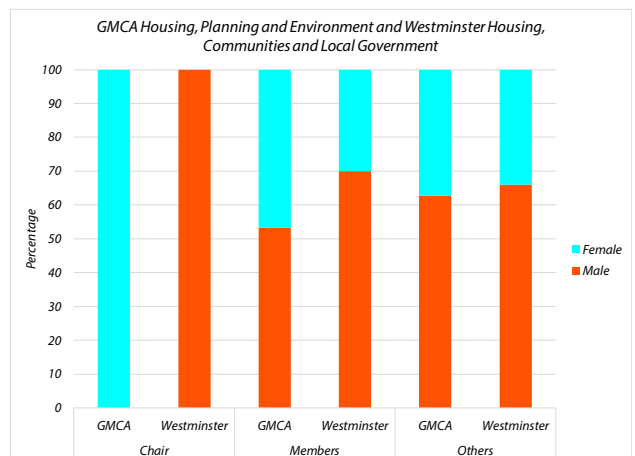


Figure 2: GMCA n=94, Westminster n=126

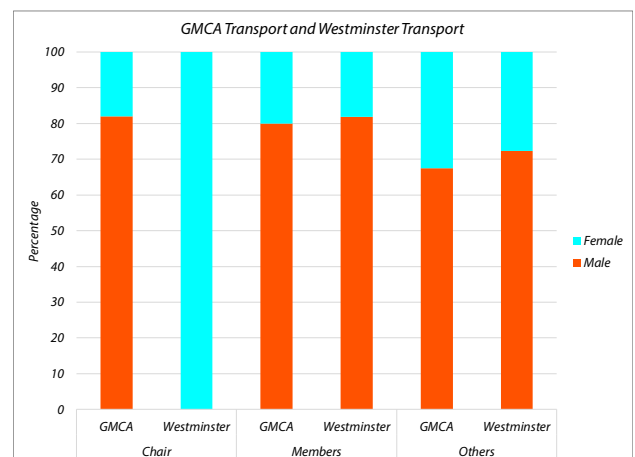


Figure 3: GMCA n=200, Westminster n=87

Sources: Minutes of meetings available at: www.parliament.co.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/ and www.gmcameetings.co.uk
Gender of names determined by www.genderize.io Python package